

Allah Made Us: Sexual Outlaws in an Islamic African City. By Rudolf Pell Gaudio. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2009, pp. 235. ISBN 978-1-4051-5252-5 (Paper Back).

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Islamic societies in Africa are characterised by some distinct features. Special consideration of gender and sexuality on the basis of Islamic principles forms a major part of such features. It is, therefore, worrying to discover some trends of homosexuality and prostitution in any of such societies. Rudolf Pell Gaudio in his book derived from his doctoral dissertation, *Allah Made Us: Sexual Outlaws in an Islamic African City*, engaged in an ethnographic exploration of an Islamic African city to analyse the existence of homosexuality and prostitution in an Islamic African society. Adopting Kano, an historical and popular city in Nigeria and West Africa as his case study, his major aim was to study gender and sexual minorities in the light of homosexuality among men in an Islamic African society. Being a linguist anthropologist, he paid much emphasis on the usage of language as a means to foster the practice of homosexuality and also as a measurement of its criticism and control in the city.

In achieving his objective, he divides the book into seven major chapters. The first chapter which also serves as the introductory part of the book explains the author's motivation to embark on such project in a supposedly conservative Islamic environment. In the chapter, he also attempts to define basic words mostly in the Kano Hausa language, being employed in the body of his study. Chief among them is '*yan daudu*, meaning "feminine men" to identify the homosexuals and describe their social characteristics in the society (p.9). According to him, this group of men represents the "Hausa homosexual community" with a social practice clearly different from the gay life in the West. Furthermore, he attempts a connection of the social practices of '*yan daudu* with the concept of "cultural citizenship." Cultural citizenship is defined by him as "the things different people do in their day-to-day lives, and the effects of their actions for them and for others" (p.8).

In the second chapter of his book, he engages in an historical analysis of the emergence of '*yan daudu*' to give an account of the individuals involved in homosexuality, their location and social engagements, and their rejection and advancement over the course of time in Kano city. The great Jihad of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio is given reference to as a precursor for the understanding of Kano as a Hausa society historically founded on the Islamic principles of Shari'ah. The foregoing also explains the historical precedent of giving a proper definition for gender relations in Kano. The society generally perceives the practice of homosexuality as a spirit-induced endeavour by men who suffers from mental defections. In the period of colonialism, the British and Hausa Muslim leaders that benefited from the indirect rule system in Northern Nigeria shared a commonality of abhorring noticeable tendencies of homosexuality in the Northern region. This was founded on the general rejection of homosexuality in the British society during the period and the strong Christian background of the British colonisers. In other parts of the chapter, he content analysed an old poem written by "Baba Karo" to suggest the existence of homosexuals and their characteristics in Old Kano (p.40). He also analysed letters written in national dailies suggesting the rejection of homosexuality in the period of Northern Nigerian nationalism (pp.44-48).

The third chapter of the book is devoted to the author's physical engagement with the '*yan daudu*' in Kano. By this he aimed at surveying the lives of the '*yan daudu*' in the city and their reasons for taking to such sexual behaviour in order to describe their identity and practices. As narrated to him, the experiences of his respondents (given pseudonyms to avoid social stigma) reinforce the belief in some quarters that the act of homosexuality is caused by economic reasons in the Hausa society. Many of his respondents represent the lower class of the social strata of the society and hence generally link their socio-economic condition with their option for homosexuality. Furthermore, their experiences lend credence to the fact that homosexuality is far from the nature of man but rather an acquired behaviour that is generated over time in a particular environment (p.65). It was also discovered within the Hausa setting that a *dan daudu* (singular version of '*yan daudu*') has to move away from his kinfolk to be able to publicly display himself more as a

“woman”. Thus, migration forms a major feature of the practices of ‘*yan daudu*’ in Kano. They also form alternative kinships among their community while giving themselves in-group terms with feminine ascriptions such as “mother,” “daughter” and “girlfriend.”

Chapter four is more concerned with the language and terms adopted as means of interaction among the ‘*yan daudu*’. In the chapter, the author explores the genres of speech being employed by them to conceal their acts in the public and also identify themselves. The genres include *habaici* and *yaren harka*. The *habaici* consists of “insults and innuendo” to conceal words with distasteful meanings in the public, while the *yaren harka* or the *harka* dialect is usually a slang adopted within themselves to convey messages peculiar to their sexuality. Chapter five explores one of the major characteristics of the ‘*yan daudu*’ with respect to the Islamic faith. This involves their way of using humour to deal with their religion with their employment of different words. Apart from this, the chapter also discusses the gap between the Islamic precepts of morality and the daily lives of Muslims including those in Saudi Arabia with respect to sex.

Chapters five and six which serve as the final two chapters present media representations of ‘*yan daudu*’ in Kano and the societal response to the act. In chapter five, two films recorded on ‘*yan daudu*’ were the focus of the author. The response to the films was diverse in Kano. Judging from the commercial success of one of the films (*Ibro ‘yan daudu*), some groups perceived it as a mixture of entertainment and message that addresses the issue of “gender ambiguity” in the society. While others especially the “Islamists” condemn the film on the basis that it promotes immorality in the society. Furthermore, in the same chapter the author content-analysed the texts of both films in terms of their speech contents and concluded that the films are produced to subdue other ideologies, most notably that which concerns ‘*yan daudu*’ and make superior the ideology of Islamic Northern Nigeria. In the same vein, the sixth chapter presents media exposé of the trend of homosexuality in Kano in recent times and national and international responses to it. The series of headlines and news report of the events which included “same sex weddings” were seriously debated and condemned in Nigeria. As a result of

these reports, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights (IGLHRC) expressed their interest in providing adequate support for them. The author, therefore, concludes that homos may continue to find themselves being segregated and excluded from the society given their inability to publicly display themselves and also their feeling of “shame” in the sight of their God.

The originality of the study derived from the commitment of Gaudio to the research is commendable. In addition, the simplicity displayed in his manner of writing makes the book light for readers. This will increase its reception and accessibility to all manners of readers, not necessarily the academics only. However, many shortcomings are observed in the study conducted by Gaudio. First, the author fails to establish in concrete terms the factors responsible for the existence of homosexuality in Kano as an Islamic African city. He lends credence to the fact that homosexuality is an acquired behaviour on the basis of his discussion with the *‘yan daudu*, yet he left his readers in the dark on the origin of the act in Kano and what causes its advancement in the city. He mentioned economic reasons in the third chapter, but the question remains why homosexuality is the most available option for his subjects given the fact that others in the same condition opted for other engagements (legal or illegal). In consideration of the above, one would have expected a connection of colonialism and modern globalisation with the emergence and advancement of homosexuality in Kano. As a linguist anthropologist, the author ought to have shown how language contact at both periods facilitated homosexuality in Kano.

Second, the author confines his study to the lower class of the Hausa society in Kano. As a result of this weakness in his chosen subjects, he has failed to adequately give an account of *‘yan daudu* in Kano because the elites of the region are also involved in homosexuality. While he acknowledges this fact by quoting *Al-Mizan*, one of the newspapers, that “there were corrupt ‘big men’ who supposedly use their political influence to support *‘yan daudu* and protect them from punishment” (p.176), he failed to consider this group of men in the study. On this account, Gaudio’s description of *‘yan daudu* in Kano may be deficient and not totally represent an analysis of the trend in the city.

Third, the author also fails to adequately show the language used as a form of condemnation of the act in Kano. He was only able to give an account of the poems and letters written in earlier times in the city while leaving out what constitutes the language of condemnation employed generally in the society in modern times. As genres of speech were presented among the '*yan daudu*' in his study, he ought to have also presented some genres of speech adopted in the society to condemn such acts as he also owns up to the fact that homosexual tendencies are strictly abhorred in Kano. Upon investigation, some words such as *direba baya* (bottom driver), *dan sunuka* (snooker player) and *mekaniken bitil* (mechanic with specialty in Volkswagen beetle car), were discovered as special dialects used in the society against them which are not easily decipherable by everybody including the '*yan daudu*'.

Apart from the above, the author as a researcher fell victim of the demerits of the methodology he adopted for his research. Being a participant observer and a gay himself as he confessed, he was engrossed in the act itself rather than his research in the course of his study. The aforesaid is noticed in the fourth chapter where the researcher himself developed a sense of jealousy when his "girlfriend" or "subject" ignored him and left him on two occasions without prior information of his whereabouts. He flared up and in his words he said, "I barked and proceeded to pour out a stream of complaints and accusations about how insulted I felt" (p.109). This and more in the book would probably have affected the conclusions of his research.

Gaudio should not be criminalised by the Muslim community for his exposé of the trends of homosexuality in an Islamic society. Rather his work should be subjected to a critical survey and seen as clarion call to address a dangerous trend gradually surfacing among Muslims especially in Kano and Northern Nigeria. Though with a different intention, he has been able to provide clues on the activities of the homosexuals among Muslims in Kano for policy makers and academics to address.