

Sharia Reforms, *Hisbah*, and the Economy of Moral Policing in Nigeria¹

Musa Ibrahim
abbadanauta@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the ambiguous values that guide and sustain livelihood practices and everyday struggles of different classes of people in the context of contemporary Sharia reforms, introduced in Nigeria at the turn of the 21st century. It specifically analyzes the economic impact of the *Yan Hisbah* (moral police) in Kano in Nigeria, who enforce Islamic moral values in the economy. While the Sharia reformers promise economic prosperity in the face of allegedly failed secular government and economic systems, their interventions come under sustained criticism. Muslim subjects argue that the activities of the *Yan Hisbah* are limiting economic opportunities and development. They also criticize the *Yan Hisba* Sharia moral project as an economy thriving in an ‘immoral’ economy that it seeks to correct. The essay shows that moral economies in the context of state, religious reform, and capitalism are not easy to implement.

Keywords: Sharia reforms, *Hisbah*, moral policing, moral economy, Nigeria

Introduction

When Nigeria was transitioning to democratic rule at the turn of the millennium, a gubernatorial aspirant and former banker, Ahmad Sani Yarima promised to implement Sharia reforms in the Zamfara state to address the econom-

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ic challenges in his constituency. In campaign rallies, Yarima promised to reform the Zamfara state's legal, economic, and social systems in alignment with the Sharia. In an interview with *Tell Magazine*, Yarima stated:

In any town I went to, I first started with *kabbara*, which is chanting Allahu Akbar [Allah is Great] thrice. Then I always said, 'I am in the race not to make money, but to improve on our religious way of worship, and introduce religious reforms that will make us get Allah's favour. And then we will have abundant resources for development' (Ostein 2007:vii).

Similarly, Malam Ibrahim Shekarau (2003-2011) was elected governor of the Kano State on a promise that his regime would be based on Islamic moral and economic principles where equity, justice, and prosperity would prevail. During his campaign speeches, he often referenced the time of Caliph Umar bin Khattab (d. 644) as an ideal Islamic system where ordinary people's welfare was a government priority. Both pro-Sharia politicians and Sunni '*ulamā*' (henceforth called Islamists) in Nigeria criticized the secular politics and capitalist economic system as the cause of poverty and hardship in Nigeria. They therefore promised to introduce a religious reform that would use the seemingly abundant resources for development for alternative political and economic practices.

People across twelve states in Northern Nigeria voted Islamists into power on their undertaking to improve their welfare and address material and social inequalities. As Ostien captured:

The expectations of the people were high; the support was total and absolute in the belief that Sharia would quickly bring about the much-needed security, social and economic justice and morality that have eluded the society for too long. It was also firmly believed that corruption in all facets of life including nagging delays in judicial proceedings would soon come to an end (Ostien 2007, Vol. 1:x).

When the Islamists were voted into power, they turned to readily available economic tools at their disposal like *zakat* (religious taxes) and *waqf* (Islamic endowment) institutions. In particular, the Sharia-compliant states took over the privately-run Islamic charity organizations. However, their efforts failed

to make a meaningful economic impact. However, they were more successful at resuscitating the institution of *Hisbah* to police public morality. Whereas the impact of *zakat* and *waqf* reforms were barely felt by ordinary people, state institutionalized *Hisbah* made a significant difference in their lives.

This essay focuses on the *Hisbah* moral policing of urban and social spaces that came under sustained criticism. Many Muslims opposed the campaign to introduce moral values in economic activities because of their negative impact on economic opportunities and development. Moreover, the *Yan Hisbah* were criticized for their economy that thrived in an ‘immoral’ economy that it was seeking to correct. The debate about livelihoods, dissent, and friction between the reformers (Islamists) and the public shows that moral economies are not easy to implement at the intersection of state, capitalism, and religious reforms.

On Moral Economies and Economy of Moral Policing

Scholars consider moral economies as an organized field of values where economic practices are embedded within moral obligations and social norms (cf. Olivier de Sardan 1999; Tripp 2006; Langegger 2015). Influenced by the work of Bourdieu (1986) on cultural production, some pay attention to legitimate and illegitimate cultural production and its marketing practices as part of the moral economy (Fassin 2009; Palomera & Vetta 2016). Didier Fassin introduces a helpful distinction between the moral economy versus the economy of moral values that focuses on ‘the production, distribution, circulation, and use of moral feelings, emotions and values, norms and obligations in the social space’ (Fassin 2009:1257).

While following Fassin on the economy of morals, the essay is also grounded in Zsófia Hajnal’s conceptualization of moral economy that ‘aims to redefine economics as we know it today, by adding the moral factor to its implications’ (Hajnal 2021:64). In other words, the critical point often highlighted about moral economies is the ‘rational selflessness in its mechanisms’ (Hajnal 2021:64). By these definitions, any political and economic reform that creates or promotes imbalances and unfairly limits the economic opportunities of some people, do not qualify to carry the ‘moral’ prefix. In other words, to add the ‘moral’ factor to any form of economic reform, is to remove unfair limitations and undue advantages. This understanding ‘empha-

sizes the finite nature of humankind's resources, the interests of the community beside the interests of the individual, takes into account the needs of future generations' (Hajnal 2021:63).

In the context of religion and moral economies, Holger Weiss observes that an Islamic economy discourse 'became the cornerstone of the argumentation of the various Islamist and other critical scholars, who rejected both the Western Capitalist and the Socialist models' (Weiss 2002:9). However, Charles Tripp (2006) has shown that Muslim reformists who have openly opposed capitalism, have become part of its framework. This is what happened in Nigeria. Due to the dominance of capitalist practices, Islamists set up their reform agenda as an alternative to the failure of the political and economic systems. However, as I will show, they could not completely free themselves from it.

The contrasting notions of the 'economy of morals' over against 'moral economies' are useful in analyzing *Hisbah* as a moral reformation tool. The 'economy of moral policing' refers to the politics and manipulation of values for the wellbeing of a small but powerful group of religious activists and politicians while unfairly restricting the economic wellbeing of a significant section of the population, thereby becoming an 'immoral economy' of sorts. The economy of moral policing serves as a useful analytical frame of how the critique of the religious campaign to introduce moral values shows that moral policing by the *Yan Hisbah* is thriving in the economy that it aims to criticize. The unfolding dynamic enriches the notion that cultural domination is reproduced and altered through the manipulation of values (Bourdieu 1986). This essay offers a case study that contributes to the understanding of religion and moral economy discourse – that not all moral projects are consistent with a moral economy.

***Hisbah* and the Economy of Moral Projects**

The Arabic term *Hisbah* can be translated with 'examination' or 'verification'. It is a concept that denotes one of the structures established to ensure the observance of Sharia moral conduct in public life. According to Baker (2008:86), '[*hisbah*] is to Shari'a what the police is to any government'. When Kano was declared a Sharia-compliant state in 2000, some activists formed Kano *Hisbah* as a religious organization run by a committee of trust-

tees (Adamu 2008; Olaniyi 2011; Ibrahim 2020). In Northern Nigeria, those who work in the *Hisbah* organization are called *Yan Hisbah* (*muhtasibuun*) in Hausa. In 2003, Governor Ibrahim Shekarau (2003-2011) transformed the Kano *Hisbah* into a state agency by using Section 38, sub-section 1 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Nigeria 1999:18): ‘Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance’.

The Shekarau administration appropriated this legal provision and passed the Kano State *Hisbah* Law. Kano *Hisbah* became a government institution (Yusufari 2004) with a new name, Kano State *Hisbah* (KSH). The creation of KSH allowed thousands of volunteers to become public workers under the state government payroll. It led to the mass employment of people with religious training and activist backgrounds to manage the moral reform project.

Akin to the Nigerian Police Force, the organizational structure of KSH is very elaborate. The State *Hisbah* Command is the highest body headed by a Commandant General:

- I. The Operation Department has 13 units headed by a Deputy Commander General. These include patrol, training and medical, general complaints, sentry, ICT, monitoring and evaluation, intoxicant, and anti-*Bara* (anti-street begging) units. This department is generally responsible for field activities of *Yan Hisbah*, such as the surveillance of public places, the enforcement of Sharia canons, and the arresting of suspected violators.
- II. The Intelligence and Crime Detection Department is responsible for intelligence gathering and works with the Operation Department to prevent crimes and arrest suspects.
- III. The Da’wa Department organizes preaching sessions and similar events that invite people to Islam or reawaken them.
- IV. The Guidance and Counselling Department is responsible for settling social disputes such as marital, family, intra-religious, communal, and debt.
- V. The Enlightenment Department informs people about the activities of the *Hisbah* in the state.

- VI. The Special Services Department conducts tasks considered ‘special’, or anything that might arise that *does* not fall under the scope of any of the seven other departments, such as humanitarian services.
- VII. The Women’s Department comprises all women *Hisbah* Corps replicating the works in the previously mentioned departments.

On the second level, Kano State has 44 local government administrative areas divided into zones. There are three Zonal *Hisbah* Commands in Kano with similar structures to the State Command in each zone. On the third level, there is a Local Government *Hisbah* Command in each of the 44 local government areas that make up the state. Each local government command has a structure like that of the state and zonal commands. The fourth and fifth tiers of KSH structures continue at village and community levels.

The KSH Law describes *Yan Hisbah* as a Justice of Peace Corps (Olaniyi 2009), which is recognized as a civil group in the secular constitution. This allows KSH to employ and train members, who then earn a salary to augment their income. According to the Assistant Commandant General of KSH, Nasiru Isa, the organization has among its members ‘*‘ulamā*’, health workers, carpenters, auto mechanics, technicians, and people from other different professions’ (Interview Nasiru Isa 2014). The officials have different educational qualifications, including ‘academic degrees, *alarammomi* (those who memorized Quran by heart), and *Malamai* (*‘ulamā*’ and madrassah teachers), learned in various Islamic fields’ (Interview Nasiru Isa 2014). What brings these people together as *Yan Hisbah*, is their commitment to implement Sharia reforms.

The *Hisbah* has 13 major schedules of duty outlined in the 2007 Kano *Hisbah* Law No. 4, section 7, subsection 4. Since the first five are more relevant to my study, I paraphrase them here:

- I. *Hisbah* adherents should operate in line with the approved services in complimenting police and other law enforcement agencies in preventing vices, apprehending culprits, and charging them before the appropriate court of law.
- II. It encourages Muslims to unite under the basic principles of Islam and uphold justice and equality, as well as to enjoin one another to do good and forbid evil in all its facets.
- III. It encourages people to give out charity and financial assistance in order to improve the welfare of the less fortunate fellow Muslims.

- IV. It prevents Muslims from taking interest, usury, hoarding, and business speculations i.e., buying or selling items that one does not possess at the time of the transaction.
- V. It encourages the giving out of *zakat* and its distribution to the appropriate groups in the society (Daurawa 2022:13).

While there are other formal functions of *Hisbah*, such as mediating disputes between people, traffic control, securing places of worship, ensuring a clean environment, and promoting peace in the society, items two to three above are directly related to the moral economy through wealth redistribution. As the moral project grows, so does the number of *Yan Hisbah* civil servants. By 2015, there were over 10,000 *Yan Hisbah* in Kano on the monthly government payroll (Interview Aminu Daurawa 2015). In this regard, there is a huge economy in the *Hisbah*. The economy of *Hisbah* as a moral reform project has changed the welfare of thousands of families through additional and stable incomes.

***Hisbah*: Limiting the Economy**

The public supported the initial Sharia reforms based on the promise that they would counter poverty, crime, corruption, and moral decadence. Since economy and religion are intertwined in political Islam, the aim of the Sharia reform was to tackle ungodly economic and social practices. In other words, addressing social and economic inequalities within the society would increase religiosity and bring people closer to Allah. However, two decades into the Sharia reform implementation, the Islamists were far from fulfilling their promises. While unemployed people are no longer convinced that *zakat* and charity institutions (as administered by the Sharia regimes) would improve their wellbeing, low-income earners and some professionals started agitating for a fair playground as a means of achieving economic prosperity under the Sharia regimes. This disenchantment with the *Hisbah* was based on their encounters with the *Yan Hisbah*'s moral project and became more pronounced with the realization that the Sharia project promoted a particular economy of morals, and not the moral economy that they promised.

I use two case studies to show how *Hisbah*'s moral policing limits economic opportunities and threatens the livelihood of some of its subjects, a

situation that has been the cause of debates, friction, and dissent between the *Yan Hisbah* and the Muslim public.

Filmmaking

One sector that has proven economically fertile for young Nigerians is the popular culture industry. Camera operators who lost their jobs in the public broadcasting sector due to the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), became private video producers of events and ceremonies, using the personal low-tech hand-held video cassette recording (VCR) camera. Drama groups started inviting camera operators to record their performances on video home system (VHS) cassettes for sale to people who could afford VHS players. Due to its profitability, many people were attracted to the craft, and Nollywood, the Nigerian video film industry, emerged. The new popular video culture developed simultaneously across the whole of Nigeria. However, because of cultural differences between the regions, a specific Hausa Muslim video film industry developed in the north and distinguished itself from the Southern Nigerian films. Also, a large Yoruba Muslim population in the South-west and films in the Yoruba language are influenced by both Christianity and Islam (Ibrahim 2022). Although people often call the general Nigerian film industry Nollywood, people in the northern Hausa Muslim cinema prefer to call themselves Kannywood (McCain 2012; Jedlowski 2011; Ibrahim 2018, 2019). The first successful commercial Kannywood video film, *Turmin Danya* (*The draw*), was produced in 1990 by Salisu Galadanci (McCain 2012).

Kannywood leadership estimated that the industry is a source of livelihood for about one million people (Interview Abdul-Aziz Ezet 2017). This comprises the people in the core Kannywood industry and the jobs it generates through cinemas, viewing centers, downloading centers, advertisement, distributors, street vendors, musicians, dancers, entertainment centers, writers, magazine publishers, poster printers, and satellite TV companies and their workers (Interview Abdul-Aziz Ezet 2017). The Kannywood industry has contributed significantly to the emergence of a middle-class among Muslims who have subsequently invested in other sectors such as advertisement and the cosmetic and fashion industries. They are proud of displaying their wealth physically and on social media.

In June 2016, the Nigerian Federal Government announced its intention of establishing an 'Ultra-Modern Film Village' in Kofa Town, Kano State (Lere 2016). The aim, as explained by the then Member Federal House

of Representatives representing Kofa/Bebeji constituency, Abdulmumin Jibrin, was to create more jobs and enhance incomes by providing state-of-the-art film facilities and equipment. While the filmmakers were happy with the development, Islamic clerics waged intensive and coordinated campaigns against the proposed project. They accused the federal government of a conspiracy to undermine Islam and an attempt to promote moral degradation among Muslim youth (Sahara Reporters 2016). While the film village project had to be suspended and subsequently converted into a Juma'at mosque and market stalls, it reignited debates between a section of the Muslim youth and the Islamists about how the Sharia reform project truncates development and limits opportunities.

Most *'ulamā'*s in Kano saw Muslim filmmakers as cultural corruptors and promoters of immorality². Not long after the Sharia project was launched, the *Yan Hisbah* began to police local film shooting sites and arrest people for violating Islamic norms (Ibrahim 2017). In 2005, for example, while being on a surveillance mission, *Yan Hisbah* arrested a crew of Muslim filmmakers shooting a film inside an uncompleted skyscraper³. Taken to the KSH office, Aminu Bala Mai-lalle, the producer and co-director of the film, was accused of violating newly approved Islamic moral codes in Kano State. Mai-lalle mentioned that the then Commandant General of KSH, Shaykh Yahaya Farouk Chedi (d. 2010) and his deputy, Ustaz Abubakar Rabo gave him a pen and a paper and asked him to write an undertaking, saying that he has repented from his sins and would henceforth cease to be a filmmaker. Startled by their request, Mai-lalle asked for what sin he should repent, and why he should quit a profession that he loves and in which he invested much money. The *Hisbah* leaders replied, 'It [filmmaking] is *kufr* [disbelief or apostasy]'. According to Mai-lalle, the basis for their argument was that he brought to

² Some *'ulamā'* such as Shaykh Abdulwahab Abdallah, Shaykh Bazallah Nasir Kabara, Shaykh Sidi Attahiru Sokoto, and Shaykh Abdurrahman Abu Abdallah expressed the same concern in separate interviews with the author in Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto between 2014 and 2018.

³ The film was *Bakar Ashana*, which was about the menace of prostitution among Muslims in Northern Nigeria. While the filmmaker was first doing it as an investment, he also mentioned that he was making a moral intervention by sensitizing people about the increasing rate of prostitution as well as warning them of its consequences (Interview Aminu Bala Mai-lalle 2014).

gether men and women that are non-*Mahram*⁴ in one place as actors, in violation of the moral reforms implemented in the state (Interview Aminu Bala Mai-lalle 2014).

Mai-lalle then asked them, ‘If I quit filmmaking, what do you want me to do [for subsistence]?’ (Interview Aminu Bala Mai-lalle 2014). Without hesitation, the *Hisbah* leaders replied that ‘they would give me a job as *Dan-Hisbah* so that I would be useful to my religion’ (Interview Aminu Bala Mai-lalle 2014). Mai-lalle pondered that if he joined *Hisbah* under the Kano State public service, he would be paid a paltry sum between 8,000 and 18,000 Nigerian Naira (105 USD) per month⁵. He compared it with his investment and return in the Kannywood industry. He also thought that his withdrawal from the film industry would affect dozens of people directly working under him, and several others indirectly connected to his business. As a result, he rejected the *Hisbah* chiefs’ offer. According to Mai-lalle, employing dozens of people and making films that address societal issues are better contributions to the economic and social life of the people than joining *Hisbah*. Realizing the *Hisbah* chiefs’ resolve to stop him from filmmaking, Mai-lalle reminded them that although they were acting on behalf of the Kano State government, their proposal violates his fundamental human right and freedom to choose a profession as enshrined in the secular constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Interview Aminu Bala Mai-lalle 2014).

In 2007, a video scandal involving a popular Kannywood actress, Maryam Hiyana, emerged, showing her intimate relationship with her boyfriend, Usman Bobo, a Lagos-based businessman. Three years earlier, Maryam Hiyana visited Bobo in Lagos who recorded their intimate relationship on his smartphone in a hotel room. In 2007, when Bobo’s mobile phone was faulty, he took it for repair. The technician discovered the recorded clip and without authorization shared the video on social media. Although Maryam Hiyana acted as an individual and her boyfriend had nothing to do with Kannywood, the Kannywood industry was accused of ‘producing a blue film’

⁴ *Mahram* is a Sharia term describing any of a woman’s close relatives, including her father, brother, real uncle, son, and father-in-law. She can freely interact with these people and should not be particular about her dress, except to the extent that it should be within the limits which decency permits. A woman is prohibited from relating to any man outside the above categories, except under strict restrictions.

⁵ The exchange rate was based on the time of the research in 2014.

(McCain 2013). For this reason, the Kano State government, backed by *‘ulamā’*, banned the Kannywood industry.

In response to such incidents, the filmmakers resolved to defend their means of livelihood at all costs. They turned to religious and non-religious laws, as well as economic discourses to confront the ban on filmmaking, until it was lifted six months later. The filmmakers exploited religious differences, particularly divergent theological views between Sufi and Salafi scholars. For example, Salafis rejected filmmaking on the basis that it was a *bid‘a* (hateful invocation) that promoted immorality in society. In response, prominent Sufi Shaykhs such as Yusuf Ali countered that film is not *bid‘a* because there are instances where angels and prophets acted in drama-like manners to communicate Allah’s messages to the people. He further argued: ‘Kannywood filmmakers are doing the same thing as the *Yan Hisbah* – commanding right and forbidding wrong in society as enjoined in the Quran and Sunna – it was only the medium that differs’ (Interview Shaykh Yusuf Ali 2015). Following this interpretation, some filmmakers started explaining that what they do through their films was Islamic exhortation and discharging *Hisbah* roles. A film producer, Aminu Saira, stated:

This religion [Islam] is not for them [Salafi inclined Islamists] alone. It belongs to all of us. Prophet Muhammad enjoined Muslims to be commanding the right and forbidding the wrong. Since there was no restriction on how to do that, one can carry out the command in a way he thinks is appropriate for him. As filmmakers, we are doing it through films (Interview Aminu Saira 2015).

While this dynamic plays out to the advantage of the filmmakers as explained above and in more detail elsewhere (cf. Ibrahim 2017), it also shows how moral claims regarding political, social, and economic reforms are discursive and not exclusive to any particular group.

When I asked Shaykh Aminu Ibrahim Daurawa, the Commandant General of Kano *Hisbah* (2012-2020), about *Hisbah*’s clampdown against Muslim filmmakers and the threat of losing mass jobs created by the Kannywood industry, he responded that *Hisbah* would not condone compromising moral values for people’s subsistence: ‘People do not have to do films to get employed. We have our traditional crafts that have been there for ages, such as carving, weaving, dyeing, tailoring, and many other decent trades and oc-

cupations that our youth should embrace, but not filmmaking’ (Interview Shaykh Aminu Daurawa 2015).

In contrast, Mai-lalle contended that people first needed to live by earning decent incomes to be ‘good Muslims’. According to him, his argument is more relevant in the Nigerian context ‘where the high rate of vices was connected to unemployment and poverty’ (Interview Aminu Bala Mai-lalle 2014). Besides, he claimed that with a stable income, he would represent and promote Islam as a filmmaker in different and ‘even better ways than the *Hisbah* does’ (Interview Aminu Bala Mai-lalle 2014). He explained this in terms of the impact that various charity organizations founded by local filmmakers are making on the welfare of many destitute families.

The above examples show the contradiction between moral economies and the economy of moral policing in the context of the contemporary Sharia reforms in Nigeria. The project of Sharia reformers to enforce moral values regardless of their economic implications contradicted the everyday struggles and expectations of the public. The *Hisbah* leaders were resolute in achieving a morally sound society by opposing professions such as filmmakers.

Fashion Industry

The Nigerian beauty and fashion industries are huge, and despite the absence of statistics, my interlocutors agree that it is among the major sources of employment in Nigeria. With increased funding and staff strength, Kano State *Hisbah*’s influence grew and spread to anything remotely linked to the fashion industry. *Yan Hisbah* arrested young men with supposedly ‘inappropriate’ hairstyles whom they forcefully shaved. In June 2021, Kano State *Hisbah* issued an official statement banning the use of mannequins by fashion designers, tailors, and boutique owners. According to the chief of the Kano *Hisbah*, Shaykh Harun Sani Ibn-Sina, ‘Islam frowns on idolatry. With the head on, it [mannequin] looks like a human being’ (Shaykh Harun ibn Sina 2021; cf. also Orinmo 2021). In addition to idolatry, the mannequins’ female bodies, which show ‘the shape of the breast, the shape of the bottom, is contrary to the teachings of Sharia [Islamic law]’ (Orinmo 2021).

The *Hisbah*’s decision to ban mannequins elicited reactions from people involved in this trade from both religious and economic perspectives. A fashion designer in Kano said that the *Yan Hisbah* were bereft of ideas about Sharia reforms and resorted to sabotaging petty trades engaged by or-

dinary individuals. As a devoted Muslim, he rejected their view about mannequins which contradicted what he had seen in Mecca as a pilgrim. When I asked another informant about the mannequin ban, he retorted:

That is a misplacement of priorities. We are living in a challenging economic condition. As Naira [local currency] rapidly loses its value, the price of commodities is rising by the day. Instead of speaking to the politicians to do the right things that could improve our standard of living, they are busy making irrelevant religious laws that further impoverish people (Interview fashion designer 2021).

While the *Yan Hisbah* were initially determined to enforce the ban and were supported by many clerics through Friday sermons, people in the fashion industry argued that not displaying clothes on mannequins would reduce their attractiveness to passers-by and thus affect their business. As in the film industry, differences among the religious leaders on mannequins became part of the moral discourse. Some Sufi-oriented *‘ulamā’* rejected the imposition of the *Yan Hisbah* views, which they argued were an imposition of hardcore Salafi views against moderate Sufi views. The ban on mannequins was successfully resisted.

In 2021, for the first time in the history of the 44-year-old beauty pageant in Nigeria, hijab-wearing Shatu Garko emerged the winner and was crowned Miss Nigeria. This case of Garko further illustrates the tensions between moral policing and economic opportunities between Islamists and the Muslim public. *Hisbah* Commandant General Harun ibn Sina declared a beauty pageant illegal, and condemned Shatu Garko’s participation. He vowed to interrogate her parents for approving her participation in the pageantry:

It has come to our notice that our children are now coming out to contest for this immoral act which is not acceptable...We investigated and confirmed that the girl called Shatu Garko is from Kano state...Islamically, it is totally forbidden because it is against the teachings and practices of Islam. Immorality is practiced and it [beauty pageant] encourages the female gender to be immoral (Ibrahim 2021).

Several imams sided with the *Hisbah* and delivered Friday sermons condemning Shatu Garko's participation in the 'immoral' and 'illegal' beauty pageant and called for decisive actions to prevent further occurrence. Again, the fashion industry reacted by criticizing *Hisbah* for undermining the economic aspiration of Muslims in the country. They focused on incentives that came with Shatu's success, which was an opportunity to change her life and that of her family. They referred to the 10 million Naira cash prize, a year residency at a luxury apartment, and a brand-new car she has won, as well as other brand ambassadorship opportunities for the newly crowned beauty contest winner.

The two cases of film and fashion industries demonstrated how *Hisbah*'s moral policing limits economic opportunities and threatens the livelihood of some of its subjects. The desperate economic conditions provoked a sharp and practical response from people from all walks of life. Moreover, a debate on the religious justification of the *Hisbah* interventions emerged among the religious leaders, which was also echoed in the public's responses. However, if the *Hisbah* was opposed to the economic aspirations of the film and beauty industries, what was the economy of its moral policing? The public discourse did not take long for this critical issue to emerge.

***Hisbah* and the 'Immoral' Economy**

The experiences with *Hisbah*'s moral project elicited debates about the Sharia reforms and the wellbeing of the majority. The search for answers to these questions led some of my interlocutors to critique the *Hisbah* moral project as a business thriving in an 'immoral' economy. Several filmmakers affected by the moral reform criticized the economic rationalities of *Hisbah*. If the root causes of social vices were unemployment and poverty, why did the regime not tackle these to address their perceived outcomes or consequences? Rather, it foisted an ostensibly public and religious morality on the people – particularly those not dependent on state funding. Many of my interlocutors opined that Sharia reform has created jobs and livelihoods for tens of thousands of citizens in the regime who previously complained of marginalization. To sustain and justify the social value of this state economy, the employees in *Hisbah* must be active in enforcing moral values in other professions.

Sharia Reforms, Hisbah, and the Economy of Moral Policing in Nigeria

My interlocutors and the general public expanded their counter-moral discourse against *Yan Hisbah* by referring to sources of funding for the moral reform project. Under Sharia principles, all business activities and transactions within the capital market should be free from prohibited activities, including those activities deemed doubtful (i.e., *Shubuhah*) (Ahmed, Yahya, Haron, & Mohamed 2020). In February 2022, the Kano State *Hisbah* destroyed approximately four million bottles of assorted beer worth millions of dollars, being confiscated from sellers (Vanguard News Nigeria 2022)⁶. The bottles were crushed into the ground by bulldozers in front of crowds cheering ‘Allahu Akbar’ (*God is great*) (BBC News 2022). In September 2020, Kano *Hisbah* destroyed one million nine hundred and seventy-five thousand bottles of beer which were confiscated within the Kano metropole, whose value was estimated at over N200 million (about \$523,000) (Shuaibu 2020). This destruction has become a regular performance, which the *Hisbah* portray as part of a wider crackdown on ‘immoral behavior’ in the Muslim-dominated regions that adopted Sharia reforms. The head of *Hisbah*, Shaykh Haruna Ibn Sina declared at the ceremony, ‘Kano is a Sharia state and the sale, consumption, and possession of alcoholic substances are prohibited’ (BBC News 2022). Non-Muslim residents, who mostly own the alcoholic beverages businesses and their Muslim sympathizers view this as an example of destroying the economy of the state.

Nigeria operates a federal system of government, and Abuja, which is the capital city, has immense control over income, collection, and distribution. Those incomes are mainly drawn from oil revenues and value-added taxes, collected by the federal government and shared among the federal states. Taxes collected from the manufacture, sales, and consumption of alcohol are among the monies that go to the states and from which the moral reform is funded. In 2019, Nigeria realized \$2.29 billion through alcohol sales (Adebayo 2019).

Some Muslim and non-Muslim Nigerians whose livelihoods are threatened by the *Yan Hisbah*, challenged the economic foundation of *Hisbah*. *Hisbah* officials banned alcohol consumption and invested so much energy in the confiscating and destroying of alcoholic beverages. Still, part of

⁶ There was also a video uploaded by Kano State *Hisba* on their official social media platforms and perused by the author (Vanguard News 2022). The event was also covered by local and international media.

their salaries and offices depended on monies generated from alcohol production, sales, and consumption from other states. The anomaly was revealed when a human rights lawyer, Chief Malcolm Omirhobo sued the Nigerian government and 12 northern states that adopted the Sharia over the allocation of Value Added Tax (VAT) realized from the sale of alcoholic beverages (Onyekwere 2022). He wanted the court to either stop sharing the VAT on alcoholic beverages with those states, or force them to provide a level playing ground for alcoholic business owners⁷.

As the criticisms of the *Hisbah* and its implication for state resources became widespread, some pro-Sharia reform interlocutors responded that their reforms could not tackle all evils simultaneously. They explained that since alcoholism is directly prohibited in the Quran and Sunna, it is their mandate as moral enforcers to ban its transaction and consumption in Kano. The monies related to the alcohol business, being received by the states in implementing the Sharia reforms, are out of their control (Interview Shaykh Abdullahi Danazumi 2020). However, their critics found this response unconvincing and argued that it is all about sustaining their livelihood at the expense of the livelihood of others.

Conclusion

This essay has analyzed the economic impact of Sharia reform policies through the *Yan Hisbah* (moral police), who enforce Islamic moral values in some Nigerian states. During the transition to democratic rule in the late 1990s, Islamists criticized the capitalist economy as the cause of poverty, and promised an alternative economic system based on Sharia reforms that would balance wealth distribution and provide prosperity to ordinary people. When they were elected, reformist attempts to achieve a workable Islamic taxation and income distribution system failed to yield desired results. In Nigeria, the federal government predominantly controls economic policies, and its strategies have been consistently in line with the capitalistic and neoliberal economy.

Two decades into the Sharia reform, the Islamists failed to achieve any significant result in fulfilling their promise of economic prosperity in line with moral values. Their efforts to revitalize existing Islamic charity organi-

⁷ The case is still pending in court.

zations, particularly the *zakat* and *waqf* institutions, failed. On the other hand, Islamists also institutionalized *Hisbah* organizations to enforce Islamic moral values in all aspects of human lives, including economic practices. The *Yan Hisbah* scrutinized the everyday activities of ordinary people in light of Islamic values. Instead of promoting their economic wellbeing, however, the *Yan Hisbah* constrain and stifle their aspirations.

The two cases of filmmaking and fashion industries indicate how a moral economy was difficult to implement at the intersection of religion, state, and capitalism. Based on their lived experiences, some Muslim public not only resisted *Yan Hisbah*'s reform, but responded with a counter-moral discourse that *Hisbah*'s moral policing thrives in the 'immoral' economy of the current Nigerian state. The study has illustrated that the economy of the moral economy could not stand the critical scrutiny of its self-declared moral and economic goals.

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Dr. Musa Ibrahim
Centre for Cultural and African Studies
KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana
Department for the Study of Religions
University of Cape Town
Cape Town
musa.ibrahim@knust.edu.gh
abbadanauta@gmail.com