


RUDOLF PELL  
GAUDIO

# ALLAH MADE US

SEXUAL  
OUTLAWS IN  
AN ISLAMIC  
AFRICAN CITY

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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*New Directions in Ethnography* is a series of contemporary, original works. Each title has been selected and developed to meet the needs of readers seeking finely grained ethnographies that treat key areas of anthropological study. What sets these books apart from other ethnographies is their form and style. They have been written with care to allow both specialists and nonspecialists to delve into theoretically sophisticated work. This objective is achieved by structuring each book so that one portion of the text is ethnographic narrative while another portion unpacks the theoretical arguments and offers some basic intellectual genealogy for the theories underpinning the work.

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Rudolf Gaudio

# ALLAH MADE US

SEXUAL OUTLAWS IN AN ISLAMIC  
AFRICAN CITY

RUDOLF PELL GAUDIO

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**  
A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2009

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Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

*Registered Office*

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate,  
Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

*Editorial Offices*

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19  
8SQ, UK

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Gaudio, Rudolf Pell.

Allah made us: sexual outlaws in an Islamic African city /  
Rudolf Pell Gaudio.

p. cm. — (New directions in ethnography; 3)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-5251-8 (hardcover: alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-4051-5252-5 (pbk.: alk. paper) 1. Sexual minorities—Nigeria—Kano. 2. Prostitution—Nigeria—Kano. 3. Sex role—Nigeria—Kano. 4. Sex customs—Nigeria—Kano. 5. Islamic law—Social aspects—Nigeria—Kano. 6. Muslims—Nigeria—Kano Region—Social life and customs. 7. Hausa (African people)—Nigeria—Kano—Social life and customs. 8. Kano (Nigeria)—Social life and customs. 9. Kano (Nigeria)—Religious life and customs. 10. Kano (Nigeria)—Biography. I. Title.

HQ73.3.N62K364 2009

306.76088'2970966978—dc22

2008051206



A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

*For my parents, Christina and Alexander Gaudio, and my  
oga, Phil Shea.*

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# ***ACKNOWLEDGMENTS***

*Ma sha' Allah.* This project took shape over great stretches of space and time thanks to numerous people who (like myself) often had only a vague sense of the form it would ultimately take. Their contributions are especially remarkable given the many delays, miscommunications and cultural breaches that I committed on both sides of the Atlantic. Whatever positive value lies in these pages is due largely to their efforts; the faults are all mine.

Because of the stigma and ambiguity attached to gender-nonconformity, homosexuality and prostitution (not to mention laws against such practices), making these acknowledgments raises some of the same rhetorical problems discussed elsewhere in this book. One associate in Kano confided that, despite my intentions, some audiences might even view this text as an act of ingratitude towards the people who helped me and towards Hausa Muslim culture itself. Thus, while I am anxious to thank the individuals and agencies that supported me while I was carrying out this research, I must emphasize that they have not necessarily endorsed the course it has taken. Many of those who were most helpful to me placed a premium on discretion and must remain anonymous. These individuals, known as 'yan daudu, independent women, and masu harka, welcomed me into their social worlds, offered me food, drink and fellowship, and tolerated my social and linguistic missteps, as well as unusual and inconvenient requests for assistance. In my attempts to describe their words, deeds and lives, I have tried to respect my friends' values and reputations, and I ask for forgiveness where I have fallen short.

I extend sincere thanks to the faculty and staff of the Department of Nigerian Languages at Bayero University,

Kano (BUK), especially Professor Abdullahi Bature; the Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages at BUK; the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, especially its former research director, Malam Auwalu Hamza; and Arewa House Centre for Historical Documentation and Research. I am indebted to Dr. Salisu A. Abdullahi, Professor Abdalla U. Adamu, Alhaji Muhammad Munzali Muhammad (CEO of Yoko Films), Professor Tijjani Isma'il and Hajiya Binta Tijjani, Alhaji Aminu Sharif Bappa, Alhaji Malam Sa'idu, Professor M.S. Abdulkadir, Professor Thomas K. Adeyanju, Hajiya Aisha Rufa'i, Mr. David Jowitt, Sani Bello Mai Tafari, and the staff at the former U.S. Consulate in Kaduna. Special thanks to Usman Aliyu Abdulmalik, who helped me with transcribing and countless other things; to Professor Fatimah M. Palmer, for the cultural and culinary lessons; and to Sunusi Ibrahim, Bashir Umar, Haruna Abubakar, and Sunusi Shu'aibu. *Allah ya saka da alheri, amin.*

Fieldwork in Nigeria was funded by a Fulbright Junior Research grant administered by the Institute for International Exchange; research and travel grants from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Arizona; faculty support awards from Purchase College, State University of New York; and a professional development award from the Purchase chapter of United University Professionals. Funds for completing earlier versions of the project were provided by the Stanford Institute for Research on Women and Gender and a DOE Title VI grant administered by the Stanford Center for African Studies; subsequent funding was provided by Purchase College.

My academic mentors and colleagues in the northern Nigerian/Hausa studies 'mafia' - especially Clifford Hill, Joe McIntyre, Susan O'Brien, Matthias Krings, Esther Morgenthal, Katja Werthmann, Douglas Anthony, Louise Lennihan, Steven Pierce, Heidi Nast, Adeline Masquelier, Moses Ochonu, Sean Stilwell, and John A. Works - offered

intellectual, moral and practical assistance. Murray Last and Renée Pittin gave critical feedback on earlier drafts; Jonathan Reynolds furnished archival materials for Chapter 2; and Jack Tocco made sense of my own archives. Special thanks to Alaine S. Hutson, for repeatedly helping me find my way; to Brian Larkin, Conerly Casey, and Shobana Shankar, for encouraging me to trust my ethnographic instincts; and to Deborah Pellow, for taking me under her wing and keeping me there.

The dissertation that this book grew out of was caringly guided by Shirley Brice Heath, John Rickford, Penelope Eckert and Will Leben of the Stanford Linguistics Department, where I also enjoyed the collegial support of Renée Blake, John Baugh, Jen Roth-Gordon and others; these relationships continue to enrich my work. The same can be said of my colleagues at the University of Arizona, especially Jane H. Hill and Susan U. Philips, on whom I have relied extensively for professional support and scholarly advice. Kira Hall, Anna Livia, Mary Bucholtz, Sara Trechter and Bonnie McElhinny gave painstaking editorial commentary on articles that furnished parts of Chapters 4, 5 and 6, and Sandro Duranti, Candy Goodwin, Chuck Goodwin, Bill Hanks, Miyako Inoue, Judith Irvine, Chaise LaDousa, Erez Levon, Bruce Mannheim, Barb Meek, Leila Monaghan and Bonnie Urciuoli gave critical feedback on work presented in other forums.

Henry Abelow, Cesnabmihilo Dorothy Aken'ova, Zehra Arat, Niko Besnier, Christa Craven, Catherine M. Cole, Donald Donham, Deborah Elliston, Wolfram Gleichmar-Hartmann, Lorraine Herbst, Janet Jakobsen, Miranda Joseph, Suzanne Kessler, Bill Leap, Ellen Lewin, Martin Manalansan, Shaka McGlotten, Stephan Miescher, Steven Murray, Esther Newton, Maisa Taha, Niels Teunis, David Valentine and Luise White offered incisive observations about sexuality, gender, nation and race in Africa and elsewhere. Deb Amory led me

to many interesting places. Jacqui Ambrosini, Sima Belmar, Martha Fenn, Kathleen Hill, Brad Holland, Marie J. Palluotto, Leland Pitts-Gonzalez, Marianne Villanueva and Anne Wolf shared their experiences and insights on the creative process. Special thanks to Greg Gaudio for his critical feedback on my opening chapters, and to my great Aunt Louise Iorillo for her biscotti and her prayers.

For their guidance, encouragement and extraordinary patience, I thank my editor at Wiley-Blackwell, Rosalie Robertson, my former editor, Jane Huber, and their assistants/mavens, Deirdre Ilkson and Julia Kirk, whose unflagging attentiveness and enthusiasm kept me on track. Ben Soares, two anonymous reviewers, and the students in my Global Sexualities class at Purchase gave generous, detailed commentary on earlier drafts. Hassane Boukary and Isma'ila Maigyara patiently answered my linguistic questions. Rob Scarpa spent many hours designing the photographs, maps and other images, amazing me with his artistry and boundless generosity.

Marla Berman, Dana-ain Davis, Sid Donnell, Adriana Estill, Helen Gremillion, Marco Last, Bonnie McElhinny, Patrick Mead, Denise Morgan, Leslye Obiora, Roopali Mukherjee, Teresa Picarazzi, Carolina Sanin, Michelle Stewart, Jennie Uleman, Char Ullman and Jess Weinberg helped me navigate the ethical and emotional relationship between academics and "real" life. Towfiq Awwal, Emory Fry, Mike Hall, Gerard Ilaria, Marvin Peguese, Wai Poc, Thomas Uldrick and Case Willoughby let me kvetch. Stefanie Jannedy gave me solace and the space to compose myself. Steve Bialostok knew just what I needed. Jeff Maskovsky kept me honest. Norma Mendoza-Denton was my rain in the desert. Galey Modan reminded me to tell the story, and helped me see the point.

I thank my parents, Christina and Alexander Gaudio, and the whole Gaudio clan for supporting me from a distance and giving me a loving home to return to. This book is

dedicated to them, and to my mentor and friend, Philip J. Shea, whose knowledge of northern Nigerian history and culture was surpassed only by the generous enthusiasm with which he shared it, often with a plate of food and a glass of lemonade. Phil inspired countless students in Kano and elsewhere. We miss him.



# **NOTES ON ORTHOGRAPHY, TRANSLATION AND TRANSCRIPTION**

## **Orthography**

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

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

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

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

## Translation

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

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

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

## Transcription

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

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

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

] indicates the end of an overlap.

() indicates uncertainty regarding the accuracy of the transcription inside the parentheses.

(xx) indicates indiscernible speech.

(..) or <..> indicates that speech has been omitted from the transcript.

(( )) or < > indicates my commentary about the interaction (as an analyst, not as a participant).

# 1

## **INTRODUCING 'YAN DAUDU**

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

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

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

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

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

My first interpretation of this surprising exchange was that, for Hajiya Asabe, being a Muslim was less important than being Hausa, and had more to do with the performance of cultural rituals than it did with accepting the moral precepts of Islam. His irreverent claim that Muslims engaged in forbidden acts like drinking and homosexuality "more than anyone" was clearly facetious, yet I knew it was based on his experiences in Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, where he

had performed the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, more than once. Like many other poor pilgrims, Hajiya Asabe had overstayed his visa on several occasions in order to live and work illegally in the port city of Jiddah. While most undocumented Nigerians take on menial jobs that are Islamically legal, Hajiya Asabe supported himself through what he called *karuwanci* ['prostitution'], providing social and sexual companionship to men, some of whom might also enjoy the company of female prostitutes as well as marijuana, cocaine, or even alcohol. His most recent sojourn had ended over a year earlier, when he was arrested, deported and forced to leave behind most of the wealth he had accumulated. The circumstances of Hajiya Asabe's expulsion from Saudi Arabia weighed heavily on him, yet his day-to-day practices signaled a decidedly positive attitude towards the country. He dressed in Saudi men's fashions, listened to cassette tapes of Arab music, and peppered his speech with expressions from Arabic. Though he was unable to read in any language, he kept Arabic language magazines prominently displayed in his room, along with perfume bottles and other mementos. He also performed the five daily prayers more consistently, and more visibly, than most other 'yan daudu I knew.

Despite his apparent disregard of certain aspects of Islamic morality, I soon discovered that Hajiya Asabe's commitment to his faith was more sincere than I had initially thought; his irreverence had definite limits. Like many ethnographers, I learned of these limits accidentally, by transgressing them in a way that left me embarrassed but enlightened. On another visit to Sabon Gari, when Hajiya Asabe and I were sitting in his room to escape the midday sun, I sought to explain my ethnographic interest in the language practices of 'yan daudu. With my limited, graceless Hausa, I told him how I had initially come to Nigeria to learn about the speech of *malamai*, Islamic

scholars, but that I had eventually lost interest in that topic. “Staying with them is not pleasurable,” I said, “and their talk is not interesting.” At this Hajiya Asabe’s facial expression suddenly changed from that of a sympathetic listener to one showing hurt and indignation. “Sani,” he reprimanded me quietly. “This is our religion.”

## **Cultural and Sexual Citizenship in Northern Nigeria**

In the Hausa-speaking region of Northern Nigeria, prevailing interpretations of *Shari’a*, Islamic law, mandate a strict separation of the sexes and different rules of behavior for women and men in virtually every facet of life. ‘Yan daudu break those rules. As men who are said to talk and act ‘like women,’ they are widely perceived to be witty and clever, but they are also persecuted for their presumed involvement in heterosexual and homosexual prostitution. This book is about ‘yan daudu (singular: *ɗan daudu*) in and around Kano, the economic and cultural center of Hausaland, whose government joined that of eleven other northern Nigerian states in officially adopting Shari’a in 2000.<sup>1</sup> (See [Figures 1.1](#) and [1.2](#).) An ancient Islamic emirate that grew rich from the trans-Saharan trade, Kano today is one of Nigeria’s and Africa’s largest cities. It is also the hub of a transnational network of ‘yan daudu, independent women, and other gender and sexual minorities that links cities and towns throughout northern Nigeria with Hausa-speaking communities in other regions and countries.

**[Fig. 1.1](#)** Approximate extent of Hausa city-states since 1810 C.E.



'Yan daudu are most visible in urban markets and motor-parks (taxi and bus stations) where they cook and sell food to male workers and travelers. Some 'yan daudu live or spend time at 'women's houses' where they and 'independent women' [*mata masu zaman kansu*, literally 'women who live on their own'] entertain male visitors. The term *gidan mata* ['women's house'] is often translated as 'brothel,' reflecting the popular image of independent women as 'prostitutes' and of 'yan daudu as their 'pimps' or as 'homosexual prostitutes' themselves. The translations are misleading. Some independent women, as they generally prefer to be called, and some 'yan daudu, especially younger ones, do sometimes have sex with



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

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

Source: Courtesy of User:Morwen according to GNU Free Documentation License  
<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.xhtml>



While cooking and serving food is considered women's work, 'yan daudu often describe their other feminine social practices – songs, dances, gestures, clothing and language – as 'play' [*wasa*]. 'Play' accurately reflects the pleasure these practices bring to 'yan daudu and others, but it belies their serious, material consequences. 'Women's talk' [*maganar mata*], for example, is useful for those 'yan daudu who work as intermediaries [*kawalai*] between male patrons and independent women, for by engaging men in flirtatious banter 'yan daudu are often able to make more satisfying, and potentially lucrative, matches. On a more covert basis, moving and talking 'like women' helps some 'yan daudu

attract their own friends, sex partners and patrons. These benefits are mitigated, however, by the material ways 'yan daudu are made to suffer: they are regularly harassed and ostracized for their alleged immorality, and subject to abuse at the hands of police and young male hooligans, who can assault, rape, steal or extort money from them with impunity.

Nigeria - a member of OPEC - is rich with oil and other resources, but 'yan daudu, like other Nigerians, are overwhelmingly poor and illiterate, and they suffer from the economic deterioration wrought by years of corruption and mismanagement by politicians, military dictators, businessmen, multinational corporations and international lenders.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the impoverishment caused by this corruption, 'yan daudu and karuwai are often scapegoated for it - accused of conspiring with corrupt 'big men' [*manyan mutane*] who use their ill-gotten wealth to satisfy their legendary appetites for sex and other pleasures. From a cosmological standpoint, many Hausa Muslims believe their collective suffering is God's punishment for disobeying Him, and Muslim leaders commonly blame karuwai and 'yan daudu for promoting such disobedience. In the last half of the twentieth century, if not earlier, Northern Nigerian states, emirates and municipalities periodically enacted morality campaigns similar to the ones that accompanied the recent adoption of Shari'a; most of my 'yan daudu acquaintances had been arrested or worse at some time or other.<sup>6</sup> What was different in 2000 was that these campaigns were not confined to a particular territory or jurisdiction, and they did not quickly dissipate; rather, they constituted a broad, and seemingly more durable, movement to construct a Northern Nigerian public - a kind of nation, often termed simply *Arewa* ['the North'] - supposedly unified by its adherence to orthodox Islam.

While 'yan daudu have been subject to both official and unofficial persecution for at least several decades, with the adoption of Shari'a they became even more vulnerable. Why have 'yan daudu been targeted? How, in the face of these and other challenges (including poverty and HIV/AIDS) have 'yan daudu's social networks managed to survive? What do 'yan daudu's experiences tell us about gender and sexuality, culture and nationalism, religion and power in Northern Nigeria, in other postcolonial societies, and in the contemporary world at large? As this book will show, the answers to these questions lie to a great extent in the ways 'yan daudu use language, their bodies, and other media to 'play,' as they put it, with the boundaries of what it means to be male and female. For better and for worse, 'yan daudu attract the attention of many Hausa Muslims because, in the time since Nigeria received its independence from Great Britain in 1960, Islamic norms of gender and sexuality have come to be seen as symbols of Northern Nigerian culture - a culture that some people imagine is threatened by, and in competition with, other parts of Nigeria and the Judeo-Christian West.<sup>7</sup> Islamic reformists' ideas about how 'good' Muslim women and men should talk, dress and act are a central element of these norms, and it is to these ideologies that many people refer when they condemn 'yan daudu as 'bad' Muslims and 'worthless people' [*mutanen banza*].<sup>8</sup>

This book describes 'yan daudu's social practices as claims to and performances of *cultural citizenship*. The concept is similar to what is often called 'identity,' but I use it here to emphasize certain things. First, as defined in political theory, the concept of 'citizen' is defined in opposition to other social actors who do not enjoy full citizenship rights because of their age, gender, caste, race, disability, or other forms of embodied social difference. 'Citizenship' thus emphasizes the hierarchical nature of social constructions of identity, and the negotiations and conflicts that inevitably

take place over who can do what, where, when, with whom and with what resources. Second, while legal citizenship is defined with respect to political units (states), 'cultural citizenship' calls attention to the fact that identities are embedded within particular social fields and institutions, including religion, commerce, work and leisure. Collectively, these (non-state) social fields are known in political theory as 'civil society' and in communication theory as the 'public sphere.'<sup>9</sup> Third, the term 'cultural' reminds us that participation in social life is not solely a matter of power relations, but also needs to be understood in terms of aesthetics, emotions and beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

'Cultural citizenship' thus refers to the things different people do in their day-to-day lives (as well as the things they don't or can't do), and the effects their actions have for them and for others.<sup>11</sup> These effects can be understood at various scales of social and spatial organization, from small-scale 'communities of practice' such as households, workplaces and neighborhoods, where social interactions are often face-to-face,<sup>12</sup> to large-scale 'imagined communities' such as nations, religions, political movements, classes, genders and races.<sup>13</sup> As an intermediate level of social-geographical organization, cities provide a focal point for empirical research and theorizing that link these smaller and larger scales.<sup>14</sup> Insofar as participation in the public sphere is constrained by and reproduces differences of gender or sexuality, we can speak of *sexual citizenship* as an integral aspect of cultural citizenship.<sup>15</sup>

As a linguistic anthropologist, I am especially attentive to the importance of language as both a medium of social participation and an object of criticism and control. At the same time, I am mindful that language is one of many

media that human beings use to fashion and transform the relationships, communities and institutions that are meaningful to them. With respect to 'yan daudu, this book explores linguistic and bodily performances - 'masculine' and 'feminine,' playful and serious - that challenge the arguments of Islamic reformists, African nationalists and others who insist that 'Islam' or 'African culture' is inherently hostile to, or devoid of, gender and sexual minorities. I also aim to show how 'yan daudu's citizenship claims challenge the arguments of Western-educated scholars and activists who assume that 'modern' and 'global' constructions of gender and sexuality are inevitably based on Euro-American models.

## **Who are 'Yan Daudu?**

When I describe 'yan daudu as 'feminine men' to people from the USA and other Western societies, I am often asked, "Are they gay?" The answer is not straightforward. In the earliest days of my research, when all I knew about 'yan daudu was what other people had written or said about them, I imagined I might, as a gay man, be able to become involved in their largely hidden social world. I was intrigued the first few times that I saw 'yan daudu strolling and dancing at nightclubs and outdoor parties, and could not help but compare these images to gay life at home. Although subsequent events forced me to reconsider, but not to reject outright, the naive idea that 'yan daudu were men with whom I could communicate on the basis of a shared sexuality, my interactions with them introduced me to a thriving social world of men who acknowledged and acted upon their sexual attraction to other men. These men comprise what could arguably be called a Hausa homosexual community, though their social life differs in important ways from gay life in the West.