MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

An Intersectional Multi-Level-Analysis on the Social Positioning of Contemporary Muslim Hausa Women in Northern Nigeria

verfasst von | submitted by

Laura Potthast B.A.

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:	UA 066 805
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet:	Masterstudium Globalgeschichte und Global Studies
Betreut von | Supervisor:	ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Martina Kaller

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor *A.o. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Martina Kaller*, for her continuous support, guidance, and encouragement throughout the course of this research.

I am deeply grateful to *Dr. Mary Bishop-Lawrence*, CEO of Global Consult in Abuja, Nigeria for the opportunity to work alongside her and witness her tireless efforts to advocate for Nigerian women. Her dedication truly inspired me and deepened my commitment to this work.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues, friends, and family for their patience, understanding, and moral support during this process.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die intersektionalen Strukturen, innerhalb derer muslimische Hausa-Frauen in Nordnigeria ihren Alltag gestalten. Dabei geht sie der Frage nach, ob der Islam ein Hindernis oder eine Möglichkeit für die Emanzipation dieser Frauen darstellt. Die Analyse wird in die übergeordnete Debatte eingebettet, ob ein Konzept wie Gender Equality universell anwendbar ist oder ob es kultureller Relativierungen bedarf.

Methodologisch erfolgt die Untersuchung in mehreren Schritten auf Basis der intersektionalen Mehrebenenanalyse nach Gabriele Winker und Nina Degele. Zunächst wird das Leben muslimischer Hausa-Frauen in drei Ebenen unterteilt. Die erste ist die individuelle Ebene, auf der sich Selbstkonstruktionen auf Grundlage von Zugehörigkeiten zu sozialen Kategorien – wie Geschlecht oder Klasse – und sozialen Interaktionen vollziehen. Die hierfür verwendeten Quellen sind qualitative Interviews mit Hausa-Frauen aus urbanen Zentren wie Kano sowie aus ländlichen Regionen Nordnigerias.

Die zweite Ebene umfasst soziale Repräsentationen, die ebenfalls durch soziale Zugehörigkeiten geprägt sind und direkten Einfluss auf individuelle Selbstbilder haben. Hierfür werden Literatur, Filme und Folktales herangezogen. Die dritte Ebene bilden institutionelle Strukturen wie das Scharia-Gesetz sowie aktivistische Organisationen, die beeinflussen, welche Identitätskonstruktionen privilegiert oder diskriminiert werden.

Die Analyse zeigt, dass muslimische Hausa-Frauen insbesondere innerhalb religiös geprägter Organisationen eine Form der Emanzipation praktizieren, die ihre Glaubensgrundlagen nutzt. Damit widerspricht die Arbeit der weit verbreiteten Annahme, der Islam verhindere weibliche Emanzipation in stark traditionellen Gesellschaften. Sie macht zudem deutlich, wie wichtig es ist, Entwicklungsarbeit lokal verankert zu gestalten, Frauenorganisationen Raum zu geben und kulturelle Kontexte ernst zu nehmen. Zugleich betont die Arbeit, dass Frauen weltweit ein universelles Bedürfnis nach Emanzipation innerhalb ihrer Lebensrealitäten teilen.

Abstract

This master's thesis examines the intersectional structures within which Muslim Hausa women in northern Nigeria organize their everyday lives. It explores the question of whether Islam represents an obstacle or an opportunity for the emancipation of these women. The analysis is embedded in the overarching debate as to whether a concept such as gender equality is universally applicable or whether it requires cultural relativization.

Methodologically, the study is conducted in several steps, based on an intersectional multi-level analysis, as outlined by Gabriele Winker and Nina Degele. First, the lives of Muslim Hausa women are divided into three levels. The first is the individual level, on which self-constructions take place based on affiliations to social categories, such as gender or class, and social interactions. The sources used for this are qualitative interviews with Hausa women from urban centers such as Kano and rural regions of northern Nigeria.

The second level involves social representations, which are shaped by social affiliations and directly influence individual self-perceptions. In this context, Kano market literature, films from the northern Nigerian film industry known as Kannywood, and traditional Hausa tales serve as key sources. The third level includes institutional structures, such as Sharia law and activist organizations, which play a role in privileging or marginalizing certain identity constructions.

This analysis demonstrates that Muslim Hausa women practice a form of emancipation that makes use of the foundations of their faith, particularly within religious organizations. The study thus contradicts the widespread assumption that Islam prevents female emancipation in strongly traditional societies. It also reflects on how important it is to design development work with local roots, to give women's organizations space, and to take cultural contexts seriously. At the same time, the work emphasizes that women worldwide share a universal need for emancipation, rooted in the realities of their lived experiences.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 1

2. Literature Review 2

3. Gender Equality: Cultural Relativism versus Universalism 11

4. Intersectionality 16

4.1 Methodology 17

4.2 Intersectionality as a Multi-Level Analysis 18

4.3 The Eight-Step-Analysis 24

4.4 Adapted Intersectional Multi-Level Analysis 26

5. Hausa Women in Nigeria 27

5.1 Hausa Women and Islam in Northern Nigeria 30

5.2 Muslim Hausa Women in Decision-Making 34

5.3 Muslim Hausa Women in the Economy 36

5.4 Muslim Hausa Women in the Arts and the Media 37

6. Intersectional Analysis of Muslim Hausa Women 39

6.1 Individual Level 39

6.1.1 Hausa Women in Urban Centers 40

6.1.2 Hausa Women in Rural Areas 50

6.2 Representation Level 52

6.2.1 Kano Market Literature 53

6.2.2 Kannywood Movies 59

6.2.3 Oral Hausa Tales 62

6.3 Structural Level 65

6.3.1 Sharia Law 65

6.3.2 Faith-Based Women's Organizations 68

7. Conclusion 73

Bibliography
Glossary
Auxiliary Aids
Appendix

1. Introduction

Questions of women's empowerment and gender equality have shaped national and international debates throughout history. Since its founding, the United Nations has played a central role in promoting global gender equality by empowering women, establishing dedicated bodies such as the Commission on the Status of Women to ensure continued progress. Key international agreements, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, have served as vital tools in the ongoing pursuit of gender equality worldwide.[1]

This ongoing pursuit has repeatedly raised the question of how**,** and to what extent**,** a global framework for women's empowerment and gender equality can genuinely account for the diverse lived realities and cultural contexts that exist around the world. Can a concept like gender equality, as it is currently practiced and promoted at the international level, be universally applied? Or must it be critically adapted to reflect the specific social, religious, and cultural environments it seeks to address?

Through an intersectional analysis of Muslim Hausa women in Northern Nigeria, this thesis explores experiences of womanhood that exist beyond the Western paradigm and inspects alternative ways of understanding the world. In doing so, the thesis argues that global frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal on Gender Equality, must be critically adapted to culturally specific contexts to achieve genuine sustainability and inclusivity.

The inspiration for this thesis emerged during a stay in Nigeria, particularly during travels to Jigawa, one of the country's northern states, where a reality of womanhood was encountered that differed significantly from Western experiences. These observations prompted a deeper reflection on the multiplicity of gender norms and the culturally embedded nature of concepts such as womanhood and gender equality. Conversations with Hausa women revealed that, for many, equality is not understood as symmetrical roles or shared authority within the household, but rather as the fulfillment of distinct responsibilities, with the woman managing the domestic sphere and the husband retaining decision-making authority.

With the help of an intersectional multi-level analysis, this thesis aims to showcase, based on contemporary Muslim Hausa women, the most sustainable way of empowering women and the tools they must use to strengthen themselves in their specific cultural intersectional realities.

---

[1] Cf. "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment," Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development, United Nations, accessed April 23, 2025, https://sdgs.un.org/topics/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment.

This will be achieved by adopting an intersectional analysis, a method widely used in Gender and Social Studies. It emphasizes both individual agency and the intersectional nature of Hausa women's self-perceptions. The analysis focuses on three distinct spheres of life: the individual, the representative, and the institutional. Using these pillars, the thesis examines how Muslim Hausa women self-identify, how they are represented in the film industry, oral Hausa tales and literature, and how judicial and advocacy frameworks shape their lives. Particular attention is given to regulations influenced by Sharia law, which predominates in the northern regions of Nigeria where the Hausa live. Ultimately, this approach aims to uncover how these levels interact and influence one another, and to identify the spaces within this tightly woven network that either enable or constrain Hausa women's advocacy and agency.

2. Literature Review

This literature review examines existing research on both theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as studies on Hausa women's identities, their representations in Nigerian media, and institutional structures affecting their lives in Northern Nigeria. While some scholars explore the realities of Hausa women and the role of Islam in shaping their experiences, much of this work dates back several decades and lacks a more contemporary perspective on them. Additionally, these analyses often fail to provide a comprehensive methodological framework that accounts for the individual, representative, and institutional dimensions, whose entanglements affect their everyday lives. An intersectional approach has yet to be applied to this research question within international scholarship. To address these gaps, this study contributes to the limited body of contemporary research on Hausa women's lives in modern Nigeria. Therefore, it focuses on data from the 1990s onward, ensuring that the analysis captures more recent social, political, and legal developments affecting them. Furthermore, it introduces a new methodological perspective, rooted in intersectionality, to offer deeper insights that extend beyond existing findings and potentially inform new strategies for faith-based women's activism.

The debate between cultural relativism and the universalism of gender equality provides the theoretical foundation of this thesis. It engages with this discussion by referencing the fifth Sustainable Development Goal: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", as defined by the United Nations. This goal exemplifies the universalist approach adopted by international organizations in their pursuit of gender equality. This chapter also draws on the work of American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, a prominent advocate of universalism. Nussbaum calls for the establishment of a global set of norms to be applied across cultures. She

argues that such an approach is essential to protect individual women from oppressive practices and ideologies that are often justified in the name of culture or tradition.[2]

In contrast, this section also explores culture-sensitive critiques of universalism. One significant voice is Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who challenges global gender equality frameworks for generalizing women's experiences and reducing women from the Global South to a homogenous category of "Third World women." According to Mohanty, this tendency overlooks the diverse and specific cultural, social, and political contexts that shape women's lives.[3]

Another critique is the Bangladesh-born British social economist Naila Kabeer, who argues that meaningful and lasting empowerment must emerge from within, driven by women themselves. For Kabeer, listening to women's voices and enabling them to define what empowerment means in their own contexts is crucial. This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding the intersecting factors that shape women's realities and adapting empowerment initiatives accordingly.[4]

An additional theoretical approach that also functions as a methodological framework in addressing the research question of this thesis is intersectionality. The theory was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in her groundbreaking article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." Crenshaw argues that feminist theory focuses primarily on women, while antiracist politics largely center on black men, thereby neglecting the discrimination experienced at the intersection of these two identities. Black women, for example, face disadvantages due to their dual affiliation with both Womanhood and Blackness. To support her argument, Crenshaw draws on examples from her legal expertise, illustrating how existing frameworks often fail to address the unique challenges encountered by individuals at these intersections.[5]

For a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical framework of intersectionality, the foundational work of German sociologists Gabriele Winker and Nina Degele is particularly significant. In their monograph *Intersektionalität. Zur Analyse sozialer Ungleichheiten*, the authors promote the development of intersectionality as a young theory by integrating a

---

[2] Cf. Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development. The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge University Press 2000).

[3] Cf. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review* 30, no.1 (1988): 61-88.

[4] Cf. Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities. Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought* (Verso, 1994), 69-135.

[5] Cf. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no.1 (1989): 139-167.

praxeological approach inspired by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu with intersectional concepts. Furthermore, they propose a methodology for conducting an intersectional multi-level analysis, which categorizes social action into three distinct levels: the individual level, the level of social representations, and the structural level. Additionally, they outline an eight-step process for analyzing empirical material through the lens of intersectionality, providing a practical guide for applying the theory in research.[6]

In support of Degele and Winkler's methodological approach, Kathrin Ganz and Jette Hausotter's text *Intersektionale Sozialforschung* provides a clear and structured outline of the Eight-Step Intersectional Multi-Level Analysis. The protocol enables a systematic empirical investigation of how individuals position themselves within environments shaped by social inequality. This structured approach is particularly well-suited for examining how Hausa women navigate gender, religion, and other intersecting social structures at different levels of society. Beyond that, the methodology's open and flexible framework allows for adaptations tailored to the specific requirements of this research while also offering the possibility to uncover further entanglements that may not be immediately apparent.[7]

Providing an overview of the lives and realities of Hausa women in Northern Nigeria presents a significant challenge, as contemporary texts addressing this subject comprehensively are scarce. However, Catherine Cole and Beverly Mack's monograph, "Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century", offers an extensive examination of key indicators and categories that shape the everyday lives of women belonging to the Hausa ethnicity. The work explores critical topics such as the role of Islam, their political and juridical agency, economic participation, and contributions to art and media. While this monograph provides valuable insights into these dimensions, it does not address developments in the early 21st century, which must be considered when engaging with this thesis's research question.[8]

Since the first level of the intersectional multi-level analysis focuses on how individuals position themselves within their societal framework, this part of the thesis requires primary data on Hausa women. Due to time and resource constraints, the thesis does not rely on self-conducted fieldwork but instead builds on existing studies and qualitative data by scholars with strong linguistic and cultural access to Hausa women.

The first part of this chapter focuses on women in urban centers of Northern Nigeria, while the second part examines their rural counterparts, aiming to highlight subtle differences in their

---

6 Cf. Gabriele Winker and Nina Degele, *Intersektionalität. Zur Analyse sozialer Ungleichheiten* (Transcript. 2009).

7 Cf. Kathrin Ganz and Jette Hausotter, *Intersektionale Sozialforschung* (Transcript Verlag, 2020).

8 Cf. Catherine Coles and Beverly Mack, *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

social positioning. A relevant study when exploring the lives of urban Hausa women is Katja Werthmann's *Nachbarinnen: Die Alltagswelt muslimischer Frauen in einer nigerianischen* In her work, the German anthropologist, whose academic focus lies on West African societies, examines the lives of women in Kano, Northern Nigeria, a region that is home to many different cultures and languages. Conducted in the early 1990s, her research is based on a 16-month-long field study that explores how Hausa women in that city navigate the intersections of tradition and modernity, socio-economic disparities, and gender structures. Religious norms also play an important role in Werthmann's study. Like Renne, Werthmann challenges Western indicators of gender analysis, instead prioritizing the concepts and categories that women themselves articulate in interviews. Her data collection methods include participant observation, informal conversations, and in-depth interviews with women of various ages and socio-economic backgrounds. This immersive approach provides a detailed insight into how Hausa women position themselves and negotiate their roles within their cultural environment. Given its emphasis on self-representation and lived experience, Werthmann's fieldwork serves as another important contribution to this thesis.[9]

Complementary research is Elisha P. Renne's "Gender Roles and Women's Status: What They Mean to Hausa Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria". Conducted in 1994/1995, the anthropologist's study stands out due to its unique approach, which diverges from conventional demographic frameworks by centering local definitions of womanhood, *matsayi mace,* and embedding them within the culturally significant concepts of *mutunci*, which can be translated to *respectability,* and *kulle*, translated to *seclusion.* Unlike studies that rely on standardized indicators such as education and employment to assess women's status, Renne's methodology prioritizes the perspectives of women of the Hausa ethnicity themselves. Her data collection consists of semi-structured, open-ended interviews with women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, allowing for a deeper understanding of their lived realities. What makes her study particularly valuable is her critique of Western demographic indicators, which often overlook how Hausa Muslim women define their own status and navigate their individual circumstances. By foregrounding their voices and self-positioning, Renne's research aligns closely with the intersectional methodology applied in this study, which is likewise committed to centering individual narratives as the foundation of analysis.[10]

---

[9] Cf. Katja Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen. Die Alltagswelt Muslimischer Frauen in einer Nigerianischen Großstadt* (Brandes & Aspel, 2019).

[10] Cf. Elisha P. Renne, "Gender Roles and Women's Status: What They Mean to Hausa Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria," in *Categories and Contexts: Anthropological and Historical Studies in Critical Demography*, ed. Simon Szreter, Hania Sholkamy and A. Dharmalingam (Oxford University Press, 2004), 276–294.

The key study on Hausa women in rural areas of Northern Nigeria and how they position themselves along the intersections of the categories *gender* and *religion* is Hannatu Hussaini Maina's "The Status of Hausa Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria Today: A Three-Dimensional Perspective". In her research, the Nigerian gender consultant examines the influence of religion and culture on the lives of Hausa women in Northern Nigeria. She highlights how Islam is frequently used to justify patriarchal structures within the communities and investigates why women in rural areas are more likely to accept these norms compared to their urban counterparts. Maina's study is based on in-depth interviews with 30 respondents from Kaduna State, encompassing both rural and urban settings, to emphasize the differences in their lived experiences. Beyond providing ideal data for this research, Maina's work also underscores the significance of considering *geographical location* as a crucial category of analysis, further enriching the academic conversation on gender, religion, and societal structures in Hausa communities.[11]

To examine the relationship between individual positioning and the representation in society, this research will draw on various forms of media. Literature, for example, serves as an important outlet through which Hausa women engage with themes of gender roles and societal expectations, offering valuable insights into their lived experiences and perspectives. Notable contributors to this literary conversation include Balaraba Ramat Yakubu and Bilkisu Funtuwa, among others. Novian Whitsitt, Professor of Africana Studies and English, has conducted extensive research into the texts of these female Hausa authors, focusing on their contributions to Islamic feminism. In his dissertation, "Kano Market Literature and the Construction of Hausa-Islamic Feminism: A Contrast in Feminist Perspectives of Balaraba Ramat Yakubu and Bilkisu Ahmed Funtuwa"[12], as well as his articles, "Hausa Women Writers Confronting the Traditional Status of Women in Modern Islamic Society: Feminist Thought in Nigerian Popular Fiction"[13] and "Islamic-Hausa Feminism and Kano Market Literature: Qur'anic Reinterpretation in the Novels of Balaraba Yakubu"[14], Whitsitt examines the self-perceptions of the authors as individuals navigating the intersection of womanhood and Muslim identity.

---

[11] Cf. Hannatu Hussaini Maina, "The Status of Hausa Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria Today: A Three-Dimensional Perspective," *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research* 56, no. 1 (2021): 386-409.

[12] Cf. Novain Whitsitt, "Kano Market Literature and the Construction of Hausa-Islamic Feminism: A Contrast in Feminist Perspectives of Balaraba Ramat Yakubu and Bilkisu Ahmed Funtuwa" (Diss., University of Wisconsin, 2000), 1-179, ProQuest (9972836).

[13] Cf. Novian Whitsitt, "Hausa Women Writers Confronting the Traditional Status of Women in Modern Islamic Society: Feminist Thought in Nigerian Popular Fiction," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 22, no.2 (2003): 387-408.

[14] Cf. Novian Whitsitt, "Islamic-Hausa Feminism and Kano Market Literature: Qur'anic Reinterpretation in the Novels of Balaraba Yakubu," *Research in African Literature* 33, no.2 (2002): 119-136.

His analysis explores and compares their differing understandings and expressions of Islamic feminism, making both his texts and the literary work he studies invaluable for the individual and representative dimension of this research's intersectional analysis.

An additional source of information on how Hausa women are represented in Nigeria is the Kannywood film industry, which produces Hausa-language movies in Northern Nigeria. One important study on this subject is Mahmoud Nourah Bamalli's dissertation, "Portrayal of Women in Kannywood." In his work, Bamalli focuses on both the films themselves and the perceptions of their audiences, employing methods such as focus group discussions and other qualitative data collection techniques. Through these case studies, he highlights the stereotypes and societal changes depicted in Kannywood, while also addressing the industry's reinforcement of traditional gender roles.[15]

The third and final sources for women's representations in this thesis are Hausa tales. In her article "Mata Masu Dubara da Asiri Suke Daga: The Roles of Women and Gender Complementarity in Hausa Folktales,"[16] literature scholar Anna Mooijman emphasizes the significance of orality and storytelling in Hausa culture, as well as the empowered roles often attributed to women in these narratives. Through multiple examples of different Hausa tales, she demonstrates that the depiction of women in these stories frequently contrasts with the lived realities of Hausa women in Northern Nigeria.

The third level of analysis, the structural level, focuses on the Sharia legal institutions that shape the societal structures within which Hausa communities in northern Nigeria live. These institutions are particularly influential in shaping women's self-conceptions and representations. While other state institutions also play a structuring role, Sharia institutions occupy the most prominent position in this region, exerting the greatest authority and often overshadowing other institutional frameworks.

African Historian Aisha Balarabe Bawa's "Muslim Women and Sharia Implementation in Northern Nigeria" offers an opposing argument to the frequent criticism of Sharia law presented in the other two articles. Focusing on Muslim women's activism, Bawa highlights religion as both a restrictive and liberating force. She places particular emphasis on the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) and its part in redefining gender roles within the Islamic framework. Her objective is to show that Muslim women in Nigeria are not

[15] Cf. Bamalli, Mahmoud Nourah. „Portrayal of Women in Kannywood" (BA Thesis, American University of Nigeria, 2021).

[16] Cf. Anna Mooijman, "Mata Masu Dubara da Asiri Suke Daga: The Role of Women and Gender Complementarity in Hausa Folktales," (ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 1998), 47.

merely passive recipients of Sharia law but actively engage with and influence its implementation.[17]

A key text on the positioning of women within Nigeria's plural legal system is Eghosa Osa Ekhator's "Women and the Law in Nigeria: A Reappraisal". As Professor of International Law at Derby Law School in the UK, Ekhator provides a comprehensive overview of the legal discrimination against women in Nigeria's judicial system. A central focus of his work is the intersection of law and cultural norms, which continue to shape gender relations in many Nigerian communities. He also critiques Nigeria's plural legal framework, arguing that the coexistence of English common law, Islamic law, and customary law leads to contradictions and inconsistencies in women's legal rights. Moreover, Ekhator highlights the role of judicial activism and advocacy networks, emphasizing their ongoing efforts to push for legal reforms that enhance women's rights and ensure greater legal consistency. While his analysis covers Nigeria as a whole, his discussion of Sharia law and the legal realities of Hausa women provides valuable insights, making this text a strong foundation for understanding the influence and impact of legal realities.[18]

Japhet Olusadum Nnaeto et al.'s "Appraisal of the Conflict Between Sharia Law and Rule of Law on Rights of Women in Nigeria" builds on Ekhator's analysis of the challenges posed by Nigeria's plural legal system, particularly its impact on women. The authors emphasize how Sharia law in Northern Nigeria frequently contradicts international human rights standards, further entrenching gender-based inequalities. In addition to highlighting these legal contradictions, the study goes a step further by proposing concrete recommendations for reform. The authors suggest legal amendments and policy interventions aimed at ensuring greater protection for women's rights within Nigeria's legal framework. By advocating for the harmonization of statutory, customary, and Islamic law, the article contributes beneficial perspectives on potential pathways for achieving a more equitable legal system for women in Nigeria.[19]

The organizations that try to mediate between international and regional law are, as Bawa mentions, the faith-based women's organizations in Nigeria. One of the most prominent in the Muslim communities is the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria

---

[17] Cf. Aisha Balarabe Bawa, "Muslim Women and Sharia Implementation in Nothern Nigeria: An Overview of Fomwan," *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 18, no.1 (2017): 149-167.

[18] Cf. Eghosa Osa Ekhator, "Women and the Law in Nigeria: A Reappraisal," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 16, no.2 (2015): 285-296.

[19] Cf. Japhet Olusadum Nnaeto, Emenike Everest Uzor and Juliet Anulika Ndoh, "Appraisal of the Conflict Between Sharia Law and Rule of Law on Rights of Women in Nigeria," *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research* 10, no.6 (2022): 1-26.

(FOMWAN). As a vital institutional actor, women's activism organizations like FOMWAN play a significant role on the structural level of the intersectional framework of this thesis. Adryan Wallace's, Professor of Africana Studies, text "Agency Through Development: Hausa Women's NGOs and CBOs in Kano, Nigeria" offers an overview of how various local faith-based women's organizations in Northern Nigeria collaborate with smaller community-based organizations to improve Hausa women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Wallace emphasizes that the work of these advocacy networks is rooted in Islamic principles and illustrates how women empower themselves from within the religious framework.[20]

The article "Hausa-Fulani Women's Movement and Womanhood" authored by Gbenga Afolayan, presents another important text to get an insight into the Advocacy Networks that Hausa Women in Nigeria lead. It examines the evolution and challenges of the women's movement among the Muslim community in northern Nigeria, exploring its efforts to redefine traditional views on womanhood and gender roles. Since the 1980s, feminists in the region have worked to counteract patriarchal norms and some interpretations of Islamic doctrine that reinforce gender inequalities. This movement is also marked by tensions caused by the multiple judicial institutions in Nigeria, notably specifically around issues like the Minimum Age of Marriage Clause in the Child Rights Act of 2003. He states that organizations such as BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), and FOMWAN have played important parts in advocating for gender equity. The organizations balance respect for cultural and religious frameworks with international human rights norms, often employing cultural symbols and religious discourse to navigate opposition. Despite resistance, Muslim women activists in Northern Nigeria use strategies that resonate within their communities to promote gender rights, arguing that a locally rooted approach, rather than a purely global feminist perspective, is essential for lasting change in the region.[21]

Complementary research by Professor Oluwafunmilayo J. Para-Mallam, a scholar of Development Studies, highlights the tension within gender activism in Nigeria. As a possible solution, she advocates for a shift in terminology, noting that the term "gender equality" is often rejected in the Nigerian context due to its perceived implication that men and women must

[20] Cf. Adryan, Wallace, "Agency Through Development: Hausa Women's NGO's and CBOs in Kano, Nigeria," *Feminist Economics* 20, no.4 (2014): 281-305.

[21] Cf. Gbenga Emmaunel Afolayan, "Hausa-Fulani Women's Movement and Womanhood," *Agenda (Durban)* 33, no.2 (2019): 52-60.

perform identical roles and share the same obligations, a definition that many find culturally inappropriate.[22]

In "Engineering Our Own Futures: Lessons on Holistic Development from Muslim Women's Civil Society Groups in Nigeria, Ghana and Tanzania," Adryan Wallace explores how Muslim women's organizations in West and East Africa have innovatively engaged in development work to advance gender equality and community well-being. Through case studies in Nigeria, Ghana, and Tanzania, Wallace illustrates how these organizations, including FOMWAN in Nigeria and Sahiba Sisters in Tanzania, successfully navigate local and international development frameworks to advocate for health, education, and economic inclusion while maintaining religious and cultural values. A key insight from this work is the ability of these groups to operate independently of Western aid structures, thus avoiding the constraints of neoliberal development models. The study highlights how Muslim women's civil society organizations are redefining development on their terms; however, Wallace notes that while organizations like FOMWAN play an instrumental role in promoting gender equality, there remains a lack of broad-based institutional support within some Muslim communities for advancing a fully gender-equitable development agenda, which limits wider societal impact.[23]

Adryan Wallace's observations are reinforced by Fatima L. Adamu's article *"A Double-Edged Sword: Challenging Women's Oppression Within Muslim Society in Northern Nigeria."* Adamu highlights the lack of funding faced by faith-based women's organizations, stemming from both national and international sources. National donors often withdraw support due to fears that empowering initiatives may spread the influence of Western feminism, while international donors frequently perceive Islam as incompatible with gender equality, leading them to withhold financial aid. As a result, Adamu notes, these organizations are often pressured to modify their agendas to align with donor expectations, ultimately undermining the sustainability and effectiveness of their development work. Even when international funding is secured, additional challenges arise, particularly when support comes from U.S.-based donors, since local communities may perceive these organizations as promoting anti-Islamic agendas, further restricting their impact and legitimacy.[24]

---

[22] Cf. Oluwafunmilayo J. Para-Mallam, "Promoting Gender Equality in the Context of Nigerian Cultural and Religious Expression: Beyond Increasing Female Access to Education", *Compare* 4, no.40 (2010): 459-477.

[23] Cf. Adryan Wallace, "Engineering Our Own Futures: Lessons on Holistic Development: Muslim Women's Civil Society Groups in Nigeria, Ghana and Tanzania," *African Sociological Review* 19, no.2 (2015): 53-74.

[24] Cf. Fatima L. Adamu, "A double-edged sword: Challenging Women's Oppression Within Muslim Society in Northern Nigeria," *Gender and Development* 7, no.1 (1999): 56-61.

3. Gender Equality: Cultural Relativism versus Universalism

The philosophical debate in which this research question is embedded centers on whether gender equality, as it is currently conceptualized and implemented, can be sustainable and holistic as a universal concept or whether it must be practiced in a way that is more culturally sensitive and context-specific. Within academic conversation, there is an ongoing debate surrounding this question, with scholars arguing on both sides. In this thesis, the definition of gender equality is based on that provided by UN WOMEN.

> "**Equality between women and men (gender equality):** refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development."[25]

The first actors promoting a universal approach to gender equality are international organizations such as the United Nations. In its Fifth Sustainable Development Goal—*Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*—the UN seeks to implement this agenda across all member states. In the Open Working Group proposal for the SDGs, nine nuanced goals are outlined to guide this effort.

> "**5.1** End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
> **5.2** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
> **5.3** Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
> **5.4** Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate
> **5.5** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
> **5.6** Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

[25] "Concepts and Definitions", United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UN WOMEN, accessed April 23, 2025, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsandefinitions.htm.

> **5.a** Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws
> **5.b** Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women
> **5.c** Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels"[26]

The targets outlined under SDG 5 reveal several key pillars of the United Nations' gender equality agenda. While one focus is the elimination of all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and girls, the goal goes far beyond that. It also advocates for equal opportunities and rights in decision-making in all areas of social, political, and economic life. It also emphasizes the importance of access to sexual and reproductive health services, economic resources, and financial equality. The goal also calls upon national institutions to prioritize gender equality by establishing supportive legal, political, and social structures that promote and safeguard women's rights and empowerment at all levels.

The prominent American philosopher Martha Nussbaum defends the use of universal values, and by extension, universal development goals such as gender equality, is the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum. She argues that certain universal standards and norms are necessary as a basis for political principles that can be incorporated into national constitutions. According to Nussbaum, such universal norms allow for meaningful comparisons between countries and help assess how well each nation promotes human well-being.[27] One problematic aspect of Nussbaum's argument, however, is that she implicitly promotes Western standards as a universal benchmark, using them as a template for judging cultures that differ significantly from her American background. To her credit, Nussbaum later acknowledges the challenges of applying a universal framework to culturally diverse contexts, citing empowerment at all levels. "But even if one defends theory as valuable for practice, it may still be problematic to use concepts that originate in one culture to describe and assess realities in another -and all the more problematic if the culture described has been colonized and oppressed by the describer's culture."[28] Nonetheless, Nussbaum continues to advocate for universal values, arguing that cultural relativism no longer holds up in today's world of global media and communication, where cultures are constantly merging into one another. For her, this dynamic nature of cultures

---

[26] "Open Working Group Proposal for the Sustainable Development Goals", United Nations, accessed April 23, 2025, 9, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1579SDGs%20Proposal.pdf.
[27] Cf. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 34-35.
[28] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 36.

justifies the application of universal values such as gender equality in different contexts.[29] Nussbaum also emphasizes the need to distinguish between tolerance of diversity and cultural relativism. She argues that many cultures defended under the banner of relativism contain deep-seated forms of intolerance. Consequently, those who advocate for uncritical cultural tolerance may inadvertently tolerate injustices they would otherwise reject, simply because they are framed as cultural traditions.[30]

Nussbaum concludes that a universal set of values regarding gender equality is necessary to protect women from so-called cultural traditions that reinforce injustice and inequality. These universal values, she emphasizes, must be rooted in the belief that everyone is inherently worthy and entitled to skills and opportunities that allow them to live a life consistent with their own needs and desires. Respect for cultural differences should be maintained, but only to the extent that cultural practices do not undermine human dignity.[31]

While Nussbaum acknowledges the risks of using Western values to design a universal set of norms, she does not fundamentally abandon this approach. Instead, she justifies it by pointing to the global dissemination of Western values through the Internet and global interconnectedness. This perspective, however, overlooks the persistent power structures that shape today's postcolonial world. Cultural merging has not occurred in a neutral vacuum; it is deeply influenced by the continued dominance of former colonial powers over postcolonial societies. Nussbaum risks reinforcing the very hierarchies she seeks to overcome by accepting this reality without questioning the underlying power dynamics.

In contrast to Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims to achieve gender equality, many critics argue that SDG 5 is overly rooted in a Western perspective and fails to take into account the intersectional nature of gender inequality, thereby limiting its effectiveness. In her critique of SDG 5, Margarida Martins emphasizes that gender inequalities are deeply embedded in broader structures of economic and social injustice. She highlights "patriarchy, neoliberal capitalism, imperialism, and racism"[32] as interlinked forces that perpetuate both gender inequality and environmental degradation. Martins further criticizes the SDGs for overlooking the global power imbalance between the Global North and the Global South, concluding that SDG 5, as currently framed, is ultimately destined to fall short of its goals.[33]

---

[29] Cf. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 48-49.
[30] Cf. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 49.
[31] Cf. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 57-59.
[32] Margarida Martins, "Achieving Sustainable Development: The Shortcomings of the UN SDGs and the Need for Feminist Policymaking," *Young Feminist Europe*, October 6, 2022 https://www.youngfeminist.eu/2022/06/shortcomings-sdgs-need-for-feminist-policymaking/.
[33] Cf. Martins, "Achieving Sustainable Development."

In the end, the universalist perspective on gender equality came under considerable criticism, particularly from scholars within the postcolonial feminist tradition, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Like Martins, Mohanty argues that global feminist efforts must take into account both the specific struggles at the micro-level and the broader global economic and political systems at the macro-level.[34] She criticizes the universalist feminist approach for grouping women globally into a single category, based primarily on their sex, but also on the assumption of shared oppression.[35] Mohanty also asserts that the category of *"Third World women"* is treated as a homogeneous group characterized by victimhood and lack of power. She strongly rejects this notion, arguing that women are not only shaped by structures such as kinship or colonialism but also actively produce and negotiate them.[36]

Mohanty goes on to argue that this generalization and universalism harm development work. She notes that scholars writing about development often define it primarily in economic terms, if all women share similar needs and struggles. She criticizes it as a "colonization of the specifics of daily existence and the complexities of political interests which women of different social classes and cultures represent and mobilize."[37] The author calls for critical reflection on the Western lens through which such development narratives are often constructed and advocates a culturally sensitive approach that takes these differences into account.

Although Mohanty does not explicitly use the term *intersectionality*, as the theory and its vocabulary emerged later, her analysis reflects an intersectional perspective. She criticizes the reduction of women to a single identity category, emphasizing that they occupy multiple social locations that shape their experiences of privilege and discrimination. Sustainable development and feminist work, she underpins, must recognize and respond to these multiple and intersecting realities.[38] She promotes a grassroots development framework, which means that individual needs and daily lived realities are at the center of empowerment frameworks.

British social economist Naila Kabeer shares many of Mohanty's arguments. Kabeer acknowledges that a focus on class dynamics and productive relations has benefited feminist development theory, but criticizes the lack of attention to individual experiences. She argues for a development framework grounded in grassroots experience, where individual needs and everyday realities are central to empowerment strategies. In her remarks, Kabeer shifts the

---

[34] Cf. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, „Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles", *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no.2 (2003): 501.

[35] Cf. Chandra Talpade, Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses, Feminist Review 30, no.1 (1988): 65.

[36] Cf. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 66.

[37] Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 72.

[38] Cf. Kabeer, *Reversed Realities*, 69-135.

understanding of empowerment away from narratives of powerlessness to one that recognizes the agency and power of marginalized groups. She argues that marginalized individuals, such as women, can change their lived realities and that the most sustainable empowerment strategies enable them to define their own needs. In practice, organizations have "helped to challenge conventional stereotypes about gender needs, to make visible hitherto hidden categories of women's needs and to lay bare the interconnections between different aspects of women's lives."[39]

Like Mohanty, Kabeer advocates for a culturally sensitive approach to gender equality. She emphasizes that empowerment must recognize the complex intersections of social categories that shape women's experiences. Only the women for whom development efforts are intended, she argues, can truly articulate their own needs, desires, and priorities. In this sense, Kabeer also promotes an intersectional approach to development, even before the terminology became widely used in academic and policy discussions.

Overall, both perspectives offer compelling arguments. Universalists claim that a shared set of values and norms is essential to protect individuals from oppressive practices often justified as cultural traditions. While this position, as articulated by Nussbaum, presents a strong case, it remains important to distinguish between universal human rights and the broader, contested values associated with gender equality.

In conclusion, while achieving gender equality in the context of eliminating gender-based violence necessitates universal rights and legal frameworks, applying universal norms to define what empowers women, and therefore leads to gender equality, presents significant challenges. In such cases, universal approaches run the risk of ignoring individual needs, preferences, and cultural specificities. This position echoes the work of scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Naila Kabeer, who advocate for development strategies that are grounded in the lived realities of those they seek to serve. Empowerment, in this view, must be built from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. Human flourishing can take multiple culturally specific forms. Thus, while threats to mental, emotional, and physical well-being must be addressed through a human rights lens, only those directly affected can determine what constitutes such a threat. Prescriptive assumptions about the needs or desires of others are often counterproductive. Therefore, development and empowerment efforts should prioritize the creation of safe, open spaces where women can voice their needs. From there, contextualized and culturally responsive strategies can be formulated that respect both individual agency and sociocultural complexity.

---

[39] Kabeer, *Reversed Realities*, 230-231.

This perspective is also reflected in the United Nations' definition of gender equality, which emphasizes that gender equality must address the needs of both men and women and be sensitive to the diverse lived realities of different groups. In doing so, the UN implicitly introduces an intersectional nuance to its understanding of gender equality. Overall, the international development objectives are not as far removed from culturally sensitive approaches as is often assumed. Rather, they can be seen as forming a mediating ground between universalism and cultural specificity, allowing for the pursuit of gender equality in ways that are both principled and responsive to local contexts.

In this light, this thesis uses an intersectional analysis of Muslim Hausa women in northern Nigeria to demonstrate the importance of centering women's voices in defining their identities and priorities. This approach recognizes their identities as fluid, flexible, and self-determined, challenging externally imposed narratives and simplistic categorization.

4. Intersectionality

Since the research question explores the social positioning among different categories of Hausa women in Nigeria, with a primary focus on *gender* and *religion*, it is addressed using intersectionality as the theoretical framework. Intersectionality is an approach that addresses social inequalities and has been a significant focus within cultural studies for several years. Notably, intersectionality is regarded as an open concept, a characteristic that enhances its applicability to a wide range of research questions. This openness, along with its flexibility and adaptability, has been a key factor contributing to the success and widespread adoption of the framework.[40] Despite its inherent openness, pedagogue Katharina Walgenbach defines intersectionality as the understanding that social categories such as *gender*, *nation,* or *class* cannot be conceptualized in isolation but must be analyzed in their interwoven relationships or intersections.[41]

Although the boundaries of intersectionality as a theory are fluid, its core framework consistently centers on examining power relations and systems of domination within societies. The origins of intersectionality can be traced to Black Feminism and Critical Race Theory, which laid the groundwork for its conceptual development. The term "intersectionality" was created in 1989 by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who used it to articulate the

[40] Cf. Kathy Davis, "Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful," Feminist Theory 9, no. 1 (2008), 77-78.

[41] Cf. Katharina Walgenbach, "Intersektionalität als Analyseperspektive heterogener Stadträume," in *Die intersektionelle Stadt. Geschlechterforschung und Medienkunst an den Achsen der Ungleichheit*, ed. Elli Scambor und Fränk Zimmer (Transcript, 2012), 81.

interconnected nature of social categorizations and the compounded impact of discrimination.[42] Kimberlé Crenshaw illustrated her concept through case studies that revealed the limitations of existing anti-discrimination laws in the United States. These laws predominantly offered protection to either white women or black men, failing to account for the compounded discrimination faced by individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups, such as black women.[43] The intersectionality approach is now widely utilized, particularly in Gender Studies, where it is applied to address a variety of research questions.[44] Beyond national borders, intersectionality is applied across theoretical, practical, and political fields, such as human rights debates and within Cultural Studies. [45] In summary, intersectionality is a theoretical approach emphasizing the interdependence of various categories and power relations that shape identities, social structures, and practices.[46]

4.1 Methodology

The methodology employed in this research thesis is based on Gabriele Winker's framework as presented in her monograph *Intersektionalität*. Her approach integrates three distinct levels of analysis with Pierre Bourdieu's praxeological perspective, creating a comprehensive toolkit for addressing the research question at hand.[47] Winker grounds her methodology in Bourdieu's assertion that the foundation of sociology lies in analyzing social practices, which can be accessed through empirical research. She argues that this perspective is particularly well-suited for an intersectional analysis of society for three key reasons. First, it emphasizes the importance of developing a theory grounded in extensive empirical data. Second, it highlights the necessity of contextualizing and interrelating various social phenomena. Ultimately, Bourdieu's theory demonstrates how individuals establish their social positioning by associating their identities with broader social structures and symbolic representations. Together, these elements form a robust analytical framework for this study.[48]

Bourdieu positions himself firmly against theories that lack a connection to practice. According to him, theory should never exist for its own sake but rather serve as a scientific tool to inform praxis. He advocates for the need for self-reflection throughout the research process and that

---

[42] Cf. „Intersektionalität – eine Einführung," Portal Intersektionalität, accessed May 5, 2025, www.portal-intersektionalität.de.
[43] Cf. Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection", 139-167.
[44] Cf. Portal Intersektionalität, „Intersektionalität – eine Einführung."
[45] Cf. Nira Yuval-Davis, „Intersektionalität und feministische Politik," *Feministische Studien* 27, no.1 (2009): 51.
[46] Cf. Portal Intersektionalität, „Intersektionalität – eine Einführung."
[47] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 63.
[48] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 63-64.

the research subject should be the driving force behind the theory, shaping its form and direction. Finally, he recommends the integration of different levels of analysis. This theoretical approach aligns closely with the principles of intersectionality. In intersectional frameworks, theoretical categories of analysis are not equivalent to empirical categories. This means that intersectional analysis must begin with empirical observation rather than relying on preexisting theoretical frameworks, while remaining attentive to the interconnectedness of dimensions such as *class*, *gender*, and *race*. At its core, the analysis of social practices is guided by key questions: Around which issues and challenges do individuals structure their everyday lives, and which categories do they draw upon to describe and make sense of their lived experiences?[49]

The analysis at hand starts with the categories through which the individuals define their identities and daily lives. These self-identified categories will form the foundation for further study, including an examination of structures and representations derived directly from the women's perspectives.[50] Even though a particular focus in this thesis is placed on Hausa women's positioning within the categories of *gender* and *religion*, it maintains an openness to the emergence of other intersecting categories that may arise throughout the study.

4.2 Intersectionality as a Multi-Level Analysis

In addition to various models and approaches that make intersectionality accessible across disciplines and adaptable to new areas of research, sociologists Gabriele Winker and Nina Degele introduced the concept of Intersectionality as Multi-Level Analysis in 2007. This framework examines intersectional structures on three levels: the micro-level, which focuses on social interactions and individual identity formation; the meso-level, which addresses cultural representations; and the macro-level, which analyzes societal structures and institutions.[51] At the identity or micro-level, sociologists suggest approaching individuals without prior expectations of which categories are relevant, as the significance of specific categories varies for different people depending on their life circumstances. At this first level, the focus is on securing and consolidating one's social position by distinguishing oneself from certain individuals and forming alliances with others. This happens based on different

[49] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 64.
[50] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 64.
[51] Susanne Schul, Mareike Böth, „Abenteuerliche ›Überkreuzungen‹: Vormoderne intersektional," in: *Abenteuerliche ›Überkreuzungen‹: Vormoderne intersektional (Aventiuren 12)*, ed. Susanne Schul. Mareike Böth and Michael Mecklenburg (V&R Unipress, 2017), 21.

categories of difference, such as *class*, *race* or *gender*. Through these individual attempts to ensure themselves, an entire system of differentiation is simultaneously created and preserved.[52]
At the meso-level of representation, the focus is on analyzing how everyday actions of individuals create dominant norms and stereotypes. These actions not only shape their own identities but also strengthen existing power structures and inequalities. Representations justify imbalances while also contributing to the formation of social structures and identities, providing a sense of safety. At the structural level, certain categories are to be defined. These are usually so-called structural categories, based on which power relations arise; for example, one of the structural categories can be *gender*, from which sexism arises.[53]
In her discussion of the interplay between different levels of analysis, Winker and Degele emphasize that the tasks involved in studying inequality vary across these levels. They argue that while it is crucial to increase complexity when analyzing the individual and social levels of representation, complexity should be reduced at the structural level. To this end, Winker identifies four essential categories for structural analysis: class, gender, race, and body. These categories, Winker argues, serve as a framework for analyzing power relations in different societies.[54]
The combination of these structural categories with the more open-ended categories at the levels of identity and representation reflects a methodology that balances a theory-driven approach with openness to unexpected findings. The theory-driven aspect allows for the recognition or critique of established or hidden positions such as masculinity, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, or whiteness. However, additional categories may emerge at the level of identity and representation. This flexibility strengthens the methodology because it allows for the identification of new categories at these levels that may later prove significant at the structural level within a society.[55]
The focus on the relations between theory and empiricism stems from the process-rich nature of sociality itself; therefore, the research subjects. Power relations are manifesting themselves in structures, nonetheless, they are human-made. Hence, Winkler concludes that society is deeply interwoven with human actions, which are carried out under specific conditions and result in various consequences. From this perspective, it is the individual who actively creates

[52] Cf. Nina Degele and Gabriele Winker, *Intersektionalität als Mehrebenenanalyse*, www.portal-intersektionalität.de, accessed May 18, 2025, 10-14.
[53] Cf. Degele and Winker, Mehrebenenanalyse, 23.
[54] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 68.
[55] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 69.

and sustains social structures. As sociologist Anthony Giddens states, through and within their actions, individuals reproduce the very conditions that make those actions possible.[56]

The praxeological approach, as articulated by Giddens and Bourdieu, argues that social structures are reproduced through actors' interactions and interpretations of them. These structures are not only the result of human actions but also serve to constrain and shape those very actions. This framework aligns closely with intersectional multi-level analysis, emphasizing the interconnectedness of society's macro-, meso-, and micro-levels.[57]

Giddens divides the structural macro-level of analysis into three key dimensions: signification, authority, and legitimation. For each of these dimensions, he identifies corresponding types of institutions that embody and operationalize these structural aspects: Symbolic systems shape meaning; political and economic institutions relate to the exercise of power, while legal institutions serve to legitimize that power.[58] In addition, Giddens argues that, depending on the focus of the research, one of these dimensions becomes central in the analysis, or, if the research objective requires it, the interconnectedness of all three dimensions may be explored. This approach aims to uncover the underlying power relations within a society. At the interactive level, Giddens also identifies three corresponding dimensions: First, communication is seen as a way of interpreting meaning within structured systems of signs. Second, power involves maintaining systems of control through access to resources, both material and authoritative. Third, sanction reflects the unequal power dynamics built into these structures. Interaction serves as the link between individual actions and broader social structures, as people apply rules and resources in context-specific ways to guide their behavior.[59]

Winker and Degele criticize their colleague's model for its highly abstract nature. According to them, the approach fails to concretize the connections between its key elements, limiting its practical applicability.[60]

Bourdieu adopts a similar approach by introducing the concepts of habitus and field, which together illustrate the dynamic interplay between social structures and human behavior. In his framework, a field represents a network of relations between distinct positions, rooted in power dynamics or the distribution of resources. The habitus, in contrast, reflects how these relations shape human thought, emotions, and actions over time, ultimately manifesting in patterns of behavior and perception. Social practice, as Bourdieu explains, is expressed within specific

---

[56] Cf. Anthony Giddens, *Die Konstitution der Gesellschaft. Grundzüge einer Theorie der Strukturierung* (Campus, 1995) 52.
[57] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 70.
[58] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 70.
[59] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 70-71.
[60] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionaliät*, 71.

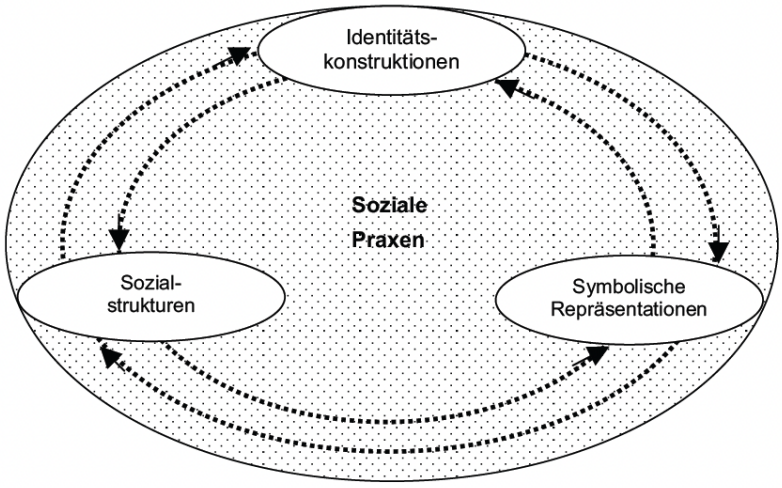
fields. These fields possess a degree of autonomy but become visible only through human activity. They are defined by ongoing power struggles in which established authority is continuously challenged and remodeled. Examples include economic and religious fields, each governed by its own set of rules. Within these fields, those who control the most critical resources also hold power over the field's structure. Consequently, for Bourdieu, power relations must be analyzed within the specific context of each field, as society cannot be understood as a singular, unified entity. Therefore, the boundaries of a field can only be determined through empirical investigation. To facilitate this, Bourdieu proposes a three-step analytical process. First, the relationship between the field and broader structures of authority must be examined. Second, the interactions and relationships between actors and institutions within the field should be analyzed. Finally, the habitus, understood as the cognitive and behavioral dispositions of the field's participants, must be studied. In this methodological approach, the focus is not on the individual but on the field itself as the primary object of analysis. [61] Bourdieu argues that to construct the field, it is essential to identify the forms of power that affect it. To discern these forms, however, one must be aware of the logical structure of the field. This duality leads to a kind of hermeneutic cycle.[62]

Adapted to the theory and method of intersectionality, this means that the interplay between the identity and structural levels cannot be fully described without empirical analysis. This becomes particularly evident when the level of representations is considered. Representations consist of coded norms and ideologies that intersect with the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels but are rarely considered an independent level of analysis. Although Giddens acknowledges the role of representations, he does not clearly distinguish them from social structures or explain their connection to the dimension of domination. Similarly, Bourdieu does not explicitly address representations. However, Degele and Winker emphasize the significance of symbolic representations in intersectional analyses, arguing that they exert a profound influence on society through mechanisms such as advertising, laws, and mass media. In this way, social categories become embedded in people's subconscious and shape their positioning within society. Thus, identity construction is deeply intertwined with symbolic representations, and through their performative nature, they contribute to both the emergence and persistence of social structures. According to Winker and Degele, these structures exist only through the ongoing actions and thoughts of individuals. In sum, identities and social representations have the power both to create new structures and to reinforce existing ones.[63] An aspect that Degele

[61] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionaliät,* 71-72.
[62] Cf. Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J. D. Wacquant, *Reflexive Anthropologie* (Suhrkamp, 1996), 139.
[63] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionaliät*, 72-73.

and Winker do not specifically mention in this part of their methodology is that identities and representations also have the potential to destabilize structures.
Methodologically, Winker and Degele make out six different relations between the three levels of Identity (I), Structure (S), and Representation (R). These relations can be of different natures. For example, they can be weakening, strengthening, or neutral. Depending on the direction and the related levels, the interaction can be contradictory.[64]

Abbildung 1: Wechselwirkungen der drei Ebenen im Feld sozialer Praxen



[65]

A practical example of this can be seen in an intersectional research project on sexism and homophobia in German soccer. In this study, the authors examine how the different levels influence each other in different ways. They begin by analyzing the impact of the structural level on the identity level, arguing that structures can both constrain and enable individual identities. For example, the president of the German Soccer Association (DFB) once stated his intention to provide a platform for minorities that are typically underrepresented in soccer.[66] By these marginalized groups, he refers primarily to women and LGBTQ+ individuals. Structural processes, such as the increasing openness of football to marginalized groups, as seen in this example, directly shape realities at the individual level. For instance, the statement by the DFB-

[64] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionaliät, 72-73.*
[65] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionaliät*, 72-73.
[66] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 74.

president contributed to a rise in the popularity of women's and girls' soccer, as well as an increase in the visibility of queer football fan clubs.[67]

Conversely, the individual level also exerts influence on the structural level. This interaction can manifest positively, for example, through adherence to laws or participation in voting. However, it can also occur negatively, such as through acts of active opposition, subversion, or revolution. In this way, individuals can create, reinforce, disrupt, or ignore social structures. An example of this phenomenon can be observed in the case of the German Soccer Association. Here, individuals, specifically queer and female soccer players, applied sustained pressure on existing structures. Their efforts were further amplified by maximizing the potential threat of reputational damage and economic losses stemming from the tolerance of sexist, racist, or homophobic practices within the organization.[68]

Third, representations also influence individuals by constructing a normative framework that determines what is considered socially intelligible and worthy of recognition. These representations define both inclusion and exclusion, shaping the boundaries of social recognition. Consequently, the construction of individual identity can manifest as either a reproduction and adaptation to these representations or as resistance against them. For example, sexist reporting, coupled with societal constructions of femininity, can lead aspiring female football players to lose confidence in the compatibility of being a woman and pursuing a football career.[69]

Vice Versa, identity also influences representations. It can legitimize representations as much as double, repeat, or question them etc. According to Judith Butler, collective identity constructions can change symbolic representations through the process of individual adaptation and henceforth give them new meanings. As an example, Winker mentions representations like queer soccer tournaments or a poster of the female football world champions on the dome in Frankfurt in the year 2007. This illustrates the interplay of how representations influence identities and especially, how identities also shape the social representations and visibilities.[70]

Even the structural level impacts the representations. One can say that the representations are the expression of social structures, and they become particularly visible through them. Winker and Degele go so far as to say that structures only truly come into existence through social representations. A law against discrimination, for instance, without people's knowledge of it, does not exist. In this case, representations can agree with structures, oppose them, or ignore

[67] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 74-75.
[68] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 75.
[69] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 74-75.
[70] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 76.

them fully. This way, the media, during the time of the female football world championship, was able to put its focus on the national approval of the female sport or reveal the difference in winners' payments between the male and the female tournament. The same phenomenon arises regarding homosexuality in soccer. One thing the representations in this example, the media cannot do anymore is ignore or oppose these topics since the change in the DFB law of 2001.[71] Vice versa, structures can also translate representations in different ways, which creates a space for interpretations. Structures can incorporate dominant norms into their internal logics, ignore them, remain indifferent, oppose them, or reinforce and extend them.[72] Regarding the example, meaning that, for example, the DFB could use the popularity in women's and girls' soccer to compensate for the decreasing numbers in the participation of boys. By equalizing the prices and payments of male and female soccer, the DFB could make the female sport more attractive for the media's reporting. Moreover, they could use the visibility and publicity of queer soccer fan clubs to attract new members.[73]

Winker and Degele draw three key conclusions from these examples. First, it is crucial to analyze intersections by considering both the direction of impact and the levels at which they interact. Second, one cannot assume that discrimination simply shifts from one level to another. For instance, while it is politically incorrect to discriminate against women and homosexuals on a structural level, such discrimination persists in everyday interactions. Conversely, the growing moral condemnation of sexual assault has pushed institutions to implement stricter sanctions and enhance prevention efforts. Third, the justification of inequalities varies. While heteronormativity creates a tension between structural and representational levels, class-based inequalities are more widely accepted and socially legitimized.[74]

4.3 The Eight-Step-Analysis

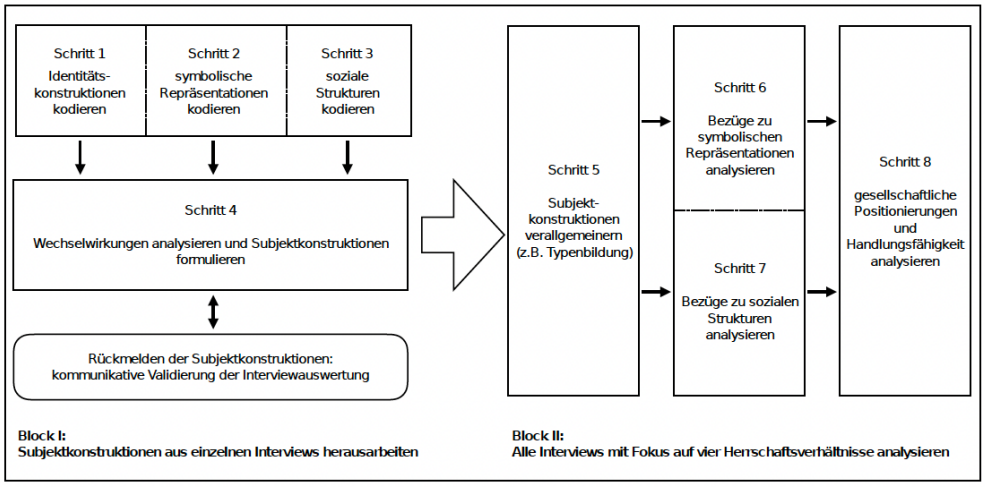
The subject-related multi-level analysis follows a structured approach, beginning with its division into two methodological sections. The first is inductive, meaning it moves from specific observations or individual cases toward broader generalizations. The second is deductive, proceeding from general principles or established rules to analyze specific, individual cases.[75] The first step involves analyzing each case to identify underlying structures and to clarify how each person positions themselves. While this initial phase already provides

[71] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 76-77.
[72] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 77.
[73] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität,* 77.
[74] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 77-78.
[75] Cf. Ganz and Hausotter, *Intersektionale Sozialforschung*, 48.

insights into representations and social structures, it is essential to remain cautious about drawing definitive conclusions at this stage. Hypotheses can be noted for future consideration, but should be set aside for now. During this part of the analysis, the level of detail in examining individual cases can vary, and the number of cases included is left to the discretion of the researcher.[76]

The second, deductive part aims at analyzing the individual self-positioning against the background of context. This way, one can try to crystallize social structures and find out how power relations function on the level of individual presentations and come up with suggestions and opportunities on how people can try to dissolve these power structures.[77]

Abbildung 1: Die Auswertungsschritte der Intersektionalen Mehrebenenanalyse



[78]

The image provides an overview of the different steps in the intersectional multi-level analysis. It is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the individual perspective, analyzing identity, representations, and subject constructions. The second shifts to the structural and societal contextualization of the first part. At this stage, different patterns can be identified, and power relations, social structures, and symbolic representations can be examined in greater depth.[79]

The first step of the initial block focuses on coding identity constructions, analyzing how individuals perceive and define their sense of identity. This step is entirely subject-centered. The second step involves coding symbolic representations, examining symbols and meanings

[76] Cf. Ganz and Hausotter, *Intersektionale Sozialforschung* 49.
[77] Cf. Ganz and Hausotter, *Intersektionale Sozialforschung*, 49-50.
[78] Cf. Ganz and Hausotter, *Intersektionale Sozialforschung,* 50.
[79] Cf. Ganz and Hausotter, *Intersektionale Sozialforschung*, 50-52.

that emerge in interviews, such as specific language use or terminology. The third step centers on coding social structures, identifying how they manifest within individual interviews.
The final phase of the first block synthesizes the findings from these three steps, emphasizing their intersections to construct a comprehensive subject profile for everyone. In interview-based research, this profile is typically shared for validation with participants, allowing them to confirm, refine, or reject the interpretation. However, since the data in this thesis is derived from pre-existing interviews that did not follow the intersectional method, this validation step cannot be incorporated into the analysis.[80]
The second block begins with step five, where types of subject constructions are developed. Individual constructions are abstracted to highlight similarities and differences more clearly. Step six links individual statements to broader societal narratives and symbols. Step seven examines how individual aspects are connected to power relations within society. Finally, Step eight explores how individuals position themselves within social power structures and exercise agency. The final objective of the analysis is to reveal the constraints they faced while identifying potential pathways for navigating and challenging these limitations.[81]

4.4 Adapted Intersectional Multi-Level Analysis

This thesis draws upon Winker's and Degele's Multi-Level Analysis in combination with Ganz's Eight-Step Analysis. While this methodology provides a valuable framework for addressing the research question, it requires adaptations to align with the specific context and realities of Nigerian Hausa women. Due to its inherently open nature, further adaptations to the methodology will be made as needed throughout the analysis to ensure a fair and accurate representation of the social realities of Hausa women in Nigeria.
On the micro-level, which will be called "identity level," relevant sources include qualitative data, such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions. Additionally, autobiographical literature by female Hausa authors can offer insights into how they perceive their identities, navigate everyday life, and engage in social interactions. At the meso-level, referred to in this thesis as the "representation level", Kano market literature offers a lens through which the intersection of gender and religious identity, specifically as Muslim women, is portrayed. Hausa movies, commonly known as Kannywood movies, also serve as a significant resource for understanding how Hausa women are represented within cultural contexts. Finally, Hausa tales provide insight into representations that are accessible to women across all social classes and

[80] Cf. Ganz and Hausotter, *Intersektionale Sozialforschung*, 50-52.
[81] Cf. Ganz and Hausotter, *Intersektionale Sozialforschung*, 50-52.

educational backgrounds. Finally, at the macro level, referred to as the "structural level," which focuses on broader institutional influences and structures, Hausa women are primarily shaped by religious institutions, particularly Sharia Law and the Sharia Penal Code. Because these institutions often operate independently of, and sometimes in opposition to, the governmental framework, state institutions are excluded from this part of the analysis, as religious legal structures are more dominant. The few structural institutions that do challenge or interact with Sharia Law are faith-based women's organizations, which also highlight potential loopholes for activism and reform. Accordingly, the analysis at the structural level centers on these two domains.

The objective is to develop a holistic understanding of how Hausa women construct their identities within the categories of *gender* and *religion*, as well as other intersecting categories. Additionally, the aim is to examine the representations and institutional structures that shape these self-constructions and, ultimately, to analyze how these elements interact and influence each other. In this final step, it is essential to consider these influences as outlined by Degele and Winker in their case study. The overarching goal is to identify loopholes for challenging structures and to compare Hausa women's activism inside these loopholes with international frameworks.

5. Hausa Women in Nigeria

Since this thesis centers around the women of the Muslim Hausa community in Northern Nigeria, the following chapter provides an overview of female experiences within the Hausa region and the history of its gendered culture and practices. Moreover, it outlines the extent of research conducted specifically on women of the Hausa community and highlights areas where coverage is lacking.

Today, the Hausa people are predominantly settled in West Africa, with the majority residing in northern Nigeria and southern Niger. While Islam is the dominant religion, smaller groups identify as Maguzawa, Christian, or animist.[82] In this thesis, the term Hausa women will refer predominantly to the Muslim majority in Nigeria since Hausa society is largely Islamic, while acknowledging the presence of non-Muslim Hausa communities. Bilkisu Yusuf, a Nigerian journalist for the "New Nigerian" in northern Nigeria and a Hausa woman herself, introduces a 1991 collection of studies on Hausa women with the following words:

> **"**Hausa women are among the most strictly secluded Muslim women in Africa. The increasing identification of Muslim Hausa with the Islamic world in the last decade has created political tensions

[82] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 4.

> within Nigeria. For those who study Hausa women, this change brings to the forefront the question of the specific impact of Islam on women's lives."[83]

She emphasizes the central role of Islam in the Hausa community, particularly in shaping the lives of its women. Notably, Hausa society is characterized by stark contrasts between urban and rural life, as well as a "status system based upon occupation and birth".[84]

The Hausa region has a long and rich history of trade. For centuries, Hausa traders traveled across the African continent, to the north, west, and east coast, while pilgrims journeyed further east and north to Mecca, carrying Hausa culture with them. Despite periods of external rule by the Kanuri, the Fulani, the British colonial administration in Nigeria, and the French colonial administration in Niger, Hausa culture and traditions have endured, adapting pragmatically to outside influences.[85]

Throughout the centuries, the Hausa have been studied by scholars from various backgrounds, including colonial officials, Islamic scholars, and anthropologists, among others. Most research has focused on the emergence of major urban centers in northern Nigeria and southern Niger, as well as the economic activities within these regions. Particularly significant for academic study is the formation and structure of the Islamic Sokoto Caliphate, which emerged and thrived in the nineteenth century. However, women have been largely marginalized in early scholarship, with academic attention primarily centered on Hausa men and their experiences. Nonetheless, there were a few expectations like Mary Smith's "Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa"[86] published in 1954. Baba of Karo's published biography, offering an in-depth account of Hausa women's lives and perspectives, marked a significant step in the field. In the following decade, two more studies incorporated women alongside men: Rachel Yeld's 1960 study on the Hausa and Abner and Gaynor Cohen's 1969 data collection on women in Hausa society, particularly their role in trade in Ibadan.[87] It is important to acknowledge that this early body of academic knowledge was produced or edited by British authors rather than members of the Hausa community itself. As a result, the perspective may be shaped by a Western bias in its portrayal of Hausa society and its women. Recognizing this colonial influence is essential when engaging with this research.

"Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s a virtual explosion occurred in research on Hausa society, and intense efforts began which led to more widespread collection of data on females

[83] Coles, *Hausa Women*, 4.
[84] Coles, *Hausa Women*, 4.
[85] Cf. *Hausa Women*, 4.
[86] Cf. Baba of Karo, *Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa*, ed. Mary Smith (Faber and Faber, 1954).
[87] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 4-5.

as well as males."[88] The heightened interest in the Hausa ethnicity persisted into the 1980s, leading to a broader body of research on Hausa women, though largely studied separately from their male counterparts. This strict division in scholarship was often justified by the argument that Hausa society is characterized by rigid gender roles. However, Yusuf argues that this clear distinction reflects the academic lens of the time rather than the lived reality of Hausa society. For instance, studies on power and authority predominantly examined inherited roles held by men, thereby marginalizing other sources of influence or areas where women exercised power. Yusuf criticizes the fact that research on Hausa women, with few exceptions, remained narrowly focused on topics stereotypically associated with femininity, such as childbearing and domestic life, rather than exploring the broader social, economic, and political roles they occupied.[89]

Another critical limitation of the literature from this period is its predominant focus on women in urban centers of Hausa society, such as Kaduna in Nigeria or Accra in Ghana. As a result, rural Hausa women, who play a crucial role in agriculture and local development, remain largely marginalized in research despite their significant contributions to Hausa society. Additionally, non-Muslim Hausa women are underrepresented in scholarship, primarily due to their small percentage within the population. Lastly, Yusuf argues that referring to the ethnic group simply as Hausa is misleading, as the Fulani have intermarried extensively with the indigenous Hausa population since the emergence of the Sokoto Caliphate in the early nineteenth century. She suggests that the more accurate term would be Hausa-Fulani to reflect this deep historical and cultural integration.[90] Despite Yusuf's argument for referring to the ethnic group as Hausa-Fulani, this thesis will continue to use the term Hausa. This choice acknowledges that Hausa can serve as an umbrella term encompassing various forms of cultural and ethnic intermixture. While the Hausa have indeed mixed extensively with the Fulani, they have also merged with other ethnic groups, and referring to them solely as Hausa-Fulani would obscure these broader interconnections. Furthermore, members of the community commonly refer to themselves as Hausa, and thus this thesis adopts the term used by the community itself, rather than an external designation.

In conclusion, Yusuf argues that previous research has been shaped by the assumption that women's subordination stems from patriarchal Islam and pre-colonial Hausa values. This perspective, she contends, has prevented scholars from fully exploring gender as a fundamental factor in social relations, production, and reproduction, among other aspects of society. Yusuf

[88] Coles, *Hausa Women* 5.
[89] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 5.
[90] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women,* 5-6.

calls for a more open, unbiased approach that accurately reflects the roles and influences of Hausa women. She highlights the importance of re-evaluating dominant assumptions to make their contributions more visible, an effort that some scholars have already begun by documenting real-life behaviors and women's interactions across multiple social identities and life stages.[91]

5.1 Hausa Women and Islam in Northern Nigeria

A central focus of contemporary studies on Muslim Hausa women is the role of religion in shaping their lives. However, it is important to acknowledge that the influence of Islam is not as straightforward as often assumed; rather, it is deeply intertwined with local cultural traditions. The process of Islamization in Northern Nigeria continues to blend Islamic practices with indigenous customs, and because this process does not occur uniformly or simultaneously across all areas, the impact of Islam varies significantly across different aspects of Hausa culture and regions.[92] In some regions, societal structures and, by extension, women's lives, are shaped more by patriarchal norms rooted in Middle Eastern traditions, while in others, local customs play a more dominant role. This interweaving of Islamic and indigenous Hausa influences makes it challenging to distinguish between the two and to determine which exerts a greater impact on Hausa women's lives in modern Nigeria.[93] A closer examination of the historical development of the Hausa region reveals that "gender roles in Hausa society before and after the adoption of Islam shows quite clearly that the spread of Islam, and particularly the Fulani jihad early in the nineteenth century, changed profoundly the social, political, and cultural conditions of Hausaland for women."[94]

Islam first reached the region where the Hausa were settled in the late eighth century. Before this period, sources, particularly from Kano, suggest that before the widespread conversion to Islam, women had greater access to public participation and leadership. Legally, men and women in pre-Islamic Hausaland also appeared to have had relatively equal rights. Evidence supporting these claims includes origin myths, king lists, and the Kano Chronicles. Additionally, sources on the modern non-Muslim Maguzawa are often used to conclude Hausa society in the pre-Islamic era, as their customs, social structures, and gender roles are believed to reflect aspects of pre-Islamic Hausa culture. However, Yusuf cautions against relying too heavily on these remnants as definitive representations of the broader pre-Islamic Hausa

[91] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 6.
[92] Cf. Jerome H. Barkow, "Hausa Women and Islam", *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6, no.2 (1972): 317.
[93] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 6-7.
[94] Coles, *Hausa Women*, 7.

society. Women in mid-20th-century Maguzawa communities interacted freely with their male counterparts. They tended to marry later in life and often wed men of similar or closer age, in contrast to Muslim Hausa women, who frequently marry at a younger age, often to significantly older men. Additionally, Maguzawa women cultivated their land to support their families and played active roles in spiritual and cultural rites and rituals.[95]

Alongside these sources, 18th-century travelers' accounts provide further insights into Hausa women's lives, describing them as participants in market trade and free to move about as they pleased, except for the wives of Hausa kings, who were confined to the women's quarters. These freedoms were significantly restricted following the Sokoto Jihad from 1804 to 1812, which reshaped religious practices and beliefs across the Hausa region. Sources on Usman dan Fodio, the cleric who led the jihad, reveal that many of his reforms directly impacted women's lives. He criticized, among other things, the practice of inheriting through the maternal line and the insufficient covering of women's bodies. Additionally, he disapproved of men and women mixing in public spaces and condemned the tendency of Hausa Muslims to establish their own sets of rules and rites rather than adhering strictly to the teachings of Islamic scholars.[96]

During Usman dan Fodio's Jihad in the 18th century, his regulations were forcefully implemented, primarily restricting women's freedom of movement and confining them to the domestic sphere. As a result, their interactions in public spaces were largely limited to other women and children, significantly altering their social and economic roles. With the spread of the post-Jihad-Islamization, women largely abandoned their previous engagement in agricultural labor and instead shifted toward the development of domestic crafts.

> "Today the observance of seclusion coincides with class and educational distinctions. In rural areas with dispersed compounds or small villages, where the need for their labor continues to involve many peasant women directly in subsistence agricultural production on family farms, seclusion is practiced minimally, if at all. Where such work is available, women may even seek jobs as paid agricultural laborers.[97]

In these areas, it was primarily religious teachers and wealthy farmers who could afford to seclude their wives. Compared to small villages, women in larger settlements, even those in seclusion, continued to engage in production and trade from within the domestic sphere. In urban centers, seclusion was less common among poorer women, as it was financially unsustainable. To contribute to household income, women from low-income families needed to remain mobile and actively participate in economic activities alongside their husbands. For

[95] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 7.
[96] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 7-8.
[97] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 8.

middle-class women, seclusion became increasingly prevalent in the 20th century, as men viewed it as a symbol of prestige, demonstrating their ability to provide for their families without requiring women's financial contributions. In contrast, the upper class, particularly those educated in the Global North, demonstrated more varied practices. Some women were not secluded at all, while others experienced partial seclusion, allowing them to work outside the home but requiring them to remain within the domestic sphere outside of their professional responsibilities.[98]

The transmission of Islamic teachings within Hausa culture was facilitated through the establishment of formal educational systems. Children began their education in Qur'anic schools, later progressing to more advanced Arabic schools, and eventually, some continued their studies at Islamic universities. In the early 1980s, new Islamic schools attracted a significant number of adult Hausa women, many of whom later secured teaching positions within these institutions. This development contributed to decreased literacy rates among Hausa women, providing them with access to a wider range of professional opportunities.[99]

Overall, scholars hold different views on the impact of Islam on Muslim Hausa women over time. Nigerian scholar Balaraba Sule and American academic Priscilla Starratt argue that, in contemporary society, Hausa women's affiliation with Islam does not necessarily restrict their voice or agency. They highlight the ongoing debates surrounding Islamic interpretations of gender roles, both in Nigeria and across the broader Islamic world. To support their argument, they draw on case studies of three Hausa women, each holding distinct leadership positions as for example academics or social workers, but also spiritual positions of leadership. All of them live in Kano and have obtained a degree in Qur'anic education.[100] "Through their activities as teachers, in preparing women for the hajj, recruiting for membership in the Islamic "brotherhoods," and carrying out welfare work, women in these leadership roles are an example of Islamic women's active involvement in public issues in their own society and abroad."[101] Although these women belong to the elite of the Hausa community and represent only a small segment of society, Sule and Starratt view them as examples of how Muslim Hausa women can assume leadership roles in the public sphere. They also interpret their positions as indicative of

[98] Coles, *Hausa Women*, 8-9.
[99] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 9-10.
[100] Cf. Balaraba B. M. Sule, Priscilla E. Starratt, "Islamic Leadership Positions for Women in Contemporary Kano Society," in *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Catherine M. Coles and Beverly Mack (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 29-30.
[101] Coles, *Hausa Women*, 10.

a broader trend toward increased female participation in public life within Muslim Hausa society.[102]

American anthropologist Deborah Pellow challenges this perspective, arguing that women's lives are constrained by Islam. However, she emphasizes that the more important question is whether Hausa women themselves perceive these so-called limitations as restrictive. Like her colleagues, Pellow uses case studies to illustrate her argument. Her research focuses on a woman who initially lived in Accra Zongo, Ghana, before later relocating to Kano, Nigeria. Through this case, Pellow compares the integration of Islamic norms in Ghana and Nigeria. Pellow observes that the woman in her study, Hajiya, is unhappy with her move to Kano, as she had previously lived with her maternal relatives in Accra, where seclusion was not practiced. In Accra, she had a job and access to a supportive female social network. However, in Kano, she faces seclusion, which, due to a lack of support and opportunities, prevents her from continuing her profession. Using this case study, Pellow highlights how Islam intertwines with local beliefs and customs, demonstrating that even among the Hausa, Islamic practices can generate distinct social norms, values, and behaviors. Some of these variations may impose occupational restrictions on women, negatively impacting their economic status and increasing their vulnerability to poverty.[103]

Scholar Roberta Ann Dunbar takes a third position, acknowledging that while Islam has a significant influence on Hausa women, it also provides opportunities for the evolution of gender roles. Her research focuses on various state development organizations, including the Association des Femmes du Niger (AFN) and the Islamic Association of Niger (AIN). Dunbar highlights the challenges faced by Muslim women's organizations in Muslim communities of West Africa, particularly in collaborating with women from other regions of the countries. To illustrate the distinct interests and needs of Muslim Hausa women, often differing significantly from those of women in the southern regions, these organizations ultimately established separate associations dedicated exclusively to Muslim women. Although highly educated Hausa women often lead these activist organizations, their primary goal is to improve the lives of poor and uneducated women.[104]

In conclusion, Yusuf acknowledges the constraints that Islam imposes on Muslim Hausa women while also advocating for women’s essential role in promoting development and

---

[102] Cf. Balaraba, “Islamic Leadership,” 48.

[103] Cf. Deborah Pellow, “From Accra to Kano: One Woman’s Experience”, in *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Catherine M. Coles and Beverly Mack (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 50-68.

[104] Cf. Roberta Ann Dunbar, „Islamic Values, the State, and “the Development of Women”: The Case of Niger”, in *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Catherine M. Coles and Beverly Mack (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 69-89.

challenging these restrictions. She argues that while practices such as seclusion do limit women's mobility and freedoms in the public sphere, they still have opportunities to participate in economic, political, and spiritual life. According to Yusuf, the practice of Islam itself does not inherently restrict women's ability to exert influence in these domains.[105]

5.2 Muslim Hausa Women in Decision-Making

Another key point Yusuf highlights in her introduction is the patriarchal structures within Hausa society. It is often assumed that these structures place women under the control of their male counterparts and that they are "entirely lacking any authority in the public realm."[106] Yusuf also notes that these structures have been widely confirmed in research on Muslim Hausa women. She explains that scholars have traditionally interpreted public affairs as meaning political matters. In later studies, the adoption of the public-private dualism further reinforced rigid gender roles, confining women primarily to the domestic sphere. However, in the 1970s, this assumption was challenged by research on Hausa women, which argued that Western perspectives on the relationship between the private and public spheres do not accurately reflect those of non-Western societies. In the latter, power and authority are not exercised solely in the public realm but also within kinship networks in the private sphere, which, in turn, shape the public domain.[107]

An analysis of the authority exercised by Muslim Hausa women reveals that their status is far from subordinate; rather, it differs from Western conceptions of power. Hausa women exercise power, particularly in their impact on others. For instance, in the early 20th century, women from higher social classes held authority over enslaved individuals, a dynamic that continues today, although in the form of domestic servants in wealthier households. In summary, women generally can influence others "through prestige which accrues to them from the bearing and socialization of children, seniority accorded through age and generation, secular or Islamic learning, and the exercise of ritual power and authority."[108] Yusuf's contribution to the study of female power dynamics demonstrates that not all Hausa women occupy a subordinate position. Additionally, it underscores the significance of *class* in determining who exercises power. The question of which Hausa women hold authority, and thus challenge assumptions of subordination, is closely tied to their socioeconomic background. Since power appears to be

[105] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 12.
[106] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 12.
[106] Coles, *Hausa Women*, 12.
[107] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women, 12.*
[108] Coles, *Hausa Wome*n, 13.

concentrated among women from wealthier households, *class* emerges as a crucial factor in this analysis and will remain a central consideration throughout this thesis.

The influence of wealthy Hausa women takes various forms, including property ownership and economic contributions to their communities, such as job creation. Additionally, older women are often seen as role models for younger ones. Due to these functions of Hausa women, recent feminist debates propagate a widening of the term politics to incorporate activities that women carry out. To say it with Morgan and Bookman's words: "activities that are carried on in the daily lives of ordinary people and are enmeshed in the social institutions and political-economic processes of their society. When there is an attempt to change the social and economic institutions that embody the basic power relations in our society that is politics."[109]

According to this definition, Hausa women inherit political authority alongside their male counterparts. However, patriarchal structures continue to shape Hausa society. Placing emphasis on women's agency offers insight into why they either accept or resist these structures. Yusuf raises an important point by questioning whether gender itself is a fundamental element of authority, particularly given the highly stratified nature of Hausa society. While this stratification existed in precolonial times, it has been reshaped over the years by the Fulani Jihad, colonial rule, and the formation of the Nigerian state in 1960.[110]

Originally, the social hierarchy of the Hausa society was based on profession or descent, "and including a distinction between *masu sarauta* (rulers, by virtue of birth, and by achievement or appointment) and *talakawa* (common people), it is an important part of the overall status-prestige system."[111] A woman's status was largely determined by the social position of her kinship group, with marriage being one of the few opportunities for social mobility. Yusuf states that a woman's standing is also significantly influenced by factors such as age and education.[112] This statement further underscores the intersectional nature of Hausa women's lives, as their access to privilege or experiences of discrimination are shaped not only by class but also by intersecting factors such as age and education. These elements significantly influence their social positioning. Acknowledging this complexity reinforces the relevance of intersectionality theory, as it draws attention to how various social categories are interwoven.

Despite the apparent rigidity of the structures they live in, Hausa women have found ways to navigate and, in some cases, escape male control, particularly through divorce, income-generating activities, and other strategies. One key observation is that women's primary

---

[109] Sandra Morgen, Ann Bookman, "Rethinking Women and Politics: An Introductory Essay", in *Women and the Politics of Empowerment,* ed. Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen, Temple University Press, 1988, 4.

[110] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 13-14.

[111] Coles, *Hausa Women*, 14.

[112] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women,* 14.

allegiance remains tied to their kinship and *class* rather than *gender*, making broad female solidarity difficult to achieve. This lack of collective identification is further reinforced by older women often exploiting younger ones, ultimately perpetuating patriarchal structures. Yusuf argues that this dynamic is a major factor behind the continued underrepresentation of women in politics, their limited access to state employment, and their marginal role in development projects.[113]

Overall, Yusuf concludes that the primary challenge for women in exercising power lies in their attempt to gain access to the political sphere while maintaining their identity and continuing to assert authority within the private sphere. It becomes clear that they do not view their domestic labor as separate or disconnected from their activities outside the home but rather as an integral part of their broader influence and agency.[114]

5.3 Muslim Hausa Women in the Economy

Just as assumptions regarding Hausa women's exercise of power must be critically examined, so too must prevailing narratives about their economic participation. Misleading assumptions in this area often stem from data collection methods that disproportionately focus on the public sphere of Hausa society, a domain where women are largely absent, while neglecting economic activity within the private sphere. Domestic labor, including childcare and various income-generating activities, is frequently excluded from the scope of quantitative data collection. This absence has not only distorted perceptions of women's economic contributions but has also led to a significant underestimation of overall economic activity in Northern Nigeria. As a result, such miscalculations risk informing flawed development policies and ineffective planning in the region.[115]

However, qualitative studies, such as those conducted by Polly Hill and Emmy Simmons, have sought to fill these gaps. Their research highlights the diverse, often informal trading activities carried out by Hausa women across various regions of Northern Nigeria, while also acknowledging the heavy burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities. Renée Pittin further challenges the assumption that marriage is the only viable path for Hausa women, demonstrating that many unmarried women in Katsina engage in paid labor. These findings emphasize that while women do participate in income-generating activities, their opportunities are frequently shaped and limited by intersecting factors such as poverty, ethnicity, and social

[113] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 14-15.
[114] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women,* 17.
[115] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 17-18.

competition. This underscores the complex interplay between economic activity, class, and ethnicity in shaping the livelihoods of Hausa women. Common income-earning activities among Hausa women are "sale of cooked food, sewing, weaving, trade (both petty and large-scale), midwifery, herbalism, and prostitution."[116] These activities are predominantly carried out by older women, who, unlike their younger counterparts, are no longer subject to strict seclusion, often due to circumstances such as the death of a spouse.[117]

Once again, greater opportunities and mobility are observed among older women compared to their younger counterparts. However, this advantage is often accompanied by the absence of a husband as a provider, making income-generating activities essential for their financial survival. Moreover, previous research suggests a link between women's domestic responsibilities, particularly childbearing, and their participation in income-generating activities alongside their male partners. As the number of children in a household increases, so too do nutritional and financial demands, often compelling women to contribute to household income. However, this added burden frequently results in a decline in the overall well-being of women, men, and children alike.[118]

Overall, women in low-income households play an important role in income-generating activities, primarily within the informal sector, where their economic opportunities are often further constrained by industrialization and economic shifts. Older and middle-aged women tend to earn higher incomes, particularly through occupations linked to ritual practices. Nevertheless, despite limited representation in the formal sector, most Hausa women remain largely excluded from it. Expanding their access to formal employment is thus essential to improving their economic status and securing broader gender equality in the region.[119]

5.4 Muslim Hausa Women in the Arts and the Media

Just as Hausa women's economic contributions and exercise of power have often been overlooked, so too has their role in literature, music, and media. However, this lack of documentation should not be mistaken for a lack of participation. Female Hausa artists have made significant contributions, particularly in singing, dancing, and poetry, with many enjoying recognition within the Muslim community. Some married and non-secluded women also pursue creative careers in media, working in fields such as radio and television broadcasting, acting,

---

116 Coles, *Hausa Women,* 19.
117 Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women, 19.*
118 Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women, 19.*
119 Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 19-20.

and newspaper editing. Even among secluded women, artistic expression flourishes, particularly through painting and poetry, though their work often circulates within private social networks.[120]

Public events such as weddings offer women opportunities to engage in creative arts like singing and dancing. While many of these festivities conform to Islamic gender norms, certain communities continue to practice the pre-Islamic Bori spirit possession cult. In Bori rituals, participants enter trance states to become possessed by spirits, a process believed to help individuals cope with personal difficulties. Music and dance play a central role in these ceremonies, and Bori is often perceived as a space where marginalized groups, including women, can access a form of power. However, despite high levels of female participation, most spirits invoked are male, and the hierarchical structure of Bori tends to reinforce, rather than challenge, male dominance.[121]

Beyond music and dance, literature has long served as a powerful medium for female creative expression. A key historical figure in this tradition is Nana Asma'u, the daughter of jihad leader Usman dan Fodio, who composed religious and topical poetry in Arabic. Today, numerous female authors continue this legacy by writing about issues that shape their everyday lives and experiences as Muslim Hausa women. Oral storytelling also remains an important literary form, through which women transmit knowledge, convey moral lessons, and challenge dominant gender ideologies across generations.[122] As noted in scholarly interpretations

> *"*A pre-Islamic tradition that carries many images long present in Hausaland, tatsuniyoyi nevertheless contain many Islamic themes acquired through the history of their telling. The image of women presented in them is of independence and even superiority to men. Women's cultural roles are expressed in and sustained by their culinary and reproductive activities-traditional aspects of their roles."[123]

These oral narratives, known as *tatsuniyoyi*, serve as artistic tools for negotiating gender norms, providing women with a space to express power within the patriarchal structures of their community.[124] Similarly, women's participation in theater offers another platform for them to assert their agency and reshape dominant narratives.[125]

Overall, this chapter challenges the widely held assumption that women in Hausa society are inherently subordinate to their male counterparts. It becomes clear that women do exercise power, though often in different spheres than men. Furthermore, the distribution and inheritance

---

120 Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 21.
121 Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 21-22.
122 Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 23.
123 Coles, *Hausa Women*, 23.
124 Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 23.
125 Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 23-25.

of authority are deeply tied to one's position within society, particularly social class. Yusuf's analysis of Hausa women highlights the need for a reassessment of preconceived notions about their lives and realities to provide a more accurate and differentiated perspective. Moreover, focusing only on gender asymmetry and traditional gender roles fails to capture the complexities of Hausa women's experiences. Yusuf's insights underscore the necessity of an intersectional approach that considers factors such as religion, class, and other categories, all of which intersect in diverse ways to shape women's lives and determine whether they experience oppression, resistance, or acceptance of their societal roles**.**

6. Intersectional Analysis of Muslim Hausa Women

6.1 Individual Level

The intersectional analysis of Muslim Hausa women starts off with the quest for their self-identification, accessed through field studies that prioritize qualitative data while incorporating quantitative insights. The emphasis on qualitative research aligns with the openness of the intersectional approach, allowing for a more detailed understanding of the multiple categories that shape these women's lives. Relying primarily on open-ended interviews provides a rich perspective, avoiding the limitations of rigidly structured questionnaires that may overlook important aspects of women's experiences. This approach ensures that women's voices remain central, giving them the space to articulate their realities in ways that a researcher might not have anticipated. For this reason, methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions are particularly well-suited for this intersectional analysis.

The most central studies on Muslim Hausa women in the academic community that make use of these methodological approaches are Elisha P. Renne's *Gender Roles and Women's Status: What They Mean to Hausa Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria*, Katja Werthmann's *Nachbarinnen Die Alltagswelt muslimischer Frauen in einer nigerianischen Großstadt* und Hannatu Hussaini Maina's "Hausa Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria Today: A Three-Dimensional Perspective". What these studies provide is a diverse insight into the lives of different Hausa women. While Werthmann's and Renne's studies focus exclusively on Muslim Hausa women living in urban centers in northern Nigeria, Maina's research integrates the lived experiences of both rural and urban Muslim Hausa women in the region. However, for this analysis, only the interviews with rural Hausa women will be considered to provide a contrast between the rural and the urban context. In this way, *geographical location* serves as a key category in this study, highlighting the rural-urban dichotomy within the intersectional analysis. Unfortunately, the available data on rural Hausa women is significantly less extensive than that

on their urban counterparts. The stronger adherence to traditional norms in rural areas often results in husbands restricting their wives from speaking to outsiders, particularly women perceived as too liberated or independent, out of fear that such interactions could influence them.[126] This limits researchers' ability to engage directly with rural women or conduct long-term fieldwork, contributing to the rarity of studies on this part of the population.

The existing data on Muslim Hausa women in both urban and rural areas is primarily derived from two studies conducted by Western scholars, with only one study authored by a Nigerian Hausa woman. Ideally, the individual level of this analysis would be based on interviews conducted by Hausa women themselves, as they possess the most in-depth understanding of the language, idioms, and cultural nuances necessary for accurate interpretation and analysis. However, studies led by Hausa women remain rare. As a result, much of the data in this thesis is drawn from Western scholars who conducted ethnographic research among Hausa women in urban centers. While Werthmann learned Hausa and directly communicated with the women in their native language, Renne relied on the assistance of a local family to deepen her understanding of Hausa culture and receive cultural guidance throughout her research. These studies, supported by local involvement, enhanced the scholars' comprehension and, given their methodological relevance, provide valuable insights for this intersectional analysis.

6.1.1 Hausa Women in Urban Centers

Renne's study focuses on Muslim Hausa women in Zaria, an urban center in Kaduna State. The city, characterized by a rich history and deep-rooted Hausa traditions, such as the meticulous hand-embroidery of robes highly valued by its residents, provides an ideal setting for examining the intersection of culture, tradition, Islam, and Hausa womanhood. The primary occupations among married men in Zaria include farming, along with roles as traders, drivers, or government employees. Their female counterparts, many of whom live in seclusion, are primarily engaged in food preparation, packaging, sewing, and, particularly in Zaria, embroidery. In recent years, it has become increasingly common for some married women to pursue employment as teachers or nurses.[127]

Renne conducted her research in collaboration with a local Zarian family and a female research assistant between November 1994 and January 1995. A smaller group of these women participated in follow-up open-ended interviews from January to April 1995. Additionally, Renne incorporates qualitative data from 25 women interviewed by Nigerian scholar Hassana

[126] Cf. Maina, "Muslim Hausa Women," 398.
[127] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 280.

Tanimu in April and May 1999. Tanimu's objective was to explore these women's perceptions of their roles and those of their male counterparts, as well as the challenges they identified within urban life. Lastly, Renne supplements her study with insights drawn from informal conversations she had with acquaintances during her stay in Zaria.[128]

Anthropologist Katja Werthmann adopted a different approach to data collection than her colleague. Due to protests in Kano at the time of her stay, her original research plan could not be carried out. As a result, she shifted her focus to engaging with the women in her neighborhood, redirecting her study from the impact of secular education on women to their everyday lives, interactions, and conversations.[129] This open dialogue approach to data collection is highly beneficial for intersectional analysis, as it does not impose a predefined research objective that may be shaped by subconscious assumptions about the participants' realities. Instead, it creates space for Hausa women to highlight the topics that are most relevant to them. By living among these women for extended periods, Werthmann gained an insight that is typically more difficult to obtain. Hausa women, guided by values of respectability and patience, often refrain from openly discussing their struggles or situations that do not go as planned. However, over time, they began to open up to the German anthropologist, providing her with a unique perspective on their lived realities.[130] During her stays in Kano, she was in close contact with 46 women of different ages. Most of them, including Werthmann, lived in a *bariki*, a term that translates to police barracks, consisting of three rows of houses with a total of 48 units. The husbands of these women, all employed as police officers, earned a monthly salary ranging between 400 and 1000 Naira, which was around the national average in Nigeria during the 1990s. Most of the women belonged to the Hausa ethnic group, with a few exceptions. Except for one, all were under the age of 40, with most falling between the ages of 20 and 30.[131]

From a total of 77 women over 4 years, 1992-1994, 53 were married, 4 divorced, 2 widowed, and 17 not married. All married women had a primary Islamic education, but usually no secondary. However, almost all unmarried young girls went to secondary school.[132]

The Hausa women in both Kano and Zaria City refer to themselves as *matan kulle*, translated to "secluded women." The term expresses the expectation that, after marriage, women's mobility is restricted to the domestic sphere unless explicitly permitted by their husbands or

[128] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 280.
[129] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 32-33.
[130] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 33.
[131] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 62.
[132] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 64.

required for special occasions. Such occasions include visiting family or tending to the sick. Legally, a man is not allowed to prevent his wife from leaving the house for these purposes. The women Werthmann interviewed during her stay offered three main explanations for *kulle*. First, they described it as a divine institution established by Allah, framing it as a sacred obligation. Second, *kulle* was seen as an integral part of Hausa culture, serving to protect *mutunci*, a concept embodying dignity and respectability. Finally, some women interpreted *kulle* as an expression of male jealousy, designed to restrict their interactions with men outside the home.[133]

Despite all the women allegedly living in *kulle*, Werthmann observed considerable mobility within her network. When asked how they were able to move around so freely, the women explained that they were either going into the city or visiting relatives, often stopping by friends' homes along the way. However, they typically only left the house when their husbands were present, enabling them to ask for permission beforehand. For Werthmann, this phenomenon highlights that it is ultimately women themselves who monitor and enforce adherence to the norms of seclusion, as they are the ones most aware of each other's movements, and that *kulle* appears to be a practice with which all women, at least officially, seek to be associated.[134]

This observation is further supported by an interview with a woman who had recently moved into the *bariki*. Although she was no longer living under strict seclusion, it became evident that she still wished she were.

> „K: Was ist der Sinn der Einschließung?
> H: Das ist Hausa-Tradition.
> K: Hausa-Tradition? Ist es nicht wegen des Islam?
> H: Natürlich wegen des Islam! So hat Allah gesagt, die Einschließung der Frau ist gut. Wenn dein Mann stark [wohlhabend] ist, wenn er dir alles geben kann, dann bist du eingeschlossen. Aber wenn er nicht stark ist und wenn er einverstanden ist, dann kannst du ausgehen und ihm helfen, eure Kinder zu ernähren, verstehst du? Gut, aber wenn ein Mann stark genug ist, um seine Frau zu versorgen, wird sie nicht ausgehen. Ich nun, ach Gott, wenn mein Mann mich versorgen könnte, würde ich hierbleiben. Ich möchte mich auch ausruhen. Aber siehst du, wenn dein Mann nicht stark ist, was werden die Kinder essen? Wenn er zustimmt, dann mußt du ausgehen und ein Einkommen finden, um deine Kinder zu ernähren.
> K: Du würdest lieber zuhause bleiben?
> H: (lacht): Ich würde lieber hierbleiben; wer will sich nicht ausruhen? jeder will sich doch lieber ausruhen. Die Arbeit am Feuer ist nicht angenehm. Als ich noch nicht gearbeitet habe, fühlte ich mich gut, aber seit ich angefangen habe, geht es mir schlecht. Mein Körper ist ganz schwarz geworden. Aber was soll ich machen? Es ist notwendig, etwas zu Essen für die Kinder zu beschaffen. Ich möchte lieber ausruhen. Wenn man mir Geld gäbe, wenn man mir Kleider gäbe, wenn man mir alles

[133] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 204.
[134] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 206.

gäbe, würde ich dann nicht lieber hierbleiben?“[135]

She cites comfort as the primary reason for her preference but also notes that the ability to remain at home signifies having a strong, capable husband who can provide for her. This, in turn, reflects a certain level of household income and social status, highlighting the deep connection between seclusion and class.[136] However, social status is not the sole factor motivating women to desire seclusion, even if only at a symbolic level.

In her study on Hausa women in Zaria city, Renne explores the central question of how local Zarian Hausa women perceive and interpret their position within the city's social structure. A term that emerged repeatedly throughout her and Werthmann’s interviews was *mutunci*, which translates to “respect” and serves as a key concept in their understanding of social status and self-worth.

> “This much valued characteristic, self-respect, merges with the idea of being respectable as in women's remarks that ‘It's more respectable for a woman to stay at home than to be going out in Zaria City’. In a sense, this respectability is a ‘signifcant resource’ for women, on which their self-esteem and dignity (daraja) depends, conveying a force of moral authority in certain situations and which, to a large extent, is controlled by women themselves.”[137]

It becomes evident that women regard the fulfillment of their societal and domestic obligations, such as seclusion, as a fundamental source of respectability, which in turn reinforces their self-esteem. Engaging in activities that affirm this sense of self-worth contributes to their overall well-being.

In Werthmann’s study, seclusion emerges as an important symbol of status and prestige, reflecting the husband's social standing and, by extension, elevating that of his wife. However, when a husband loses financial stability, his wife's ability to maintain her status is also compromised, as she may be forced to seek employment to support the family. In such cases, women become increasingly reliant on their social networks to access income-generating opportunities. This heightened dependence necessitates greater mobility, gradually distancing them from strict seclusion and, consequently, from *mutunci*. To navigate this tension, women learn to strategically adapt the practice of *kulle*, enabling them to preserve their respectability while simultaneously expanding their engagement with the outside world.[138] These strategic adaptations illustrate that participating in income-generating activities is not inherently incompatible with maintaining respectability. When such work is conducted within the

[135] Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 208.
[136] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen,* 210.
[137] Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 282.
[138] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 212.

domestic sphere, it can enhance a woman's social standing by contributing additional respect and income to her family, thereby reinforcing her dignity and self-worth. Moreover, it represents an important area of Hausa life in which women can exercise a significant degree of autonomy. Women who work outside the home, for example as teachers or nurses, navigate the preservation of *mutunci* by adhering to modest dress codes, often wearing a hijab that covers most parts of their bodies. In doing so, they align their professional roles with the cultural and religious expectations of respectability.[139]

Throughout the interviews women have stated that they show their respect for their husbands in various ways, for example by "'being patient with one's husband', 'living peacefully with one's husband and co wives', 'working to help one's husband', and 'caring for the family'."[140] This demonstration of respect, in turn, is closely tied to a woman's sense of respectability. However, a common challenge faced by women in Zaria is the lack of support from their husbands, often due to financial constraints, combined with disapproval of women seeking employment outside the home. Moreover, maintaining the balance between generating an income and preserving respectability also becomes increasingly difficult when a husband lacks the financial means to provide the necessary raw materials for his wife's home-based business or withholds the support she requires. In such cases, a woman has the right to leave her husband and legally seek a divorce, as Islamic law stipulates that a man is obligated to provide for his wife in marriage and should not retain her if he is unable to fulfill this duty. In contemporary times, divorce has become a more commonly exercised option for women seeking to escape such circumstances.[141]

Nonetheless, the absence of support from a husband, regardless of the underlying reasons, places a considerable burden on women, who must navigate the challenge of maintaining their *mutunci* despite these constraints. As one participant explained in an interview:

> "*Auren kulle* is a type of marriage where husbands will provide for their wives and will not allow them to go out. Some of the men will provide for their wives and they will not allow them to go out—they provide things like soap, cream or good food, though some of the men are cheating their wives because they will not provide them with good food. Sometimes you will see a woman, you will think she is enjoying her husband's house but she's not, she's just trying to protect her respect (tana 'ko'kari ne, ta kare mutunci kanta). Things like that are common for women here in Zaria City. (LI.1)"[142]

To conclude, the primary concern for Muslim Hausa women in Zaria is the preservation of their respectability, which they maintain by observing seclusion within their homes while

[139] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 282.
[140] Renne, "Gender Roles," 283.
[141] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 284.
[142] Renne, "Gender Roles," 283.

simultaneously engaging in income-generating activities that can be carried out in the domestic sphere. When working outside the home, women rely on covering clothing and the display of so-called proper behavior as tools to safeguard their respectability. Some women in Katja Werthmann's study even took offense when accused of not strictly adhering to seclusion, further underscoring the profound importance of *kulle* in shaping the concept of *mutunci* among Muslim Hausa women in Northern Nigeria.[143] Furthermore, it becomes evident how deeply the intersectional realities of Hausa women are intertwined with those of their husbands, with each significantly shaping the other's lived experiences. Financial stability emerges as a crucial factor influencing these dynamics. Finally, even though no woman in the study explicitly questioned the institution of secluded marriage itself. Instead, they actively seek strategies to improve their circumstances within this framework, one of which is engaging in income-generating activities. In Werthmann's study, it is primarily divorced and widowed women who are compelled to seek work to support themselves. However, their access to employment opportunities is severely restricted by multiple factors affecting life in the *bariki*. First, the absence of a local market limits their ability to sell homemade goods. In contrast, women living in the old city center have easier access to such spaces, highlighting the significant role that *geographical location* and *mobility* play in shaping women's economic opportunities.[144] With better infrastructure and transportation options, women in the *bariki* could also access markets, even those at a greater distance. In addition to spatial constraints, time limitations further restrict women's economic engagement. Many are burdened with extensive domestic obligations, such as preparing meals three times a day, which leaves little room for additional activities. However, in polygamous marriages, these responsibilities are often shared among co-wives, allowing women more time to engage in economic activities. This demonstrates that *marital structure* directly influences a woman's ability to generate income, which in turn shapes her self-perception and social identity. Another challenge stems from the fact that women in the *bariki* often have children attending primary and secondary school, meaning they cannot rely on them for additional support with household or income-generating tasks. Finally, Nigeria's overall worsening economic conditions further constrain women's ability to establish independent sources of income, once again underscoring the critical role of *geographical location* in shaping Hausa women's livelihoods.[145]

Furthermore, as illustrated in the previously mentioned example by American anthropologist Pellow, women's migration is closely intertwined with the opportunities and constraints faced

[143] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 209.
[144] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 99.
[145] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 99-100.

by women in urban settings. Hajiya's move from Accra to Kano leads her to experience seclusion for the first time, which restricts her ability to continue working and ultimately drives her into poverty. This example underscores how changes in geographical and cultural context can drastically reshape a woman's agency and access to resources.[146]

Exploring another category, one participant in Renne's study points to *education* as a factor that adds to the challenges of secluded marriage, despite the *mutunci* it provides.

> "Really, women have a lot of problems between them and their husbands. There is also lack of work to do. Between them and the husband, there is lack of education that brought the problem even though there are some who are educated. But there are some who are not educated in their religion, talk less of Western education. The big problem is lack of education. If they are well educated even if there is no money they will know how to live with their lives; some men even have enough but they will not provide enough for their wives. There is this type of problem in most cases. (SI-15)"[147]

Women are increasingly aware that a lack of education poses a significant barrier to their well-being, primarily because education opens access to higher-paying employment opportunities outside the home. Moreover, it equips them with the knowledge necessary to understand their rights and to navigate societal and religious expectations while remaining within accepted cultural frameworks. For example, a woman who is unaware that Islamic law obligates a husband to provide for his wife may remain in an unsustainable marriage simply due to a lack of information. In contrast, an educated woman recognizes that she is not bound to such circumstances. She would also understand that, according to Islamic law, a husband does not have the authority to prevent her from leaving the house based solely on personal preference.[148] Women living in the *bariki* of Kano, however, face considerable barriers to accessing education, which limits their ability to independently acquire such knowledge. Many are unable to read newspapers or books, relying instead on oral or audio forms of information. Among the most consumed media is the radio, with women frequently tuning in to local stations such as Radio Kano, Radio Kaduna, and the BBC. Yet in most households, radio programming functions more as background noise than as a source of actively engaged information. In contrast, women who have received formal education use the radio more deliberately to stay informed about national developments and current events. These women often act as informal information hubs, sharing news and updates with others in their communities.[149] Since radio is a widely used medium among Hausa women, it could serve as a valuable source for studying female representation. However, due to the scarcity of research on the portrayal of Hausa women in radio media, this

[146] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 11.
[147] Renne, "Gender Roles," 285.
[148] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 285.
[149] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen* 77.

medium is excluded from the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, this lack of existing studies highlights a significant opportunity for future research and data collection on the topic.

Another medium frequently used by women is television, where they tend to prefer watching movies and TV series over news programs. These are often American-inspired soap operas that satirically depict the contrasts between urban and rural life. Additionally, women in the *bariki* frequently watch Indian films, even though they are only available with American or Chinese subtitles. As a result, they interpret the content solely through the visuals, constructing their own understanding of the storyline based on the images.[150]

The few women in the *bariki* of Kano who can read take great interest in modern Hausa novels, which are primarily written with an educational and enlightening purpose, particularly for women and girls. For instance, Yakubu's works focus on themes such as the lack of educational opportunities for females, premarital pregnancy, the unreliability of husbands, and the presence of malicious women who seek to harm others. Additionally, the Hausa book market offers a range of educational texts aimed at women, covering topics such as health, religion, politics, hygiene, and family planning.[151]

Lastly, Hausa women in the *bariki* engage extensively in oral history, using storytelling as a means of sharing narratives, often of a disturbing nature. Among these are accounts of individuals who allegedly abduct children for ritualistic killings and later consume them. These stories are rooted in socio-political realities, such as the Maitatsine unrest of the early 1980s, which resulted in the abduction, rape, and killing of many women and girls.[152]

These varying uses of media illustrate that they serve as educational tools only for women with a primary education. In contrast, those without formal schooling typically acquire knowledge through storytelling and secondhand information from others, often resulting in a biased and preconceived understanding of the world. Based on these findings, literature, film, and oral storytelling will be the foundation of the representational level in this intersectional analysis.

In the political sphere, Hausa women largely refrain from active participation to preserve their respectability. Political engagement would require regular public presence, which conflicts with prevailing societal expectations regarding appropriate female behavior. The absence of women in Hausa politics is often traced back to the Jihad of Shehu Dan Fodio. Before this, Hausa society included powerful queens and female warriors who held military and political authority. However, following the first Jihad, women were largely removed from public political life, and the practice of seclusion became institutionalized. This relegation to the domestic sphere

[150] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen* 77.
[151] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen* 78.
[152] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 79.

intensified further after following Jihads. Today, many women do not see politics as a space for themselves, associating political involvement with a potential loss of *mutunci*.[153] They do not view it as a desirable role, reinforcing Renne's main argument that "Zaria City women who are pushing for more tolerant interpretations of seclusion and more work, education, and loans are not asking for equal rights with men. Rather, they are interested in separate rights for men and women, based on their understandings of a particular gender ideology reflecting local interpretations of Islam."[154]

Finally, the prevailing gender ideology in Hausa culture in Zaria City does not frame men and women as equals but rather as individuals with distinct responsibilities and obligations. A woman from Renne's study articulates this perspective as follows:

> "According to the Islamic religion, man and woman are not the same. Man has more strength [and] because [of that] he is asked to be her head but in their lives they are the same. For example, God will give the woman money without giving the man. And there is one sura in the Qur'an meaning that men are the head of the woman, but in the Qur'an God didn't say that because he's her head, he should beat her or do something bad to her. (LI-3)"[155]

Women commonly perceive men as providers, attributing this role to their physical strength, while viewing themselves as guardians of the household. Although men are regarded as holding authority over women, women strongly condemn the misuse of this power in the form of violence. There is a clear awareness that such behavior is not permissible according to the Qur'an.[156]

Additionally, the Qur'an is subject to various interpretations regarding gender roles. Some scholars argue that verses often cited to justify gender inequality refer specifically to a man's position as head of the household, a role shaped by the woman's financial dependence. Once a woman engages in income-generating activities, scholars argue, she should be regarded as equal to her husband. Furthermore, critics of gender inequality rooted in Qur'anic interpretation point out that the text contains more verses advocating gender equity than those supporting hierarchy. This brings the issue of equal access to education back into focus, underscoring the importance of enabling women to engage with religious texts directly and develop their own interpretations, rather than relying solely on those provided by male scholars. Among Hausa women in Zaria, views on this matter vary. While some prefer that men assume greater financial responsibility,

[153] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 289.
[154] Renne, "Gender Roles," 289.
[155] Renne, "Gender Roles," 289.
[156] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 289.

others advocate for improved access to education and economic opportunity. Taken together, these perspectives reflect an ongoing negotiation of gender roles within the community.[157]
Other challenges described by women in the interviews include husbands who, despite having the means, fail to provide for their wives, those who prevent them from seeking employment, those who restrict their access to education, and those who appropriate their earnings.[158] This underscores the *husband's self-identification* as a critical category that should be incorporated into the intersectional analysis of Muslim Hausa women's lives in Zaria and Kano.
One solution that an interviewed woman suggests is equal work for both husband and wife, so that they each have their own money and can provide. Another suggestion places the responsibility on the Nigerian government:

> "The remedy of this problem is for government to give us loans so we can help ourselves. We put our heads together and formed an organization to get a loan so that women who don't have work to do will have work to do. The thing began step by step… We got N200,000 [approximately $2,000 US]. We used the money for business. As you know, we are embroiderers. We bought shedda (cotton damask) with part of the money. Then we were doing the embroidery and some we gave some out to women to do for us. We are 45 women in that organization. (SI-18)"[159]

Another perspective highlights the importance of communication, as one woman suggests that when faced with these challenges, women can engage in dialogue with their husbands to persuade them to offer greater support. In doing so, she underscores her belief in moral authority that women have within their households.[160]
Overall, the most defining aspect of their lives, and the one that most contrasts with Western cultural perspectives, is the strong significance women place on seclusion as a marker of social prestige. The extent of its importance is evident in the fact that many women who do not practice seclusion often do not openly acknowledge it.[161] In Zaria City, the most common form of seclusion is a nuanced balance; women are not entirely free to move as they please, yet they do not experience strict confinement that severely restricts their mobility. This is largely due to women's efforts, particularly in the late 1970s, when many sought to persuade their traditionally rigid husbands to grant them access to education. As part of this small-scale resistance, women justified their stance by referencing a verse in the Qur'an that emphasizes the obligation of both Muslim men and women to seek continuous education. One interviewee acknowledges: "A woman should have equal education with the man—because the Prophet said we should look

[157] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 290-291.
[158] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 285-286.
[159] Renne, "Gender Roles," 286.
[160] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 286.
[161] Cf. Renne, "Gender Roles," 287.

for education in every place and he didn't say that it was a man or a woman who will look for the education. But only if the woman will protect her self-respect' (LI-4)."[162] This strategy, in which Muslim Hausa women persuade their husbands to grant them greater opportunities by referencing the Qur'an and specific interpretations of it, is a widely employed approach among Hausa women across different regions to access education and expand their freedoms.

6.1.2 Hausa Women in Rural Areas

Maina's research on women in rural and urban areas of Kaduna State, located in North-West Nigeria, is providing an insight into the self-constructions of Hausa women living in the rural areas of North Nigeria. Her study explores the intersection of Islam, culture, and modernization, examining their interplay and mutual influence. Methodologically, she employs a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews (IDIs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and document analysis. Through this method, a total of 30 male and female participants from both rural and urban settings were interviewed. However, as this stage of the intersectional analysis focuses specifically on the self-identification of Muslim Hausa women in the rural areas of Northern Nigeria, only their data will be considered in the subsequent discussion, while the responses from male participants will be excluded.[163]

The gender ideology expressed by women in rural areas aligns with that of their urban counterparts, emphasizing women's subordination to their husbands. In this context, they refer to the Qur'anic verse that designates men as protectors and providers, attributing this role to the greater strength given to them by Allah.[164] Women in rural Northern Nigeria similarly interpret this verse, as one woman explains in her in-depth interview (IDI): "My husband is the head of the household, he takes all the decisions. He knows what is best for us and we can't question his actions."[165] Unlike their urban counterparts, women in rural areas perceive this as a complete surrender of both body and soul, rendering them highly vulnerable to physical, mental, and emotional abuse. Furthermore, this interpretation persists regardless of whether their husbands fulfill their obligation to provide for them or not.[166]

This belief is deeply embedded in the customs and traditions that shape rural Hausa communities, influencing women throughout their lives. They view adherence to these practices as a way of living by Islamic teachings. As one woman shares: "When we were getting married,

[162] Renne, "Gender Roles," 287.
[163] Cf. Maina, "Muslim Hausa Women," 386.
[164] Cf. Maina, "Muslim Hausa Women," 395.
[165] Maina, "Muslim Hausa Women," 395.
[166] Cf. Maina, "Muslim Hausa Women," 395.

the advice usually given to us is that we should worship God sincerely, obey our husbands in all matters and also respect his parents and relations. Paradise lies at the foot of our husbands and to attain that reward, we have to wholly obey them.“[167] Their strong adherence to tradition is also evident in their rejection of modern perspectives, perceiving modern women as overly liberal. They justify this stance by arguing that modernization contradicts Hausa traditions.[168]
Cultural values also influence the perception that girls should not be sent to school, as they are expected instead to contribute to their family's livelihood.[169] Educational opportunities in rural areas are limited, and the few that do exist are often financially inaccessible to many households, as noted by one female interviewee.[170]
It is important to consider that the average income in rural northern Nigeria is significantly lower than in Zaria or the *bariki* in Kano. Their socio-economic circumstances require both the women and their children to contribute to the household income, preventing them from accessing education, which would further strain financial resources they already lack.[171] This highlights the deep interconnection between *geographical location*, *class*, *religion*, and *education*, as each factor influences the others. Limited financial resources force people to reside in rural areas, where survival requires all family members to work. This, in turn, leads to restricted access to education, preventing many from breaking out of this cycle.
Another significant topic in the interviews, just as in urban centers, is seclusion. As one Hausa woman from a rural area explains: “Although total seclusion is no more practiced, we still cannot go out without seeking permission from our husbands and we have to dress properly and cover-up. In my own case, I cannot even visit my neighbors without my husband’s consent.”[172]
All interviewed women agreed on the importance of seclusion, emphasizing that a married woman should remain within the home and only leave with her husband's permission. In this respect, rural women share the same perspective as their urban counterparts. While this study does not explicitly establish a connection between the practice of seclusion and the preservation of *mutunci*, such a link can be reasonably inferred, given the women’s strong adherence to cultural and traditional norms. Hill’s study of a rural Hausa community further supports this assumption: even poor farming households maintained the seclusion of women, despite the apparent economic disadvantages. This suggests that *mutunci* continues to play a significant

[167] Maina, “Muslim Hausa Women,” 398.
[168] Cf. Maina, “Muslim Hausa Women,” 397.
[169] Cf. Maina, “Muslim Hausa Women,” 397.
[170] Cf. Maina, “Muslim Hausa Women,” 398.
[171] Cf. Maina, “Muslim Hausa Women,” 398.
[172] Maina, “Muslim Hausa Women,” 397.

role in rural contexts, as it elevates a woman's respectability and, by extension, that of her husband.[173]

To summarize the first level of this intersectional analysis, it is essential to acknowledge the diverse self-conceptions among urban and rural Hausa women in northern Nigeria. However, none of them perceive fundamental cultural and religious practices, such as seclusion or domestic obligations, as oppressive. They do not view their religion or culture as repressive in the way it is often interpreted by Western perspectives. Clarifying this point is particularly important, as Western scholars have frequently singled out Islam as the primary cause of what is perceived, through a Western lens, as the "oppression" of women. However, there is a strong call for increased education for women, particularly regarding their rights and the various interpretations of their religious practices and texts. Additionally, the elimination of violence against women is recognized as crucial for their well-being.

This discussion among Hausa women demonstrates that there are diverse forms of self-construction. The most influential categories shaping these self-identifications include *class, education, occupational activity, geographical location, husband, marital structure, mobility,* and *migration*, alongside other potential categories not captured in the three studies referenced. Notably, all interviewees shared the same affiliation regarding *gender* and *religion*.

For future research, it may be valuable to explore summarized types of self-identification, as suggested in the methodology of the Eight-Step Analysis. Grouping individual experiences into broader typologies could enhance the practical applicability of development initiatives and policymaking by reducing the need to respond to each unique lived reality in isolation. However, this thesis deliberately refrains from constructing such generalized types, as this approach risks oversimplifying the small yet significant differences that shape women's everyday experiences. Additionally, the development of such typologies lies beyond the scope of this study and is therefore recommended as a direction for further research.

6.2 Representation Level

The following discussion examines how various forms of social representation, specifically Kano market literature, Kannywood films, and oral Hausa tales, shape and influence women's self-constructions, whether by reinforcing, challenging, or rejecting them. At the same time, it considers how self-constructions may, in turn, influence social representations and how they are judged. It is important to note that access to these media varies among Muslim Hausa

[173] Cf. Polly Hill, *Rural Hausa: A Village and a Setting* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 22-24.

women, with certain forms being available only to specific groups. Accordingly, the discussion pays attention to how financial means, geographical location, and educational background determine which types of media are accessible to different segments of society.

6.2.1 Kano Market Literature

The first medium under consideration is Hausa literature, which is primarily accessed in urban centers such as Zaria and Kano. These novels predominantly revolve around various romantic narratives, earning them the title *Littattafan Soyayya*, which translates to "books of love." While some authors focus on the premarital phase of relationships and the challenges associated with it, others emphasize married life and its complexities. Regardless of their specific focus, most of these novels introduce a provocative element within an otherwise traditional and conservative Muslim environment. In doing so, they contribute to social change, particularly among younger generations, by challenging and reshaping aspects of Hausa societal norms. Kano market literature plays a central role in influencing debates surrounding traditional Hausa gender ideologies, including concepts such as polygamy, seclusion, and women's access to education. This literature has faced significant criticism, as it is perceived to shape the perspectives of its predominantly young female readership, who constitute the largest group of its consumers.[174]

The rapid expansion in the readership of these novels between 2000 and 2010 can be attributed to their marketability, which led many married women to purchase, read, and share them within their social circles. However, due to their tendency to challenge traditional norms, the authors began facing stricter censorship by the Kano State government. In response, a collective of Hausa writers mobilized against these restrictions, using the media to expose the censorship and the unfair treatment they experienced. At the same time, they continued to frame their novels in ways that reflected their underlying messages, as seen in titles such as Zuwaira Isa Ɗanlami's *Akwai Matsala (There Is a Problem)* or Halima B.H. Aliyu's *Muguwar Kishiya (Evil Co-wife)*.[175] This already provides insight into the relationship between representational and structural level, illustrating how institutional actors reject the gender portrayals found in the representational sphere, particularly in Kano market literature, while the representational level, in turn, resists structural ideology by challenging its legal frameworks.

[174] Cf. Whitsitt, "Hausa Women Writers," 387.
[175] Cf. Umma Aliyu Musa, *Emotions in Muslim Hausa Women's Fiction. More Than Just Romance* (Routledge, 2019), 33.

The most prominent female authors in Kano market literature, and the most extensively examined by scholars, are Balaraba Ramat Yakubu and Bilkisu Ahmed Funtuwa. Their significance lies in their direct challenge to traditional gender roles and the broader influence of cultural norms. Moreover, their work raises critical questions about the foundations of Islamic-Hausa feminist theory. Female authors have become central to academic inquiry, in part because storytelling has traditionally been a domain occupied by women. While oral storytelling was once widely practiced among Hausa women, it declined following the most recent Jihad. This shift, however, led many women to transition from oral to written forms of expression, contributing to the strong presence of female voices in Kano market literature.[176]

Before examining the specific ways in which female representations in Kano literature challenge societal realities, it is essential to acknowledge that a majority of the corpus of Hausa literature is fundamentally shaped by an Islamic-educational objective. This means that existing literature primarily serves to convey legal, theological, or religious teachings. While modern Hausa literature has introduced a wider range of non-religious themes, references to the Islamic faith remain dominant. Regardless of whether a story is shared orally or in written form, it typically incorporates religious and traditional guidance, a tradition to which both female authors of interest also adhere.[177]

Bilkisu Funtuwa's work predominantly revolves around one central theme: education. Her protagonists are typically women who achieve remarkable career success because of their educational background and religious devotion. Additionally, her novels place romantic relationships at the forefront, offering implicit guidance on how women can sustain a happy marriage, primarily by fulfilling their husbands' needs, particularly physical affection, to prevent them from seeking it elsewhere. The emphasis on these two themes reflects the author's belief that women can enhance their mobility and improve their quality of life through education, aligning with the aspirations of the Hausa women discussed in the individual-level analysis. Moreover, she positions the responsibility for maintaining a successful marriage largely on women, emphasizing the effort they must invest in meeting their husbands' needs.[178]

Another significant theme in Hausa culture is also reflected in Funtuwa's two-volume novel *Ki Yarda da Ni*. In this work, she explores the dynamics of a polygamous marriage, focusing on the struggles faced by the first wife, the protagonist, and how she ultimately overcomes them. The novel narrates the story of a once-successful marriage that is disrupted when the husband

[176] Cf. Novian Whitsitt, "Kano Market Literature and the Construction of Hausa-Islamic Feminism: A Contrast in Feminist Perspectives of Balaraba Ramat Yakubu and Bilkisu Ahmed Funtuwa," Diss., University of Wisconsin, 2000, 114.
[177] Cf. Novian, "Kano Market Literature," 114-115.
[178] Cf. Novian, "Kano Market Literature," 115-117.

takes a second wife, who initially mistreats the first wife and her children. Over time, however, the second wife undergoes a transformation through a deepened connection to her faith, ultimately leading to a harmonious coexistence within the polygamous household. This narrative illustrates Funtuwa's perspective that polygamous marriage is an inherent aspect of Islamic-Hausa culture, which she does not question in her writing. The innovative aspect of her portrayal, however, lies in her depiction of modern, affectionate love as compatible with the institution of polygamous marriage.[179]

Another recurring marital theme in Funtuwa's works is forced marriage. In her novel *Allura Cikin Ruwa,* she narrates the story of Asiya, a young woman from a lower-income family who falls in love with a man from a significantly higher social background. Their desire to marry is rejected by the young man's father, and Asiya is ultimately forced to wed a man chosen by her father. Although she initially resists the marriage, she eventually grows to love her husband, pursues a career as a lawyer within the Sharia court system, and raises four children. The novel concludes with Asiya taking revenge on her former love's father and assisting another woman in securing a marriage with the man of her choice.[180]

Funtuwa aims to illustrate a harmonious balance between parental authority and education in the context of forced marriage. Through her storytelling, she once again critiques the limited access to education for women, presenting an ideal scenario in which a young woman receives full support from her parents in pursuing a Western education. Additionally, she advocates for greater access to high-ranking positions for women, as demonstrated by her female protagonist's rise to the role of lawyer within the Sharia court system. This portrayal directly challenges the prevailing cultural notion that women should not attain such influential positions within the judicial system.[181]

The most popular of Funtuwa's works is her three-volume novel *Wa Ya San Gobe*. Like her other stories, it follows a young woman with a notable intellect and an aunt who supports her pursuit of education. After completing two different university degrees, securing a position as Assistant Minister of Education, and navigating numerous personal challenges, the protagonist, Fati, ultimately attains celebrity status in both Nigeria and the UK for her contributions to improving access to female education. Fati stands out as the most educated and activist-driven character Funtuwa has created in her novels. Through this protagonist, the author conveys her strongest social critique, expressed directly in Fati's own words:

---

[179] Cf. Novian, "Kano Market Literature," 119-121.
[180] Cf. Novian, "Kano Market Literature," 121-122.
[181] Cf. Whittsitt, "Kano Market Literature," 124-125,

> "If one looks at our educational training here in Hausaland, they see that men are still not supportive of permitting women to work and pursue careers. I recognize that a woman such as myself is one in a million. My husband, however, is greatly supportive of progress for northern women, so with the grace of God and my husband's support, I plan on making contributions in this area."[182]

Once again, Funtuwa's work reflects a fusion of Hausa culture and female empowerment in the realms of education and career. While Fati, the most successful and educated woman in her community, actively works to improve educational opportunities, particularly for girls and women, she also represents a break from traditional norms, which historically restricted Hausa women from pursuing education and professional careers. This challenge to cultural expectations in Kano market literature is most evident in *Wa Ya San Gobe*. Nonetheless, Funtuwa asserts that young women should marry before attending university, as she views the campus environment as a place of moral risks that women may fall victim to. Through this perspective, the author once again demonstrates that advocating for women's rights, such as better access to education, can coexist with respecting and preserving Hausa cultural traditions.[183] However, she does not accept all marriage customs. Later in the novel, Fati marries Sulaiman, whose mother insists that he take a second wife, as Fati had been previously married. The mother wishes for her son to experience marrying a virgin, a Hausa custom known as *wankan sai'bi*. Fati rejects this proposal, not out of opposition to polygamous marriage, which the author also does not criticize, but as a rejection of the practice of virgin marriage itself.[184]

The most prominent feature in Funtuwa's novels is her portrayal of autonomous women existing within the framework of Islamic-Hausa culture. She strongly criticizes the lack of educational opportunities available to Muslim Hausa women, as well as practices such as child marriage and forced marriage.

Funtuwa's literary counterpart, Hausa author Balaraba Ramat Yakubu, expresses even stronger and more outspoken criticism, not only in her novels but also in interviews, as demonstrated in the following example:

> "We can say that setting about to allow our female children to go to Western school is what compels us, but we can also say that a female child does not have such value if you were to see her among us. The only thing that our men know is to gather us in a confined area of our home like donkeys, give us koko and kosai, with no meat in our soup except the legs of a guinea-fowl. And since we are ignorant beyond repair, our only occupation is the heavy load of continual pregnancy. Every one of Allah's years we give birth like goats."[185]

---

[182] Bilkisu Salisu Ahmed Funtuwa, *Wa Ya San Gobe*, Kano City Bookshop, 1996, 29.
[183] Cf. Whittsitt, "Kano Market Literature," 128-129.
[184] Cf. Whittsitt, "Kano Market Literature," 129.
[185] Whittsitt, "Kano Market Literature," 131.

Although the two authors differ in the intensity of their criticism, they share the conviction that education for Hausa girls and women is the most crucial step toward meaningful social change. However, they diverge significantly in their views on institutions such as polygamy. While Funtuwa believes that the custom can be harmoniously integrated with female emancipation, particularly through education, Yakubu strongly opposes this view. From Yakubu's perspective, such practices limit the potential of women and girls, serving primarily to satisfy men who, in her view, have lost their connection to the true principles of Islamic faith. Whereas Funtuwa engages with patriarchal structures as integral components of the culture she values, Yakubu takes a more confrontational stance, directly challenging the foundations of patriarchy itself.[186]

In her novel *Budurwar Zuciya*, Balaraba Ramat Yakubu centers the narrative around the practice of polygamy. While the novel does not present an explicit critique of the institution, criticism is nonetheless implied through its portrayal. The family dynamic depicted in the story deteriorates as the husband takes new wives at will, divorcing others to remain within the Islamic limit of four. His eventual sudden death is framed as a form of retribution for his immoral conduct in managing his marital relationships. However, despite this implicit critique of male behavior within polygamous settings, Yakubu maintains a critical opinion toward unmarried women. The narrative's focus on the "promiscuous" behavior of the man's daughter, Ummi, during her high school years, contributes to the stigmatization of young, unmarried women. In doing so, the novel reinforces existing societal narratives that marginalize female sexuality outside of marriage and further perpetuates the rejection of non-conforming behavior among young women.[187]

In addition to expressing social criticism while reinforcing certain prevailing norms, Yakubu also uses her literature as a vehicle for education. Through her detailed portrayal of the character Ummi undergoing an abortion, she simultaneously informs her readership about the process, offering practical knowledge on how to terminate an early pregnancy. She even goes so far as to specify the drugs involved and outlines various available methods, thereby using fiction as a means of delivering reproductive health education.[188]

Another text by the Nigerian Hausa author circles the theme of a neglectful husband, a topic that also emerged in interviews conducted during the first level of analysis. In the central narrative, the wife, Rabi, is forced to work to feed herself and her children, as her husband, Alhaji Abdullahi, prioritizes his own pleasures and uses his financial resources for personal indulgence rather than supporting his family. The story offers a renewed criticism of the

[186] Cf. Whittsitt, "Kano Market Literature," 131-132.
[187] Cf. Whittsitt, "Kano Market Literature," 132-139.
[188] Cf. Whittsitt, "Kano Market Literature," 139-140.

patriarchal structures embedded in social life and presents polygamous marriage as a harmful institution that reinforces gender inequality.[189]

Lastly, the novel *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?*, like Funtuwa's work, centers on what is also the most significant emancipatory theme in Yakubu's writing: education. For Yakubu, education represents the greatest opportunity for women to free themselves from the oppressive constraints of traditional and cultural practices. The novel tells the story of a young girl living on the rural outskirts of Kano, who is withdrawn from school by her father. This decision not only deprives her of an education but also results in the loss of a promising marriage prospect, ultimately forcing her into marriage with a much older man. After fleeing to her aunt in Kano, a new chapter begins for Zainabu. She resumes her education and excels, eventually earning a scholarship to Oxford University. Throughout the novel, Yakubu offers a strong criticism of certain Hausa cultural practices in Northern Nigeria, particularly forced and early marriage. She draws attention to the negative health consequences these practices can have on young girls, highlighting the dangers of early sexual activity, including serious medical conditions such as vesico-vaginal fistulae.[190] In addition to its educational function, this text carries a strong critique of *auren dole*, or forced marriage. Yakubu presents this practice as a misinterpretation of Islamic customs, emphasizing that Islam requires marriage to be consensual, meaning that both the man and the woman have the right to negotiate the terms of the union or reject it entirely. However, in practice, a woman is often not permitted to manage her marital affairs; instead, her guardian, typically her father, assumes this role. According to Islamic tradition, the guardian is required to seek the bride's explicit consent in all marriage-related decisions, as affirmed by the Hadith, a central source of religious guidance alongside the Qur'an. Drawing on these religious texts, Yakubu argues that *auren dole* contradicts Islamic law.[191]

To conclude, it is important to note that Kano market literature is primarily distributed in urban centers such as Kano and only reaches rural areas of Northern Nigeria through informal channels, for example, when women visiting rural communities lend or gift copies to their counterparts. As a result, Hausa women in urban settings are more frequently exposed to the emancipatory themes of Kano market literature. In contrast, women in rural areas typically face even greater barriers to education, contributing to higher rates of illiteracy.[192] This limits their ability to engage with written texts and, by extension, with the ideas and messages conveyed

[189] Cf. Whittsitt, "Kano Market Literature," 143.
[190] Cf. Whittsitt, "Kano Market Literature," 147.
[191] Cf. Novian Whitsitt, "Islamic-Hausa Feminism and Kano Market Literature: Qur'anic Reinterpretation in the Novels of Balaraba Yakubu," *Research in African Literature* 33, no.2 (2002): 129.
[192] Cf. "Report of the National Literacy Survey," National Bureau of Statistics, accessed May 22, 2025, https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/National Literacy Survey, 2010.pdf, 20.

by female authors. In conclusion, the influence of these novels is most pronounced among educated women in urban areas, while their impact remains lower in rural contexts, particularly among those with little or no formal education. The content of this literature carries an emancipatory message, particularly influencing younger Hausa women. The representations found in these texts often challenge and, in some cases, contradict traditional forms of self-identification, prompting many young women to reject certain cultural norms and instead aspire toward education and greater autonomy. In contrast, for women without formal education, especially those living in rural areas, as well as for older women who are not the primary audience of these books, such representations tend to have a more limited impact on their self-construction.

6.2.2 Kannywood Movies

In addition to Kano market literature, movies represent another influential medium for the portrayal of women. Northern Nigeria is home to a film industry, known as Kannywood, which produces movies that address issues relevant to the Hausa-speaking audience.

In his study, Bamalli analyzes three Kannywood films, each representing a distinct period and selected based on their popularity and critical recognition, whether through awards or audience viewership. The first period spans the 1990s to the early 2000s, the second covers 2001 to 2015, and the third extends from 2016 to 2021. The movies selected are *In Da So Da Kauna* ("If There is Love, There is Care") for the first period, *Yar Maye* ("The Female Drug Addict") for the second, and *Mai Mata Hudu* ("The Man with Four Wives") for the most recent period. Bamalli conducts focus group discussions to explore perceptions of female representation in these films. He organized four groups, each consisting of six participants, both men and women, and subsequently divided each group into two subgroups: one composed of married individuals and the other of single participants. All participants were required to have watched at least one of the selected films and to possess a strong familiarity with both the Hausa language and cultural context to ensure a good understanding of the movies' content. The moderator then facilitated discussions by posing questions related to the portrayal of women in the films, allowing the focus groups to reflect and debate the gendered narratives presented.[193]

Bamalli's open-ended and qualitative approach to examining the representation of women, and, more importantly, how individuals of both sexes interpret these portrayals, whether by rejecting

[193] Cf. Mahmoud Nourah Bamalli, „Portrayal of Women in Kannywood" (BA Thesis, American University of Nigeria, 2021), 32-36, http://digitallibrary.aun.edu.ng:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/603/cORRECTED SENIOR RESEARCH PROJECT - Final %281%29.pdf.

or reinforcing certain aspects, offers valuable insight for an intersectional analysis. His findings shed light not only on how movies influence women's self-construction but also on how the latter may, in turn, shape media representations and how these are judged.

The first theme emerging from the focus group discussions centers on the one-dimensional portrayal of female characters in the films. "The roles that women play in every movie they play are given the same roles of either the housewife, who is exposed to all kinds of hardship in the household or a lonely woman who is divorced or widowed and is facing serious challenges of survival in society."[194] Among the group of single women, a participant criticizes the absence of female protagonists, emphasizing that women rarely hold leading or significant roles. Instead, they tend to appear in relation to male characters, consistently portrayed as dependent on male guidance and financial support. In addition, the single female participants condemn the negative connotations attached to female characters in Kannywood films. Women are frequently depicted as engaging in black magic, often to harm a co-wife or eliminate rivals. These participants reject such portrayals, arguing that men are equally involved in such behaviors, and that women also engage in many positive and constructive activities that remain largely absent from Kannywood narratives.[195]

This perspective is supported by a group of married women who challenge the portrayal of women in these films as being "idle, backbiters, and gossipers"[196]. For the married women, many of whom come from academic or professional backgrounds, the negative portrayal of women in media is seen as a misrepresentation that must be addressed and corrected. They argue that such portrayals do not reflect the reality of Muslim Hausa women, who are often ambitious and intelligent. Moreover, they view the change of women's representation as essential, given the significant influence the media has on members of the Muslim Hausa community. According to them, "the impact of television social and cultural norms should not be ruled out, because the movie industry has deeply penetrated the fabrics of all cultural and religious values, which can be deployed negatively or positively in the society."[197] They express concern that the negative representations of women in these films may harm, especially younger generations within Muslim Hausa society, by encouraging them to adopt the gender roles depicted on screen as aspirational models. In doing so, these portrayals risk reinforcing the limited and stereotypical representations of women. As a result, participants in the group of

[194] Bamalli, "Portrayal," 37.
[195] Cf. Bamalli, "Portrayal," 37-38.
[196] Bamalli, "Portrayal," 38.
[197] Bamalli, "Portrayal," 39-40.

married women voiced fears that young women may come to believe that what they see on screen reflects the full extent of what a Hausa woman can be.[198]

Although both single and married women agree on the issue of gender representation in film, their views differ when it comes to matters perceived as blasphemous. In this context, Bamalli shifts his focus from film content to the controversy surrounding Kannywood actress Rahama Sadau and a 2020 Twitter post in which she appeared wearing a form-fitting, backless dress.[199] The post provoked widespread public outrage, with many accusing her of disgracing both religion and culture. Reports even circulated that she could face a death sentence for violating Sharia law. In Bamalli's study, the group of younger, unmarried women defended Sadau's actions and criticized the cultural backlash directed at her. One participant stated, "The general Hausa are religious extremist and that they ease up on the amount of punishment they were given."[200] In contrast, the group of married women strongly condemned both the actress's behavior and the younger women's support of her. One participant argued, "What she did was wrong because is completely out of northern culture and she is Kannywood actress." Another added, "Actually, it was morally wrong because it is against the ethics and teachings of our religion Islam."[201]

Overall, the relationship between the representation of women in films and women's self-construction varies significantly depending on *age* and *marital status*. Younger, unmarried women tend to construct more emancipated identities and are often more critical of cultural traditions and customs. In contrast, married women are more likely to uphold these traditions and reject more liberal portrayals of women, both in movies and in real life, as illustrated by reactions to the controversy surrounding the Hausa actress. In this case, it appears that individual self-construction has a stronger influence on the interpretation of media representations, with women either accepting or rejecting these portrayals based on their positions and beliefs. However, the women interviewed emphasize that such representations also strongly influence younger viewers, who make up a large part of the audience. They express concern that repeated portrayals of women as inferior or morally flawed contribute to the internalization of submissive roles among young girls, shaping their self-constructions.

Finally, unlike literature, movies can be accessed without formal education or literacy. However, access to these media still depends on the ability to generate a certain level of income and is therefore directly linked to *class*. As a result, the specific representations of Muslim

198 Cf. Bamalli, "Portrayal," 40-42.
199 Cf. Appendix.
200 Bamalli, "Portrayal," 46.
201 Bamalli, "Portrayal," 47.

Hausa women portrayed in this medium primarily impact the segments of society that have the means to consume it.

6.2.3 Oral Hausa Tales

A medium that women in all geographical spaces, both urban and rural, and all social classes, despite their educational status, have access to is oral Hausa tales. Orality is a crucial part of Hausa life and tradition.[202] It encompasses different forms of performative art such as "storytelling, music, dance, and literature."[203]

Throughout history, the roles and economic contributions of women in Hausa society have been largely undocumented and, as a result, frequently overlooked by scholars. Before the influences of the jihads and European colonization, legends told stories of women of royal lineage ruling over Hausaland and even serving as commanders of entire armed forces.[204] Concerning gender roles, these tales, known as *tatsuniyoyi,* often depict women in traditional roles such as housewives and nurturing maternal figures. However, their domestic lives are not characterized by dependence on their husbands, but rather by a sense of interdependence between the two sexes.[205] This aspect of the tales reflects an ancient African worldview in which all elements of life are seen as interconnected, for example, the relationships between man and woman, or between humans and the divine. Because women are portrayed as individuals with power and agency, *tatsuniyoyi* are often regarded as a form of feminist media, noted for their empowered depictions of women and the balanced dynamics between the sexes. Mooijman, who has conducted an in-depth analysis of numerous Hausa tales, argues that:

> "As the following discussion of Hausa tales shows, quite a few courageous and smart female characters, from young girls to mature women, can be found in the tales. Thus, there are some young girls who dare to take great risk for love in tales. In doing so, they show strong determination and willingness to overstep social boundaries, for instance, restrictions based on gender."[206]

Mooijman supports her thesis with several concrete examples drawn from different tales. One such example is Tale 38, which follows the journey of a woman who initially travels alone as a prostitute. Over time, she transforms. She becomes pregnant, gives birth to a son, and eventually becomes the matriarch of a large family with grandchildren and great-grandchildren. As a mark

---

[202] Cf. Mooijman, "Hausa Folktales," 47.
[203] Kariamu Welsh Asante, *The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the traditions*, (Greenwood Press, 1993), 13.
[204] Cf. Mooijman, "Hausa Folktales," 117-118.
[205] Cf. Connie L. Stephens, "Marriage in the Hausa *Tatsuniya* Tradition: A Cultural and Cosmic Balance," in *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Catherine Coles and Beverly Mack, (University of Wisconsin, 1991), 231.
[206] Mooijman, "Hausa Folktales," 182.

of respect, the chief rewards her with a large plot of land, where she goes on to establish a town. The central moral of this tale is that women do not need to marry to achieve financial or social stability, and that choosing independence is a valid and respected path for them.[207]

Another tale referenced by Mooijman is titled *The Daughter Born of a Man*. This story is notable for its highly unconventional narrative: a girl is miraculously born from her father. After he is killed by the hand of a king during her childhood, she grows up determined to avenge his death. Upon reaching adulthood, she embarks on a quest, killing the regent who murdered her father, as well as other powerful men, ultimately amassing considerable power and wealth. When another king learns of her achievements, he offers her marriage. She declines and instead demands a share of his kingdom and a ministerial position. As the king refuses and challenges her to battle, she defeats and kills him as well. Only later does she choose to take a husband, on her terms.[208]

The story centers on a powerful female protagonist navigating a male-dominated world in which men refuse to accept female authority, a world she ultimately overcomes. However, as Mooijman notes, the true resolution of the tale does not lie in the defeat of these men, but rather in the protagonist's eventual choice to marry, settle down, and raise a family. While this conclusion could be interpreted as reinforcing the stereotype that a woman's fulfillment lies in marriage, Mooijman argues that it instead affirms the protagonist's agency. Her decision to marry is not born of dependence, but of autonomy; she freely chooses both her life path and her partner, without economic or social pressure. The fact that she gifts her town to her husband further reinforces this interpretation; she alone decides who is worthy of such an honor, reversing the typical power dynamic. Ultimately, the tale advocates for a balance between the sexes, portraying female agency as equal in weight to male authority. At the same time, it subtly promotes a form of resistance to contemporary social norms by recalling a historical Hausa context in which women, such as queens and female warriors, exercised greater independence and power than they often do today.[209]

Nonetheless, some tales do promote obedience, though typically only towards close relatives such as mothers or fathers, rarely towards husbands. Acts of disobedience are never punished when they are framed as morally or practically justified. In one of the Hausa tales, for example, a husband instructs his wives not to untie his dogs. However, when he finds himself in danger and calls for the animals, one of his wives defies his command and releases the dogs, ultimately saving his life. Her decision is rewarded, reinforcing the message that women should, and can,

[207] Cf. Mooijman, "Hausa Folktales," 182.
[208] Cf. Mooijman, "Hausa Folktales," 183.
[209] Cf. Mooijman, "Hausa Folktales," 184.

trust their judgment, especially when it serves a greater good. This highlights that women's judgment can be more important than simply following orders.[210]

Marriage is a central theme in Hausa tales, mirroring its significance in broader Hausa society. It is the main theme in approximately half of the 400 stories Mooijman collected for her study. These narratives often present marriage through a female lens, portraying it not as a fixed contract but as a dynamic, evolving relationship. A common theme is the justification for leaving a marriage, with mistreatment, such as physical abuse or lack of support from the husband, frequently cited as a valid reason. Additionally, the stories demonstrate that a woman can leave her husband simply because she isn't fond of him or wants to be with someone else. This ability to choose who to marry and who not to states an autonomy regarding marriage, opposed to the common forced marriages in Hausa culture.[211]

To conclude, *tatsuniyoyi* offer representations of Muslim Hausa women's identities that are broadly accessible, regardless of *geographical location, social class,* or *educational background*. The only real condition to consume this medium is a strong familiarity with the Hausa language and cultural context, which applies to all Muslim Hausa women.

The stories are typically passed down by older women to young children, both boys and girls, and serve as social guides, shaping ideas of appropriate behavior and influencing understandings of gender roles and male-female relationships.[212]

Tatsuniyoyi do not align with Islamic legal norms and often express subtle disapproval of them. For example, do the tales rarely punish women who flee from their husbands and frequently affirm a woman's right to choose her partner, directly challenging the practice of forced marriage. This flight is sometimes justified through religious interpretation. The resistance to Islamic norms can be traced to the pre-Islamic origins of many of these stories, which reflect older Hausa traditions in which women exercised greater agency in shaping their lives. Furthermore, *tatsuniyoyi* often encourage children to trust their instincts rather than unquestioningly obey authority figures, again standing in contrast to Islamic teachings that emphasize obedience to parents and, for women, to husbands.[213]

The social representation of women in the Hausa tales contrasts with the self-constructions from the interviews of the first level of the analysis. It remains open whether the representations of these stories influence the self-constructions or vice versa. Since the lived realities of many Hausa women contradict the representations in the *tatsuniyoyi,* it seems more likely that the

[210] Cf. Mooijman, "Hausa Folktales," 185.
[211] Cf. Mooijman, "Hausa Folktales," 193.
[212] Cf. Mooijman, "Hausa Folktales," 202.
[213] Cf. Mooijman, "Hausa Folktales," 185.

self-constructions determine how the tales are judged. To confirm or reject this hypothesis, future research could usefully explore how Hausa women evaluate these tales to assess whether they influence their self-constructions.

Finally, social representations in various forms of media not only influence and shape women's self-conceptions but are also closely interconnected with institutional frameworks. In the case of the Muslim Hausa community, these institutions often stand in contrast to the values portrayed in the oral stories of the Hausa. The most prominent institution affecting the structures in which Hausa women live is the Sharia law, which embodies core Islamic principles and affects life in North Nigeria more than any other institution.

6.3 Structural Level

6.3.1 Sharia Law

Among scholars worldwide, there are two contrasting perspectives on the impact of Islam on women's lives. While some argue that Islam imposes an authoritarian, patriarchal structure that limits women's agency, others contend that Islam is not inherently oppressive toward women. The latter perspective is often supported by the claim that, even before many other cultures recognized women's equal rights and dignity, Islam had already acknowledged these principles. It is further argued that women in Islam are granted a well-defined framework of rights that enables them to "enter into contracts and legal agreements; the right to earn an income and dispose her property as she wishes, the right to express her opinions on all issues private or public, the right to education; the right to inherit and be inherited by her next of kin; the right to contribute to the development of the society in all spheres."[214] Despite the rights granted to women during the early stages of Islamization, Islamic law was also used to equate a wife's obedience to her husband with obedience to God. This association subsequently reinforced male authority within the household and contributed to the assignment of domestic responsibilities to women. In addition, women were often tasked with agricultural labor.[215]

However, at the beginning of the 19th century, a significant shift occurred in the political landscape of the Northern Hausa community. Sparked by Shehu Usman Dan Fodio's efforts to revive and protect Islamic values from perceived moral decline, the Sokoto Caliphate was established in the 1810s. The formation of this new Islamic state brought about profound changes in the lives of Hausa women. It became increasingly viewed as inappropriate for women to hold public office, and they were gradually encouraged, if not expected, to remain

[214] Bawa, "Sharia Implementation," 150-151.
[215] Cf. Bawa, "Sharia Implementation," 151.

within the domestic sphere. As a result, women were progressively pushed out of public life and confined to their homes, a pattern that continues to shape the reality of many Hausa women today.[216]

It is important to note that Nigeria operates under a plural legal system, consisting of English common law, customary law, primarily practiced in the southern states, and Sharia law, which constitutes the legal framework for most women living in the northern regions of the country. The following section will examine how the current application of Sharia law and the Sharia Penal Code impacts the lives of Muslim Hausa women.

One of the most pressing legal issues concerning women is the treatment of rape. In Northern Nigeria, the Islamic Penal Code addresses rape like the Penal Code and the Criminal Code. However, a key distinction lies in the treatment of marital rape. Under Sharia law, a man cannot be convicted of raping his wife, as it is assumed that a woman, by entering marriage, has given perpetual consent to sexual intercourse for the duration of the marriage. While a husband may be held accountable under Sharia law if his wife sustains physical injuries during intercourse, he cannot be prosecuted for rape.[217]

When a rape allegation involves an incident outside of marriage, the Penal Code, in alignment with Sharia law, demands that the woman provide the testimony of four separate eyewitnesses to support her claim. If she fails to present these witnesses, she may face prosecution for falsely accusing someone of rape.[218] An example for how this rule for eyewitnesses can affect a woman's life is the story of a Hausa teenage girl that was publicly flogged for adultery after three men raped her and she wasn't able to provide the witnesses.[219]

Laws such as these highlight the significant challenges women face when attempting to report cases of rape. They also illustrate how Sharia law may discourage women from coming forward, as the fear of being prosecuted themselves often outweighs the hope for justice.

In cases where a man or woman is convicted of rape or of "wrongfully" reporting such an incident, the punishments under Sharia law differ. For married individuals, the prescribed penalty is death by stoning. For unmarried individuals, most often women, the punishment is imprisonment, with a minimum sentence of one year, which can be extended to up to 100 years.[220] The structure of these punishments reveals a clear disparity in the treatment of women

---

[216] Cf. Bawa, "Sharia Implementation," 151-152.
[217] Cf. Ekhator, "Women and the Law," 287.
[218] Cf. Ekhator, "Women and the Law," 288.
[219] Cf. Caroline E. Nicolai, "Islamic Law and the International Protection of Women's Rights: The Effect of Shari'a in Nigeria," *Syracuse Journal of International Law and Commerce* 31, no.2 (2004): 301.
[220] Ekhator, "Women and the Law," 288-289.

based on their marital status, with married women facing significantly harsher penalties than their unmarried counterparts.

Another critical issue is the broader spectrum of violence against women perpetrated by men. Under Sharia law, for instance, wife battery is not classified as a punishable offense within the legal framework. It is generally tolerated unless the violence results in serious physical harm to the woman.[221] This legal situation overlooks both the emotional and psychological trauma resulting from physical abuse, as well as instances of less severe physical harm. It illustrates the limited legal protection afforded to women in Northern Nigeria and highlights how the system disproportionately benefits men.

Additionally, the Sharia Law, as it is implemented in Nigeria, prohibits un-Islamic clothing, which consequently forces women to wear the Hijab. It also forbids women from being passengers on motorcycles and from sitting amongst men on public transport.[222]

Ekhator notes that these practices under Sharia law stand in direct contradiction to the Nigerian Constitution, which upholds principles that prohibit "degrading treatment of people, freedom of religion and protection against discrimination, amongst others."[223]

To summarize, the structures within which women's self-conceptions develop are deeply shaped by Sharia law institutions, which disproportionately benefit men while neglecting the legal protection of women. The impact these institutions have on them differs amongst different categories, with the predominant one being *marital status*. The internalization and partial affirmation of legal and religious authority is reflected in some women's acceptance of dominant Islamic teachings, their obedience to their husbands, and, in some cases, even their acceptance of violence. Nonetheless, there are institutions through which women's self-conceptions resist these structures and actively seek to transform them to secure greater legal protection for women. The most important institutions are local faith-based women's organizations.

6.3.2 Faith-Based Women's Organizations

> "In the wake of controversial implementation of Sharia (Islamic law) in the governance of some states, the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN) served as an agency through which Muslim women speak as well as demonstrate that the implementation of Sharia is the greatest weapon against male domination."[224]

[221] Cf. Ekhator, "Women and the Law," 289
[222] Cf. Nnaeto, "Appraisal of the Conflict", 8.
[223] Ekhator, "Women and the Law," 289.
[224] Bawa, "Sharia Implementation," 149.

Lastly, this thesis examines how female activism within the Northern Nigerian Hausa community seeks to address the tension between empowered representations of Muslim Hausa women, obvious in Hausa tales and Kano market literature, and the limited protection afforded to them under the current application of Sharia law and the Sharia Penal Code in cases of gender-based violence and empowerment. Additionally, this chapter demonstrates how Muslim Hausa women navigate the constant dual pressure of conservative Islam on one hand and the global spread of Western feminism on the other.[225] The most present advocacy networks that work with Islamic principles are the following NGOs: the Grassroots Health Organization (GHON), the Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO), the Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN), the Women and Development Network (WODEN), the Voices of Widows, Divorcées, and Orphans (VOWAN), and two CBOs, the Trading Cooperative and the Traditional Birth Attendants."[226] These organizations fight for Muslim women's rights and the improvement of their well-being on multiple levels since Muslim women in Nigeria have long been marginalized by former development projects conducted by the state.[227]

These organizations support Muslim Hausa women primarily through collaborative efforts. GHON, for instance, works in partnership with community-based organizations (CBOs) and government agencies to enhance women's access to healthcare services. They emphasize connecting CBOs with local political institutions. This strategy enables communities to voice their concerns directly at the level where policy decisions are made. VOWAN focuses on economic empowerment by providing financial guarantees for small loans to women. Meanwhile, MSO conducts human rights training specifically tailored to the needs of Muslim Hausa women.[228]

Even though all the mentioned faith-based women's organizations operate within the framework of Islam, some place a stronger emphasis on empowerment in areas such as education, political participation, health, and economic independence, framed explicitly through Islamic rights and values. Whereas a non-faith-based NGO might advocate for gender equality by referencing international human rights standards, faith-based women's organizations like MSO have developed a "rights-in-Islam tree"[229], which is a collection of 27 rights "that Islam affords specifically to women, among them rights around health, education, economic stability, and political inclusion, each supported by verses from religious texts

[225] Cf. Wallace, "Holistic Development," 61.
[226] Adryan, Wallace, "Agency Through Development," 284.
[227] Cf. Wallace, "Agency Through Development", 296.
[228] Cf. Wallace, "Agency Through Development", 290-291.
[229] Wallace, "Agency Through Development", 294.

providing extensive support for women's development work."[230] In that way, MSO is strongly supporting gender equality, by referring to the verse in the Quran that says, "I will not waste the work of a worker among you, whether male or female"[231] Additionally, MSO is working on advocating for democracy with justification by the Quran among the youth.[232] However, the Women's Aid Collective (WACOL) emphasizes that, in the Northern Nigerian context, moving away from Western notions of equality is more effective for improving the situation of women. The organization underscores the importance of addressing gender issues within the frameworks of Islam and local traditions as essential for achieving meaningful progress.[233]

As Ezeilo notes, this perspective is also supported by Muslim African women at the international policy level. He mentions that during efforts to urge the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva to legally guarantee equal inheritance rights for both sexes, Muslim African women voiced concerns that the understanding of equality defended in these efforts conflicted with their religious realities. They made it clear that they would withdraw their support if the committee insisted on retaining the term "equality", a term the commission ultimately chose to drop. For Ezeilo, this incident raises the critical question of whether it is Western feminism or Islamic fundamentalism that should bear the responsibility for remaining flexible and adapting to the other. The example of faith-based initiatives illustrates that mutual negotiation and compromise between the two perspectives is possible.[234] Another suggestion stems from Oluwafunmilayo J. Para-Mallam, a Nigerian professor of Development Studies specializing in Gender and Development. She observes that the implementation of the CEDAW campaign in Nigeria has faced significant challenges. As a result, many activists have chosen to move away from the term *gender equality* and instead use *gender equity*. This shift aims to distance their efforts from accusations of promoting gender role reversal or gender sameness, which are common criticisms in the Nigerian context. However, Para-Mallam argues that equality does not mean that men and women must become the same, but rather that their differences should be acknowledged while ensuring equal opportunities and access. Ultimately, both men and women should be able to achieve the same outcomes.[235] What emerges here is the tension surrounding terminology, which often deepens the divide between the global struggle for gender equality and cultural efforts to preserve identity. It may be beneficial to

[230] Wallace, "Agency Through Development," 294.
[231] Wallace, "Agency Through Development," 294.
[232] Cf. Wallace, "Agency Through Development," 294.
[233] Cf. Gbenga Emmaunel Afolayan, "Hausa-Fulani Women's Movement and Womanhood", *Agenda (Durban)* 33, no.2 (2019): 58.
[234] Cf. Ezeilo, "Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism", 42.
[235] Cf. Para-Mallam, "Promoting Gender Equality," 463-464.

develop a more abstract and flexible definition of gender equality, one that allows space for cultural specificities while still ensuring a shared global foundation. Such an approach could ultimately support the empowerment of all women within their respective cultural contexts.

In contrast to GHION and MSO, FOMWAN has focused more on practical initiatives such as promoting political participation and advocating for improvements in health-related issues. For example, the organization has worked to enhance the delivery of maternal health services in Kano. Although the state began offering these services free of charge in 2001, it failed to establish effective regulations to ensure their smooth implementation. In response, FOMWAN, in collaboration with other CBOs and advocacy groups, helped draft a "Maternal Health Bill" aimed at addressing the barriers preventing equal access to maternal healthcare services for all women. This bill brought attention to critical issues such as transportation costs, additional fees, food security, and emotional well-being. Furthermore, FOMWAN has served as a vital network, connecting local CBOs with international donors and thereby amplifying grassroots voices and ensuring they receive the support they need.[236]

Another issue FOMWAN helped address was the refusal of polio vaccines by some Muslim leaders, who feared the vaccines were contaminated. To counter this belief and support the distribution of the vaccines, FOMWAN engaged directly with these leaders, working closely with them to dispel the myths and gain their approval. This strong involvement of Muslim leaders highlights the uniquely culturally embedded strategies through which faith-based women's organizations led by Muslim Hausa women are promoting women's well-being. In addition, FOMWAN actively collaborates with women living in *kulle*. These women are often the founders of community-based initiatives, such as trading cooperatives, with which NGOs work with closely. This ensures that even the most marginalized women, who are often inaccessible to international development efforts, are included and have their voices heard. Another advantage of these grassroots organizations is their ability to navigate tensions between international development actors and local Islamic authorities.[237] Overall, the term *women's empowerment* is used here to symbolize women's active participation in shaping Islamic traditions and interpretations related to gender. Hajia Rakiya, the head of WODEN, shares this view and believes that educating women about the Quran and its teachings will help them understand their rights. This awareness, in turn, will lead to greater participation of Muslim

[236] Cf. Para-Mallam, "Promoting Gender Equality," 463-464.
[237] Cf. Para-Mallam, "Promoting Gender Equality," 463-464.
[237] Cf. Para-Mallam, "Promoting Gender Equality," 463-464.

Hausa women in the national economy and, ultimately, to their involvement in decision-making processes at both the micro and macro levels.[238]

Members and activists of these organizations were interviewed by Adryan Wallace and asked to explain their work and perspectives on development discourse from an Islamic standpoint. When asked about her own and other Muslim women's economic engagement, a member of MSO explained that, according to the Quran, she is permitted to engage in income-generating activities and actively empowers other women to do the same. She emphasized that it is possible to pursue such activities while still fulfilling unpaid domestic responsibilities at home. Even if the financial contribution is small, she and her peers nonetheless view themselves as contributing to Nigeria's economy. However, she stressed that when women have children at home, their caregiving role takes priority, and economic activities should not interfere with domestic responsibilities. Once the children have grown up and left the household, many women are both willing and able to take on more time-intensive work.[239]

To understand how holistically and sustainably these organizations can reach their goals, it is essential to examine how they collaborate and combine their different areas of focus. Larger NGOs maintain various forms of relationships with smaller community-based organizations (CBOs); these relationships are typically characterized as a "patron-client"[240] relationship, while in others, the smaller CBOs are formally integrated as members of larger NGOs such as MSO or FOMWAN. Previous research discussing the relationship between different types of organizations has raised the criticism that such structures risk reinforcing social inequality, particularly since women working in larger NGOs often come from more educated social backgrounds. This raises the concern that women from less educated and lower social classes may be overlooked. However, Wallace argues that it is precisely the collaborative structure between NGOs and CBOs that helps to counteract this growing inequality. Through their close cooperation, women involved in CBOs are given a platform to voice their concerns and interests, which the larger NGOs can then relay to government officials. At the same time, this close relationship allows NGOs to hold governments accountable by highlighting the real-world effects, successes, or failures of development projects, thus contributing to ongoing improvement and responsiveness in policymaking.[241]

Even though these faith-based and local women's organizations address many women's issues from the ground up, they continue to face significant funding challenges. Western donors are

[238] Cf. Para-Mallam, "Promoting Gender Equality," 297.
[239] Cf. Para-Mallam, "Promoting Gender Equality," 290.
[240] Wallace, "Agency Through Development," 298.
[241] Cf. Wallace, "Agency Through Development," 298.

often hesitant to support organizations operating within an Islamic framework, as Islam is frequently perceived as incompatible with gender equality. Meanwhile, national donors tend to resist funding women's projects altogether, viewing feminism as a threat to cultural values and traditional norms.[242] Adamu, a Muslim gender activist herself, points out that funding is still largely determined by the preferences of donors. As a result, faith-based women's organizations often fall through the cracks, particularly in a Northern Nigerian context. She adds that this dynamic frequently pressures NGOs to shift away from their original objectives, adapting their activism to align with donor expectations, ultimately making their work less effective and less sustainable. Although an increasing number of international donors are now willing to support organizations operating within an Islamic framework, new challenges often emerge once the funding is secured. Based on her own experience, Adamu notes that local communities sometimes resent NGOs receiving support from U.S.-based donors, as it can create the perception that the organization has been "bought" and is being used as a tool to fight Islam.[243]
To conclude, the collaborative structures between NGOs and CBOs form a holistic network that connects women across social classes and economic backgrounds, reaching even the most isolated Hausa women, including those living in *kulle*. Through these efforts, faith-based women's organizations adopt an intersectional approach, striving to engage with Hausa women across diverse social classes, traditional practices, educational levels, and economic conditions. While it remains uncertain whether their work also addresses differences based on geographic location, age, or mobility, it nonetheless represents a meaningful starting point for an intersectional practice that seeks to reflect the lived realities of Muslim Hausa women in Northern Nigeria.
Moreover, these initiatives illustrate that women's empowerment can be pursued outside the frameworks of Western feminism and international gender equality standards. They offer a model in which women do not act in opposition to, but rather from within, their religious and cultural traditions. This challenges the assumption that the rejection of practices within a culture necessitates rejecting the entire culture. Instead, these women cultivate empowerment from within, based on their own interpretations of their rights, needs, and aspirations and showcase how self-conceptions can challenge and modify structures of societies.

[242] Cf. Fatima L. Adamu, "A double-edged sword," 56.
[243] Cf. Adamu, "A double-edged sword," 60.

7. Conclusion

The intersectional analysis of the social positioning of Muslim Hausa women offers valuable insights into both the interplay of women's affiliations across various social categories and the interconnections and influences between the individual, representational, and structural level of Hausa society in Northern Nigeria. The use of qualitative data proved particularly effective in uncovering which categories are the most relevant in the lives of Muslim Hausa women in Northern Nigeria. It also revealed that, beyond the categories explored in this thesis, many other factors influence women's everyday experiences.

Moreover, the analysis demonstrated how women's self-constructions shape and are shaped by both structural frameworks and media representations. Individual self-conceptions, for example, can lead to the acceptance or rejection of portrayals in Kano market literature or Kannywood movies. Conversely, these representations can influence women's self-constructions, whether in an emancipatory direction or in one that reinforces traditional roles. The structural level functions similarly. On one hand, self-construction may lead to resistance against certain customs, as seen in the work of faith-based women's organizations. On the other hand, Sharia institutions can shape self-constructions by encouraging women to align their identities with religious norms.

Ultimately, the extent to which each level influences the others is complex and often difficult to determine with precision. However, this thesis underscores the importance of understanding these dynamics to fully grasp the multifaceted realities of Muslim Hausa women's lives.

The findings of this thesis demonstrate what a culturally sensitive approach to gender equality can look like. They show that women are actively exercising agency and engaging in activism from within their cultural frameworks, an approach that often leads to more rapid and sustainable improvements in women's rights. By working within the systems they are part of, these women understand the importance of engaging with power structures, using familiar cultural tools to achieve empowerment. Although this form of empowerment may differ from Western models, it still represents meaningful progress, shaped and driven by Hausa women themselves. This is particularly significant in a country like Nigeria, whose colonial history has produced an immense diversity of cultures, languages, customs, and legal systems. In such a context, it is not sufficient to speak broadly of "Nigerian women" when designing development projects or fighting oppression. It is essential to understand and engage with each cultural context individually, recognizing that women themselves are the best sources of insight into their needs and priorities.

For this reason, it is commendable that international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank fund and collaborate with local women's organizations like FOMWAN. Such partnerships demonstrate that universalism and cultural relativism, at least regarding gender equality, do not have to contradict each other. Instead, they can complement one another through respectful, context-specific engagement.

For future research, it would be valuable to explore each of the three levels of analysis in greater depth to gain a clearer understanding of their interconnections. It could be particularly insightful to examine how different Hausa women evaluate various forms of representation in the media, as discussed in the chapter on Kannywood movies. Further studies might also focus on the reception of representations in Kano market literature or oral Hausa tales. This could help clarify which level of analysis influences which aspects of women's self-conceptions, and in what ways. Furthermore, applying the second phase of the intersectional Eight-Step Analysis, by developing typologies of self-construction at the individual level, could help translate these insights into practical applications for development work. Finally, conducting a comparative intersectional analysis of women from other Nigerian ethnic groups, such as the predominantly Christian Yoruba ethnicity, could offer further understanding of the ways religion, Islamic or otherwise, shapes women's lives.

Bibliography

Adamu, Fatima L. “A double-edged sword: Challenging Women’s Oppression Within Muslim Society in Northern Nigeria.” *Gender and Development* 7, no.1 (1999): 56-61.

Adamu, Fatima L.; Para-Mallam, Oluwafunmilayo J. “The Role of Religion in Women’s Campaigns for Legal Reform in Nigeria.” *Development in Practice* 22, no.5 (2012): 803-818.

Afolayan, Gbenga Emmaunel. “Hausa-Fulani Women’s Movement and Womanhood.” *Agenda (Durban)* 33, no.2 (2019): 52-60.

Bamalli, Mahmoud Nourah. „Portrayal of Women in Kannywood.” BA Thesis, American University of Nigeria, 2021. http://digitallibrary.aun.edu.ng:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/603/cORRECTED20SENIOR RESEARCH PROJECT_Final %281%29.pdf.

Barkow, Jerome H. “Hausa Women and Islam.” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6, no.2 (1972): 317-328.

Bawa, Aisha Balarabe. **“**Muslim Women and Sharia Implementation in Nothern Nigeria: An Overview of Fomwan.” *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 18, no.1 (2017): 149-167.

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loic J. D. Wacquant. *Reflexive Anthropologie*. Suhrkamp, 1996.

Coles, Catherine and Beverly Mack. *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*. The University of Wisconsin Press. 1991.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no.1 (1989): 139-167.

Davis, Kathy. “Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful.” *Feminist Theory* 9, no.1 (2008), 67-85.

Degele, Nina, and Gabriele Winker. „Intersektionalität als Mehrebenenanalyse.“ Accessed May 18, 2025. www.portal-intersektionalität.de.

Dunbar, Roberta Ann. “Islamic Values, the State, and “the Development of Women”: The Case of Niger”. In *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Catherine M. Coles and Beverly Mack. The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.

Ekhator, Eghosa Osa. “Women and the Law in Nigeria: A Reappraisal.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 16, no.2 (2015): 285-296.

Ezeilo, Joy. “Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: Some Perspectives from Nigeria and Beyond.” *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 32, no.1 (2006): 40-47.

Funtuwa, Bilkisu Salisu Ahmed. *Wa Ya San Gobe*. Kano City Bookshop. 1996.

Ganz, Kathrin and Jette Hausotter. *Intersektionale Sozialforschung.* Transcript Verlag, 2020.

Giddens, Anthony. *Die Konstitution der Gesellschaft. Grundzüge einer Theorie der Strukturierung* Campus, 1995.

Hill, Polly. *Rural Hausa: A Village and a Setting.* Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Kabeer, Naila. *Reversed Realities. Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*. Verso. 1994.

Karo, Baba of. *Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa*. Edited by Mary Smith. Faber and Faber, 1954.

Maina, Hannatu Hussaini. “The Status of Hausa Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria Today: A Three-Dimensional Perspective.” *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research* 56, no. 1 (2021): 386-409.

Martins, Margarida. “Achieving Sustainable Development: The Shortcomings of the UN SDGs and the Need for Feminist Policymaking,” *Young Feminist Europe*, October 6, 2022. https://www.youngfeminist.eu/2022/06/shortcomings-sdgs-need-for-feminist-policymaking/.

Meeting of Mind. “Rahama Sadau’s Case Evidences a Culture of Harassment and Misogyny in Kannywood.” Accessed Mai 18, 2025, https://meetingofmindsuk.uk/realreads/rahama-sadaus-case-evidences-a-culture-of-harassment-and-misogyny-in-kannywood/.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.” *Feminist Review* 30, no.1 (1988): 61-88.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. “Under Western Eyes“ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles.” *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no.2 (2003): 499-535.

Mooijman, Anna. “Mata Masu Dubara da Asiri Suke Daga: The Roles of Women and Gender Complementarity in Hausa Folktales.” ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. 1998.

Morgen, Sandra; Bookman, Ann. “Rethinking Women and Politics: An Introductory Essay.” In *Women and the Politics of Empowerment,* edited by Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen. Temple University Press, 1988.

Musa, Umma Aliyu. *Emotions in Muslim Hausa Women’s Fiction. More Than Just Romance.* Routledge. 2019.

National Bureau of Statistics. “Report of the National Literacy Survey.” Accessed May 22, 2025.https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/National Literacy Survey, 2010.pdf.

Nicolai, Caroline E. “Islamic Law and the International Protection of Women’s Rights: The Effect of Shari’a in Nigeria.” *Syracuse Journal of International Law and Commerce* 31, no.2 (2004): 299-326.

Nnaeto, Japhet Olusadum; Emenike Everest Uzor and Juliet Anulika Ndoh. “Appraisal of the Conflict Between Sharia Law and Rule of Law on Rights of Women in Nigeria.” *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research* 10, no.6 (2022): 1-26.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Women and Human Development. The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge University Press. 2000.

Okome, Mojbol Olfnk. “Domestic, Regional, and International Protection of Nigerian Women against Discrimination: Constraints and Possibilities.” *African Studies Quarterly* 6, no.3 (2002): 33-63.

Onyemelukwe, Cheluchi. “Legislating on Violence Against Women: A Critical Analysis of Nigeria’s Recent Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015.” *Journal of Women, Gender and the Law* 5, no.2 (2016): 1-56.

Para-Mallam, Oluwafunmilayo J. „Promoting Gender Equality in the Context of Nigerian Cultural and Religious Expression: Beyond Increasing Female Access to Education.” *Compare* 4, no.40 (2010): 459-477.

Pellow, Deborah. “From Accra to Kano: One Woman’s Experience”. In *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Catherine M. Coles and Beverly Mack. The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.

Renne, Elisha P. “Gender Roles and Women’s Status: What They Mean to Hausa Muslim Women in Nothern Nigeria.” In *Categories and Contexts: Anthropological and Historical Studies in Critical Demography*, edited by Simon Szreter, Hania Sholkamy and A. Dharmalingam. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Schul, Susanne; Böth, Mareike. „Abenteuerliche ›Überkreuzungen‹: Vormoderne intersektional.“ In *Abenteuerliche ›Überkreuzungen‹: Vormoderne intersektional (Aventiuren 12)*, edited by Susanne Schul, Mareike Böth and Michael Mecklenburg. V&R Unipress, 2017.

Stephens, Connie L. “Marriage in the Hausa *Tatsuniya* Tradition: A Cultural and Cosmic Balance.” In *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Catherine Coles and Beverly Mack. University of Wisconsin. 1991.

Sule, Balaraba B. M.; Starratt, Priscilla E. “Islamic Leadership Positions for Women in Contemporary Kano Society”. In *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Catherine M. Coles and Beverly Mack. The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.

United Nations. “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment,” Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Sustainable Development. Accessed April 23, 2025. https://sdgs.un.org/topics/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment.

United Nations. “Open Working Group Proposal for the Sustainable Development Goals”. Accessed April 23, 2025, 9. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1579SDGs%20Proposal.pdf.

UN WOMEN, “Concepts and Definitions“. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Accessed April 23, 2025. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsandefinitions.htm.

Portal Intersektionalität. „Intersektionalität – eine Einführung.“ Accessed May 5, 2025. www.portal-intersektionalität.de.

Walgenbach, Katharina. “Intersektionalität als Analyseperspektive heterogener Stadträume.“ In *Die intersektionelle Stadt. Geschlechterforschung und Medienkunst an den Achsen der Ungleichheit*, edited by Elli Scambor und Fränk Zimmer. Transcript, 2012.

Wallace, Adryan. “Agency Through Development: Hausa Women’s NGO’s and CBOs in Kano, Nigeria,” *Feminist Economics* 20, no.4 (2014): 281-305.

Wallace, Adryan. “Engineering Our Own Futures: Lessons on Holistic Development: Muslim Women’s Civil Society Groups in Nigeria, Ghana and Tanzania.” *African Sociological Review* 19, no.2 (2015): 53-74.

Welsh Asante, Kariamu. *The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Traditions*. Greenwood Press. 1993.

Werthmann, Katja. *Nachbarinnen. Die Alltagswelt Muslimischer Frauen in einer Nigerianischen Großstadt*. Brandes & Aspel. 2019.

Whitsitt, Novian. “Hausa Women Writers Confronting the Traditional Status of Women in Modern Islamic Society: Feminist Thought in Nigerian Popular Fiction.” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 22, no.2 (2003): 387-408.

Whitsitt, Novian. “Islamic-Hausa Feminism and Kano Market Literature: Qur’anic Reinterpretation in the Novels of Balaraba Yakubu.” *Research in African Literature* 33, no.2 (2002): 119-136.

Whitsitt, Novian. “Kano Market Literature and the Construction of Hausa-Islamic Feminism: A Contrast in Feminist Perspectives of Balaraba Ramat Yakubu and Bilkisu Ahmed Funtuwa.” Diss., University of Wisconsin, 2000. ProQuest (9972836).

Winker, Gabriele and Nina Degele. *Intersektionalität. Zur Analyse sozialer Ungleichheiten.* Transcript. 2009.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. „Intersektionalität und feministische Politik.“ *Feministische Studien* 27, no.1 (2009): 51-66.

Glossary

AFN - Association des Femmes du Niger[244]

AIN - Islamic Association of Niger[245]

Auren dole – forced marriage[246]

Bariki – police barrack[247]

CEDAW - Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women[248]

DFB – German Soccer Association[249]

FOMWAN - Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria[250]

GHON - Grassroots Health Organization[251]

Kulle – seclusion[252]

Littattafan Soyayya – books of love[253]

Masu sarauta - rulers, by virtue of birth, and by achievement or appointment[254]

Matan kulle – secluded women[255]

Mutunci – respectability[256]

MSO - Muslim Sisters Organization[257]

Talakawa - common people[258]

Tatsuniyoyi - folktales[259]

VOWAN - Voices of Widows, Divorcées, and Orphans[260]

WACOL - Women's Aid Collective[261]

Wankan sai'bi – marrying a virgin[262]

WODEN - Women and Development Network[263]

---

[244] Cf. Dunbar, „Islamic Values", 78.
[245] Cf. Dunbar, „Islamic Values", 83.
[246] Cf. Whitsitt, "Islamic-Hausa Feminism," 128.
[247] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 62.
[248] Cf. "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment".
[249] Cf. Winker and Degele, *Intersektionalität*, 74-75.
[250] Cf. Wallace, "Agency Through Development", 284.
[251] Cf. Wallace, "Agency Through Development", 284.
[252] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 204.
[253] Cf. Whitsitt, „Hausa Women Writers," 387.
[254] Coles, *Hausa Women*, 14.
[255] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 204.
[256] Cf. Werthmann, *Nachbarinnen*, 282.
[257] Cf. Wallace, "Agency Through Development", 284.
[258] Cf. Coles, *Hausa Women*, 14.
[259] Cf. Stephens, "Marriage in the Hausa *Tatsuniya* Tradition", 231.
[260] Cf. Wallace, "Agency Through Development", 284.
[261] Cf. Afolayan, "Hausa-Fulani Women's Movement", 58.
[262] Cf. Whittsitt, "Kano Market Literature," 129.
[263] Cf. Wallace, "Agency Through Development", 284.

Appendix

Pictures from Rahama Sadau's Tweet, leading to the blasphemy scandal.

"Rahama Sadau's Case Evidences a Culture of Harassment and Misogyny in Kannywood," Meeting of Mind, accessed Mai 18, 2025, https://meetingofmindsuk.uk/realreads/rahama-sadaus-case-evidences-a-culture-of-harassment-and-misogyny-in-kannywood/.

Auxiliary Aids

DeepL - https://www.deepl.com/de/translator.

OpenAI - https://openai.com.

Grammerly - https://www.grammarly.com.

Declaration of Independence

I hereby declare that I have written this thesis independently and without the use of any resources other than those specified. All passages taken verbatim or in spirit from published and unpublished publications are identified as such. The thesis has not been submitted in the same or a similar form as an examination paper either in Austria or abroad (to an assessor for review).

Vienna, 09.06.2025

Laura Potthast