

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Censorship, citizenship and cosmopolitan unity in Muslim and Christian creative responses to repression in northern Nigeria

Carmen McCain

SOAS University of London, London, UK
Email: cm74@soas.ac.uk

Abstract

Nigeria is often portrayed as having a ‘Muslim north’ and a ‘Christian south’. Such representations oversimplify the complicated interrelationships between the two religious communities and their geographic locations. Similarly, while much has been written on the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria’s Middle Belt region, there has been less scholarly attention to the philosophical and communal relationships between adherents of the two religions in northern Nigeria. I argue that there are parallels in the way in which Hausa-speaking Muslim artists responded to a censorship crisis in Kano State in 2007–11 and in the way in which Hausa-speaking Christian musicians from Nigeria’s north-east responded a few years later to the Boko Haram crisis. I examine Muslim filmmaker Hamisu Lamido Iyantama’s response to the Kano State Censorship Board, alongside Christian musician Saviour Y. Inuwa’s response to Boko Haram. Iyantama and Inuwa both counter repressive forces by expressing parallel understandings of their identities as citizens in the pluralistic state of Nigeria and as righteous members of universal religious communities that emphasize God’s justice in the end times. I argue that these Hausa-language artists present a vision of cosmopolitan unity across ethnicity and religion, as an alternative to the repressive forces of both state censorship and the anarchic violence of Boko Haram.

Résumé

Le Nigeria est souvent décrit comme ayant un Nord musulman et un Sud chrétien. De telles représentations simplifient à l’excès les rapports compliqués entre les deux communautés religieuses et leurs situations géographiques. De même, alors que l’on a beaucoup écrit sur le conflit entre musulmans et chrétiens dans la région Middle Belt du centre du pays, l’attention des chercheurs s’est moins portée sur les relations philosophiques et communales entre adeptes des deux religions dans le nord du Nigeria. L’auteur soutient qu’il existe des parallèles dans la manière dont des artistes musulmans de langue haoussa ont réagi à une crise de la censure dans l’État de Kano entre 2007 et 2011, et dans la manière dont des musiciens chrétiens de langue haoussa du nord-est du Nigeria ont réagi quelques années plus tard à la crise de Boko Haram. Il examine la réponse du cinéaste musulman Hamisu Lamido Iyantama à la commission de censure de l’État de Kano parallèlement à la réponse du

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musicien chrétien Saviour Y. Inuwa à Boko Haram. Iyantama et Inuwa s'opposent tous deux à des forces répressives en exprimant des interprétations parallèles de leur identité en tant que citoyens dans l'État pluraliste du Nigeria et en tant que membres vertueux de communautés religieuses universelles qui soulignent la justice de Dieu à la fin des temps. L'auteur soutient que ces artistes de langue haoussa présentent une vision d'unité cosmopolitaine qui transcende l'ethnicité et la religion, comme alternative aux forces répressives de la censure d'État et de la violence anarchique de Boko Haram.

Introduction

On a trip to Kano in 2006, I sat in a publishing office where a group of writers, actors and other artists involved with both the local Hausa-language publishing industry and the Kannywood Hausa film industry were complaining bitterly about the current administration of then Kano State governor Ibrahim Shekarau. This was a year after the sharia enforcement force, the *hisbah*, had begun to pull women off commercial motorcycles, claiming that riding so close to young men was immoral and immodest. One actor told me that he had passionately supported 'Malam' (teacher), as Shekarau was popularly known, who had campaigned on a platform of more fully implementing sharia law. He had seen him as a humble man who would focus on the rights of the *talakawa*, ordinary people. By 2006, when there seemed to be little improvement in the lives of *talakawa*, he was sorely disappointed in a government that did not seem to be interested in justice as it applied to the poor. Later, I asked a popular author if they supported sharia. 'How can I be a Muslim and not support sharia?' the writer asked. The problem was not, to this creative artist and their colleagues, with sharia law, a legal system that connected northern Nigeria to larger Maliki school ideals of justice, but instead with the hypocritical and unjust way it was being implemented.

Indeed, many Muslim writers and filmmakers had supported the popular calls to reimplement a law that had been practised by the Sokoto caliphate before the advent of colonialism. The popular vision of sharia among many ordinary Muslims was that it would bypass the corrupt Nigerian legal system, right the injustices brought about by colonialism, which had imposed British 'common law' in criminal justice, and bring about justice and order in society. Filmmakers contributed to this narrative. Matthias Krings (2008) writes of a proliferation of 'conversion films' that were released on video for home viewing in the years following sharia implementation. Set in mythic times with storylines that idealize Muslims as righteous models against uncivilized and violent pagans, these films metaphorically capture the debates and controversies of the time.

Yet, as Krings points out, such films were also self-conscious arguments to prove the piety of filmmakers in a public discourse that characterized cinema culture as a corrupting influence on Muslim society. There had been much anxiety about the film industry in the years leading up to sharia implementation. In one sharia implementation report, it was recommended that, in addition to taking action against cinemas, the government should 'with immediate effect close all video houses and shops where drama cassettes are sold'. The concern was that 'these institutions have a great corrupting influence on youth. This is in addition to the fact that they serve as meeting places for criminal elements' (quoted in Ostien 2007: 4). Shortly after sharia law was declared in Kano, in December 2000, the Kano State government announced that 'the

shooting, production, distribution and showing of such films anywhere in the state is prohibited' (Bello 2001). In the same meeting the deputy governor spoke of a ban on 'prostitution, alcoholism, gambling and other immoral acts'. He claimed that these were issues Christian residents of the Sabon Gari 'strangers quarters' agreed were religiously prohibited. When questioned more about Christian support, however, the deputy governor stated that the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) had been asked only 'its views on social vices', not invited 'to approve the government's implementation of sharia'. While Muslim filmmakers and Christian pastors often voiced their opposition to the 'immoral acts' highlighted by the deputy governor, the banning of filmmaking alongside such vices associated the filmmaking community with the 'strangers quarters', implying that they were foreigners and outsiders, not part of Muslim Hausa society. Muslims in the creative industries and Christians were consequently linked together as outsiders who had a say in the legal workings of the state only in as much as they upheld the state's interpretation of sharia implementation.

I have explored elsewhere how filmmakers protested against the 2001 ban and worked with the state to create, instead, a censorship board. I have also written about how a second censorship crisis occurred in 2007 after a Hausa actress was featured in an amateur sex video shot on her boyfriend's mobile phone.¹ Here, I focus on how, during this second censorship crisis from 2007 to 2011, creative artists and their critics/antagonists walked a fine line between the discourses of a national identity with its pluralistic values and individual rights and those of a religious identity with its communal responsibilities to the Muslim ummah. These claims to cosmopolitan citizenship and rights in both the nation and a wider religious community, I argue, are made by both Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria when faced with repressive forces. Indeed, these repressive forces, while often exacerbating conflict, may even push these communities closer together.

First, I examine how the head of the Kano State Censorship Board from 2007 to 2011 used the secular language of bureaucratic reform to explain censorship to the national media, while using the religious language of morality and sharia implementation to explain state censorship on more local platforms. Second, I look at how Muslim artists protesting against censorship respond to the censor, similarly alternating between the use of the secular language of citizens' rights and the religious language of judgement. I focus specifically on the calls for a Nigerian identity in Hamisu Lamido Iyantama's 2012 musical docudrama *Kurkuku* (Prison), which recounts his arrest and imprisonment by the Kano State Censorship Board.² Finally, I show how Christian musicians from the north-east respond to the extremist group Boko Haram through music videos marketed in Jos by using much the same formulation that Muslim artists adopted in their responses to Kano-based censorship. I centre on the music videos of Christian musician Saviour Y. Inuwa in his album *Yan Chibok* (The People of Chibok; 2014) and its sequel *Ni Bana Duniya Ba* (I Am Not of This

¹ See McCain (2013; 2014) and also Adamu (2010; 2014), Krings (2015) and Liman (2009). Ludwig (2008) has studied Christian innovations to work around sharia restrictions.

² *Kurkuku* (Prison), directed by Ahmad Alkanawy and Hamisu Lamido Iyantama, subtitles by Ummul 'Khairi Usman, produced by Iyan-Tama Multimedia, 2012.

World; 2018).³ Although Iyantama is Muslim and Inuwa is Christian, both express parallel understandings – a kind of shared grammar – of their identities as citizens in two frameworks that give them more moral and legal authority than those who persecute them. First, they both claim the constitutional rights they have as citizens in the secular state of Nigeria; and, second, they claim the privileges they gain as righteous members of universal religious communities that emphasize God’s justice in the end times. Finally, they both highlight the strength and support found in interreligious relationships. I argue that these Hausa-language artists pose a vision of cosmopolitan unity across ethnicity and religion as the alternative to the repressive forces of both state censorship and the anarchic violence of Boko Haram, illustrating shared communal sensibilities that are often overlooked in writing about conflict.

I explore these tensions through what I call the politics of exposure,⁴ the contestations in northern Nigerian society over cosmopolitan influences and how they are being exhibited to audiences. Debates about exposure include discourses of judgement that focus on revealing secret sins to a wider public. In the eyes of conservative critics, the Hausa film industry, drawing on influences from India and America and even southern Nigeria, exposes vulnerable communities to ‘corrupting’ influences, such as Bollywood-style dancing or hip-hop attire in videos played in the home. As can be seen in the initial proclamations about the ban on films after sharia implementation, this distrust of film production layers onto much older representations of film culture as synonymous with Western influence and un-Islamic behaviour. Sharia implementation, as Musa Ibrahim (2020) has pointed out, was seen as necessarily disciplining that which was visibly un-Islamic. On the other hand, Hausa artists claim this connection to the world beyond northern Nigeria as evidence of sophistication and knowledge. If they expose their audiences to a wider world, it is often the wider Muslim world. Films regularly feature characters who wear Arab fashion as shorthand for their international Muslim identity, and some films are even set in cities such as Dubai or Medina, where Hausa characters explore their place in the larger global ummah. Moreover, filmmakers often claim that they are educating their audiences about Islam and portraying bad behaviour as a teaching tool. The storylines of the films are frequently didactic: sinful characters are punished and righteous characters rewarded. If the hypocrisies of those who claim to be good Muslims but who are actually corrupt are not exposed, how can society be reformed? This discourse engages with two concepts encoded within popular sayings. First, the popular Hausa prayer ‘*Allah ya rufa mana asiri*’ (May God keep our secrets) points to the importance of privacy in Muslim Hausa society, yet popular artists often point to the day of judgement when every secret will be exposed. As another proverb points out: ‘*Komai nisan dare, gari zai waye*’ (As deep the dark of night, the dawn will break). What is hidden, here, is compared to the darkness of night, while the coming of the light brings a new day. Both the filmmakers and their critics use the language of religion, morality and

³ *Yan Chibok* (People of Chibok), by Saviour Y. Inuwa, video directed by T. M. Douglas, produced by A. Bolki Media Productions, 2014; *Ni Bana Duniya Ba* (I Am Not of This World) (*Yan Chibok 2*), by Saviour Y. Inuwa, video directed by Sam Zera Buba produced by Hill-stream Media Productions, 2018.

⁴ I explore the concept of the politics of exposure in Hausa cultural production, particularly literature, film and music, in my current book project, *God Has Exposed You: politics, secrecy, and contested cosmopolitanisms in Hausa cultural production*.

culture, but whereas the impulse of creative artists is often exploration, questioning and openness to conversation with their audience, their loudest critics tend to proclaim, close down and protect.

Censorship

The censor Abubakar Rabo Abdulkarim (called Rabo by the filmmakers) balanced secular and Islamist discourse in his accusations against the filmmakers. Following the 2007 sex scandal when a private sex video of a popular Hausa actress was leaked, the governor of Kano appointed Rabo, the former deputy commander of the sharia enforcement group the *hisbah*, as head of the Kano State Censorship Board (KSCB). Only the year before, Rabo had been arrested by federal police who charged him and the commander general of the *hisbah* with treason and subversion of the government and with operating 'an unlawful society known as the Hisbah' (Ige 2006; Rabi 2006). Although he had eventually been released and charges of treason dropped (Last 2008: 53) in 2007, he took to 'sanitizing' the film industry with the same zeal he had given to pulling women off motorbikes.

Yet the official releases and Rabo's discussions with the national press are filled with dry bureaucratic language that imitates the language of the 'secular' national government. In Rabo's first press release after being appointed head censor, he suspends film activities in Kano for six months, but there is little talk about religious reasons for the ban. Instead, he writes about tax clearance certificates and required office equipment (Abdulkarim 2007). In a 2009 interview with me, he similarly couched the right of the censorship board to operate in federal constitutional law (McCain 2009). Sounding much like the theorists of third cinema who strove 'to purify the forms of popular expression' (Bakari and Cham 1996: 21), he spoke of 'cultural heritage' and 'societal ideals' and denounced cultural imperialism. 'Culture' rather than religion is given as a major reason for censorship. In fact, when I asked about whether the censorship law was part of sharia, he denied it, claiming (incorrectly) that when the law was implemented in 2001, 'There was nothing like sharia implementation in Kano.'⁵ Thus, he attempts to draw validation for the application of censorship from a kind of universal secular law. In the interview and elsewhere, he argued that the censorship law in a multi-religious state protects Christians and Muslims equally from sacrilegious films.

Rabo was aware of the complex religious and political stage on which he was speaking. Articles and interviews with southern papers or with a Western journalist, even the official publications of the KSCB, seem designed to appeal to secular sensibilities; however, his interaction with northern Nigerian audiences appealed more directly to religious sensibilities. 'Film censorship guidelines' posted on the KSCB website directed that films must 'conform with the tenets of the Islamic Shari'ah and the good norms of our cultural heritage'.⁶ Yet, his interpretation of censorship was harsher than that of his predecessors at the KSCB. Musa Ibrahim claims that Rabo

⁵ In fact, the censorship board was instituted by the Kano State government in 2001 as a measure to allow films to continue being made after they had initially been banned when sharia law was implemented in the state.

⁶ 'Film censorship guidelines' <http://kanocensorsboard.com/LegalTools/FILM_CENSORSHIP_GUIDELINES.pdf>, accessed 23 June 2011.

represented an intolerant Izala perspective on popular culture that had become dominant in the government of Ibrahim Shekarau (Ibrahim 2017: 98). In a 2008 press briefing, he argued that ‘religion, culture and public dignity cannot be compromise [sic] by any good government in the name of Economic interest’, since it is ‘entrusted by our people to this administration which operate within the tenants [sic] of Shari’a legal system’ (Abdulkarim 2008).

The KSCB reported that, from 2007 to 2011, over a thousand people associated with the entertainment industries were arrested.⁷ Most were taken to a mobile court attached to the censorship board, where, often within a few hours and without a lawyer present, they were sentenced to months in prison or given large fines. Although the stated goal of the KSCB was to guard the masses from corrupting influences, Rabo zealously attempted to ‘expose’ the sins of the film industry. In addition to arresting filmmakers and marketers, Rabo travelled around the north, going on radio to warn parents not to let their children read contemporary Hausa novels or watch films. Not only did he characterize filmmakers as sinners, but in the exclusionary political language of indigeneity often used in Nigeria, both he and then Kano governor Ibrahim Shekarau pointed to the non-Kano origin of some of the artists. Shekarau claimed that ‘some of the artistes and producers of the Hausa movies are not indigenes of the state’ (Kwaru 2007: 2).⁸ Just as the initial ban on filmmaking had done, these public statements otherized filmmakers, presenting them as outsiders to Hausa Muslim society, who were, as Rabo told me in an interview, corrupting the ‘clean and respected clan’ of the Hausa-Fulani. On air in the more liberal city of Kaduna, he told radio and television audiences that they should ‘throw them out of Kaduna State in the same way we threw them out of Kano’. The KSCB also took out full-page ads in newspapers reproducing privately taken photographs of Hausa actresses in skimpy clothing that had circulated on the internet. Ironically, the censors were doing the same thing that the filmmakers claimed to do – showing bad behaviour in an attempt to change it. Yet in attempting to ‘expose’ the sins of filmmakers, publishing the photographs in the newspapers exposed even more Hausa speakers to them, seemingly violating the very reasons for which the censorship board had been founded: to guard society from exposure to negative influences.

Cultural producers in northern Nigeria responded to this censorship regime by appealing both to their rights as citizens in a secular state and to the religious tenets of Islam. Ultimately, the interaction with the censorship board seems to have pointed filmmakers outwards to a cosmopolitan unity with other Nigerians and international connections in filmmaking. Kannywood star Ali Nuhu believed that ‘[t]he ban may have been a blessing in disguise’, since Kannywood filmmakers who had ‘never thought of leaving their comfort zone until now’ had their eyes opened to ‘a whole new world of ideas’ (Aminu *et al.* 2008). Similarly, controversial filmmaker Sani Danja said: ‘So for these very unnecessary rules they have set for the actors in Kano, most of

⁷ ‘Kano State Censorship Board progress report for the May 2007 to date’ <<http://kanocensorsboard.com/Publications.htm>>, accessed 23 June 2011.

⁸ While the Nigerian constitution gives rights of citizenship to all Nigerians, states distinguish between ‘indigenes’, whose ancestry is in a certain area, and ‘settlers’, whose families are judged to have migrated to the area in recent generations, in giving certain rights and privileges such as university placement and political representation. The language of indigeneity is thus quite political and is often used in legally ambiguous ways to discriminate against ‘settlers’ (see Madueke 2018).

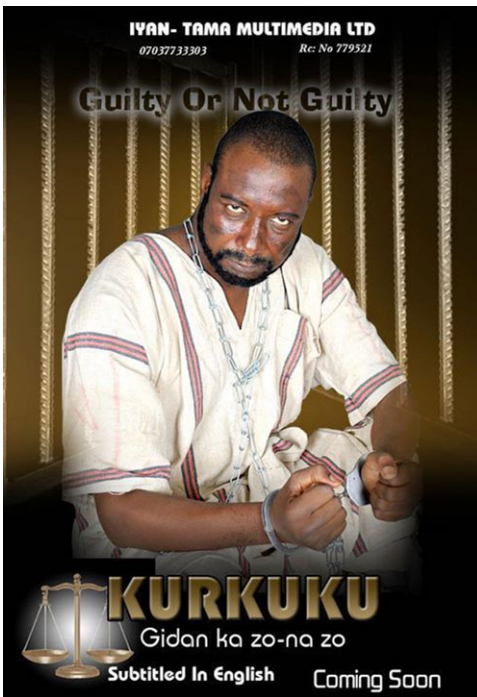


Figure 1. Poster for Iyantama's film *Kurkuku*, a docudrama about his imprisonment by the KSCB. Used by permission of Hamisu Lamido Iyantama.

us have decided to take our talent elsewhere.' He mentioned that they were filming in other places in Nigeria and even Dubai. 'So you can see that we are expanding even outside the shores of Nigeria' (Alhassan and Aliyu 2010: 19). At the same time, many filmmakers began attending professional development workshops in Abuja, Jos and Lagos and going to training seminars in India and the United Arab Emirates. The filmmakers largely attempted to defend themselves through recourse to their identity as Nigerian citizens, who, according to the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), could make and show their films in the thirty-five other states of the nation.

Yet, they also made religiously inflected arguments, defending their identity as Muslims. They claimed that they used their profession to teach audiences about how to live as good Muslims and denounced the hypocrisy of their critics who sought to damage their reputation. Musicians working with the film industry responded to censorship with subversively critical films and fiery songs, which mocked the censorship board and challenged its claim to the moral authority of both sharia law and Nigerian law. One of the most popular was a song called '*Hasbunallahu*', after the prayer for comfort narrated by Ibn Abbas as being first recited by the Prophet Ibrahim in the face of his enemies: '*Hasbunallahu wa ni'mal wakil*', meaning 'God is sufficient, the best disposer of affairs'.⁹ This Arabic prayer was interspersed as a chorus between twenty-two verses in Hausa that called on God to punish those who kept artists from their livelihoods. The song claimed a persecuted Muslim identity for

⁹ See Hadith 4564 in Book 65: *Prophetic Commentary on the Qur'an* <<https://sunnah.com/bukhari/65/86>>, accessed 18 January 2021.

the artists against antagonists they represented as evil-doers. Although the Kano State government responded by banning eleven such songs and arresting several musicians, the bans simply gave them more publicity in a technological environment where the internet and Bluetooth made physical censorship very difficult. Finally, as if the prayers of the musicians were answered, the head of the KSCB, Rabo, was himself embroiled in a sex scandal. With the change of political administration in 2011, the crisis largely came to an end, at least for a year or so.

Iyantama's *Kurkuku* (Prison)

With the change in political administration in 2011, several films and music videos about the crisis appeared. I will focus here on the four-part docudrama *Kurkuku* (Prison) produced, directed by and acted in by Hamisu Lamido Iyantama (see Figure 1). The filmmaker was imprisoned for three months by the KSCB on the accusation that he had released an uncensored film, *Tsintsiya*, which featured a romance between an Igbo Christian and a Hausa Muslim.¹⁰ After a long legal battle, he was cleared. In *Kurkuku*, Iyantama presents his perspective on the story of his arrest and the subsequent court cases, as an exposé of the injustices filmmakers suffered under the KSCB and the state government. The film depicts these local institutions as oppressive and unenlightened. By contrast, Iyantama portrays himself and other filmmakers as citizens in two frameworks that are larger than their antagonists. First, they are citizens of Nigeria, whom he argues have the right to sell their films in all thirty-six states of the nation. Second, they are citizens of the cosmopolitan Muslim ummah, a global spiritual community under God's rule. Citizenship in these two realms gives them recourse to a justice that is greater and more powerful than the corrupt local implementation of laws specific to Kano State. The film suggests that if Nigerian courts cannot bring them justice in this lifetime, God's court will bring them justice in the hereafter, when the hypocrisy of the oppressor will be exposed on the final day of judgement. As stated in Surah 69:17 of the Qur'an, 'On that Day you will be exposed – no concealed act you did will stay concealed' (Bewley and Bewley 2011: 579). In staking these metaphysical claims about citizenship and justice, Iyantama aligns filmmakers with ordinary people who suffer in an unjust environment and warns the government of the consequences of injustice in both this life and the next.

The film presents evidence that was not accepted in court and exhibits archival photographs, newspaper articles and court records, as well as Iyantama's certificate and receipts proving the legitimacy of his business, which had been questioned in court. The filmed court cases are re-enactments of court transcripts. Iyantama, *FIM Magazine* editor Aliyu Gora and other Kannywood stars play themselves as 'witnesses'. They speak about the suffering they faced during the censorship crisis to journalists and researchers inside the diegetic space of the film, sometimes directly to the

¹⁰ *Tsintsiya* (Broom), directed by Hamisu Lamido Iyantama and Ahmad Alkanawy, produced by Hamisu Lamido Iyantama for Iyan-Tama Multimedia, 2007. The film was sponsored by the US embassy to promote ethnic and religious harmony, which seems significant considering the anti-Western statements of the head censor. Because of its foreign sponsorship, KSCB laws technically did not require it to be passed by the board, but Iyantama was arrested when a video CD of the film was found in his Kano office.

camera, as if to a court of popular opinion. These scenes showing injustices against filmmakers are paralleled with scenes where ordinary citizens complain about poverty induced by the government.

The narrative arc of the four-part film is balanced: parts 1 and 2 show the triumph of the KSCB as it sends the Hausa film industry into a deeper and deeper crisis; in parts 3 and 4, roles begin to reverse as filmmakers seek justice and their antagonists find their power fading. Part 1 mostly focuses on Iyantama's arrest and initial trial. Part 2 picks up in pace, showing arrests of video-gaming centre employees, singers and video marketers, and a meeting where well-known Kannywood figures vent their frustration at how their names are being tarnished by the censors' propaganda. In parts 3 and 4, Iyantama's lot improves as the director general of the KSCB begins to face the judgement of his superiors and the general public, who are affected by the economic woes caused by the crackdown on the film industry. Iyantama gets out of prison, travels to Hollywood, and sues the director general. The director general finds himself reprimanded by the Nigerian minister of information, representatives of the NFVCB and other members of the Kano State government for his unprofessionalism and injustice. The narrative arc of the film contrasts the provincial and corrupt ways of the board with the cosmopolitan, sophisticated and good Muslim filmmakers.

The appeal to a Nigerian identity runs throughout the film. *Kurkuku* follows and comments on the film for which Iyantama was arrested, *Tsintsiya*, with its message that Nigerians of various ethnic and religious backgrounds should come together. In *Kurkuku*, an Igbo trader attending a community meeting observes the xenophobic rhetoric of the censorship board, which framed its activism in terms of 'protecting culture and religion': 'He wants us to go. He wants us to leave his own state. But we have our rights as Nigerians. We also have our national certificates to do business anywhere in this country.' A human rights activist, Princess Emmanuel (a 'Christian' name), is shown researching Iyantama's case throughout the film. The 'local' antagonists are contrasted with cosmopolitan Nigerians. The film portrays the censorship board, despite its claims of being aligned with the goals of national censorship, as being backward and the enemy of progress in a multicultural, multi-ethnic nation.

The second, and higher, judgement comes in the form of God's judgement, as hinted at in the curses the filmmakers and other people affected by the censorship crisis rain down upon the censorship board. This sort of connection is made in the multiple song performances, which reprise throughout parts 2–4 of the film. One of the songs, which features Iyantama and his family lamenting the injustice that has been done to them, takes place shortly after a scene that show thugs invading Iyantama's house and threatening to assault his wife. The visuals intercut between Iyantama's family at home and Iyantama in chains in prison. The song speaks to the instability of life in Nigeria, where innocent people suffer alongside criminals and justice is not done. This discussion of temporal injustice is contrasted with the eternal justice of the universe in which God will eventually reward the righteous and judge the hypocrite. The intercutting between the domestic setting, in which Iyantama's family sings about how they miss him, and the prison, where Iyantama sits, visually reminds the audience of the injustice done not just to him but to his innocent family, who become a kind of synecdoche for the ordinary people being treated unjustly by the government. It associates the government with rapists and

thugs who have made Iyantama – ideally, the protector of the sacred private space of the home – helpless behind bars, while the family is left to God’s protection. Iyantama’s most direct attack on the unnamed censor is in verses 22–24.

Verse 22: And you *Dan bora* [an epithet obliquely referring to the censor] the role you played in the whole issue wasn’t a good one, and Allah has rewarded you for your wickedness. You have seen the fruits of your act in this world, not forgetting that God is also waiting for you.

Verse 23: God has exposed you and will surely expose your allies. You . . . will surely come to a bitter end, because you are cheats and hide under the shade of religion.

Verse 24: Allah does not do injustice and also emphasized in the Qur’an, and Allah is the master of all judges. But you don’t do anything aside dictatorship. May Allah punish you. And as for us filmmakers we are just doing our legitimate business and enlightenment.¹¹

In this discussion of justice, Iyantama indirectly references the shameful exposure by the media of the censor’s own sex scandal. The censor who persecuted him is judged in two ways: first, the humiliation of his sins being exposed in life. He sings: ‘God has exposed you and will surely expose your allies’ – a just punishment for the false accusations he has made against the filmmakers. But this first judgement is only a foreshadowing of the final day of judgement, when everything will be laid bare before God. The song warns the censor and his allies that ‘God is waiting for you’. In a previous verse, he also sings: ‘May Allah judge them on the day of reckoning, where the guilty and the non-guilty will be known.’ As opposed to hypocrites hiding behind religion – a category of people denounced strongly in the Qur’an – Iyantama emphasizes that God’s justice is on the side of filmmakers, contrasting the ‘enlightenment’ performed by the filmmakers with the deeds hidden in the shadows by their antagonists. By shedding light on the corruption of the board, the filmmakers perform a precursor to judgement day, when sins that have not been exposed in this lifetime will be brought out into the open. These sorts of calls for judgement are also found in the aforementioned song ‘*Hasbunallahu*’, which had been banned by the censorship board and which Iyantama reprises at structurally important moments in the film. After Iyantama’s court appeal in part 3, the following verse from ‘*Hasbunallahu*’ is sung over a montage of Iyantama being placed in chains and transported back to prison:

As for those that despise us, Lord, please despise them too, make all those who love them begin to despise them . . . Whenever they call on you oh Lord for a favour, scatter their plans and give unto them what they wish for us.

In the film, it is after ‘*Hasbunallahu*’ is performed that the fortunes of the censorship board begin to reverse and the head censor begins to suffer humiliation at the hands of his superiors. In the space of the film, at least, he begins to see the consequences of

¹¹ I have transcribed the translation of these songs from the subtitles created by Ummul ‘Khairi Usman. I have left them as is, with a few minor edits for spelling and clarity.

unjustly persecuting the innocent. The appeals to God are seen as working through the official operations of the Nigerian state. By reaching outside the film and pulling in the banned song, the filmmakers give '*Hasbunallahu*' a narrative function as a prayer that is answered over the course of the film. They also rebelliously indicate the end of the censor's power that enabled the release of the film in the first place. This is reinforced when the two singers who were arrested over the song, Aminu Ala and Bashir Dan Dago, are shown performing it at a Kannywood party at the end of the film, illustrating the triumph of the filmmakers over the KSCB.

In the party at the end of the film, prominent members of the Hausa film industry celebrate alongside members of the Igbo and Christian communities who had supported them during their travails with what has been portrayed as a backward and ethnocentric government. The human rights activist Princess Emmanuel speaks to Nigerians about their rights before handing over the microphone to filmmakers and musicians arrested during the crisis. The ending is reminiscent of a similar party at the end of Iyantama's film *Tsintsiya*, the film for which he was arrested, where Hausa Muslims celebrate alongside Igbo Christians. The final film song of *Kurkuku* presents a cosmopolitan and pluralistic vision of Nigeria. Praise singers sing that Iyantama 'believes in unity lies our strength . . . Peacemaking, condemning violence and law enforcement should be our civil duty. He sees Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as one without feeling superiority over the other.'

Iyantama's film *Kurkuku* thus makes use of the concept of exposure to refer both to judgement (the exposure of sins) and to the ideal state of an educated society (exposed to the world). The antagonists of the filmmakers are exposed as sinners, while a cosmopolitan Nigerian society becomes a stand-in for paradise on earth. Against longstanding tensions in the north between Muslims and Christians and, at that time, a recent history of election violence that occurred after Goodluck Jonathan won the Nigerian presidential elections in 2011, Iyantama sees unity and good citizenship in the nation as complementary to his citizenship in the Muslim ummah. He expresses no qualms about being what Murray Last has called a 'dual citizen' in the nation state of Nigeria and the 'worldwide Muslim ummah' (Last 2008: 59). *Kurkuku* was just one of many texts that used the discourse of exposure to appeal both to divine justice and to a cosmopolitan identity, but its docudrama style references actual events as evidence an audience can hold on to.

Christian responses

While Iyantama shows good relationships between Christians and Muslims in his triumphant ending, he portrays those Christians as southerners and does little to combat perceptions of a Muslim north and Christian south. Although he pushes back against the exclusionary language of Shekarau's government, he does not challenge the assumptions in Hausa Muslim society that a Hausa identity is synonymous with being Muslim. Such assumptions, Moses Ochonu (2014) points out, developed with the Sokoto jihad and were reinforced by British colonial rule. Nicholas Omenka (2010) contends that representations of a 'Muslim north' and 'Christian south' are rooted in colonial policy, which upheld laws to disallow missionaries from evangelizing in the northern emirates, and in Biafran propaganda, which portrayed the civil war as a conflict relating to 'a Christian state facing a Muslim Jihad' (Walls quoted in

Omenka 2010: 389). Yet, as Shobana Shankar (2014) observes, at the time of the colonial occupation of the north, both Islam and Christianity were spread among the Maguzawa, the rural people who had resisted jihadist conversion and sometimes also Hausa-Fulani rule. By the time of the civil war, there were not only large migrant Christian communities across the north but also indigenous Christian communities, particularly in Nigeria's Middle Belt region and the north-east. Whether or not these Christians were ethnically Hausa – and some of them were – they spoke Hausa in church, in evangelism and in daily life. Muslim and Christian populations, especially in rural regions, have often intermarried and lived peacefully together.

Shankar (2006) also points out that the borders between Hausa-speaking Muslims and Christians, at least in the early twentieth century, were porous and often policed more by colonial governments than by ordinary Christians and Muslims. British legislation about who could travel where, and early distinctions encouraging an identity defined more by exclusion than by what was shared, no doubt influenced the politicization of religious and ethnic identity today. Iheanyi Enwerem (1995) describes how the roots of the association that would eventually become the political interest group CAN began in the mid-1960s when northern Christian leaders felt that they needed to come together to resist the Islamization campaign by the Sardauna of Sokoto Ahmadu Bello, Nigeria's first premier. Other tensions came with the rise of the aggressive Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) and Nigeria's entrance as the forty-sixth member into the then Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) during the Babangida regime (Falola 1998: 95). A divisive statement – 'If Christians do not accept the Muslim leadership, then we have to divide the country' – was attributed in the *Nigerian Standard Newspaper* on 16 October 1991 to influential Salafist teacher Shaykh Abubakar Gumi, whose teachings are followed by the 'Yan Izala (quoted in Ikenga-Metuh 1994: 84). Perhaps the greatest conflict between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria has arisen out of the years of campaigning for and finally the implementation of sharia law.

Brandon Kendhammer points out that a language of 'religious rights' developed in the late 1970s from attempts to establish a federal sharia court of appeal in drafts of the constitution (2013: 295). This language of 'rights' to practise religion was commonly posed by Muslim politicians and intellectuals against Christian protests about the 'secular' ideals of the constitution and fears that, as minorities in the region, they would be disenfranchised and mistreated. Acrimony between the two groups grew increasingly violent, especially in the years following the implementation of sharia criminal codes in twelve states¹² across Nigeria. Political instigation led to recurring spasms of religious and ethnic violence in the Middle Belt regions, particularly in Plateau and Kaduna States. The 2011 election of Christian president Goodluck Jonathan also led to widespread violence against Christians across the north.

With the rise of Boko Haram at about the same time, many Christians associated terrorism with mainstream Muslim institutions. After Christmas day attacks in Jos, Abuja, Damaturu and Maiduguri in December 2011, then president of CAN Ayo Oritsejafor, a southern Pentecostal pastor based in Warri, Delta State, placed

¹² In three of those states – Kaduna, Gombe and Niger – sharia law was implemented in only the parts of the state with a majority Muslim population.

newspaper adverts addressed to the ‘Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs’ blaming them for the violence and threatening to ‘respond appropriately if there are further attacks on our members, Churches and properties’ (Oritsejafor 2011). Christian magazines headquartered in the Middle Belt city of Jos, such as the ECWA (Evangelical Church Winning All) church publication *Today’s Challenge*, drew parallels between Islamist violence in the Middle East and Boko Haram attacks on Christians.

There were, however, some Hausa-language Christian musicians and music video producers whose responses to Boko Haram followed the pattern Hausa filmmakers had used in their response to the censorship board. Christians regularly work on Kannywood productions in Jos and Kaduna – and Muslim Kannywood directors such as A. G. M. Bashir work on Christian films in Kano. The Jos-based National Film Institute serves both Christians and Muslims, and one of its most famous graduates, Kenneth Gyang, has made films with the Hausa-language Kannywood film industry in northern Nigeria as well as with the English-language Nollywood film industry in the south. The Christian media productions in Jos that I discuss here, however, are largely Christian affairs. While the Christian Hausa-language film and music video industries do not have the reach or prestige of the Kannywood productions, Jos has become a base for northern Christian culture and a centre of Christian Hausa-language media production.

The owners of several production and distribution companies for Christian drama and music video compilations to whom I spoke¹³ come from north-eastern Nigeria but told me that they base their headquarters in Jos. The city is a main market for Christian Hausa-language productions because of its history as what they characterize as ‘the centre of Christianity in [northern] Nigeria’. Although headquartered in Jos, these music video companies also have offices in other northern cities, including in the north-eastern states of Taraba and Adamawa, where there are large populations of indigenous Christians. These small independent production companies are not directly related to Kannywood, but they often take inspiration from Kano-based media production, including some ‘secular’ comedies that feature Kannywood Muslim comedians starring alongside lesser-known Plateau-based Christian comedians. More of these productions, however, are specifically Christian – from Christian evangelism dramas to music videos and YouTube channels.¹⁴

The music videos produced range from traditional Hausa music with Christian themes sung by singers who style themselves ‘Shata’, after the famous Muslim musician Mamman Shata, to *zumuntan mata* women’s church choirs, to contemporary gospel music, to albums that imitate in costume and sound the Sufi praise singers often called ‘Yabon Annabi’ (Praise of the Prophet). As Boko Haram began to rise in the 2010s, Christian musicians started to perform direct responses to the extremist group.

The music video productions, for a variety of musical genres, invoke Christian traditions about the end times that overlap with Muslim teachings about judgement day. In these productions, prophecies about the end of the world, judgement day and Jesus’s second coming are regularly referenced, alongside visual clips appropriated

¹³ At least one of the producers I spoke to asked me not to mention his name because of our discussion of Boko Haram.

¹⁴ I have discussed some of these videos in the book *Boko Haram* I co-wrote with Brandon Kendhammer (Kendhammer and McCain 2018).

from evangelical films showing flames raining down on earth and people being raised from the grave for the day of judgement. Here, the narrative of the end of the world both helps people make sense of the extreme violence and suffering and gives hope that their persecutors will be judged.

Similar to the way in which Iyantama directly addresses his antagonists in the film songs for *Kurkuku* and provides documentary evidence of the injustice that was done to him and the rest of the film industry, these productions address themselves directly to Boko Haram and to the government. They do so by pulling sometimes gruesome footage as evidence of Boko Haram's evil from the group's own propaganda videos in which Boko Haram demands that people convert to its extremist version of Islam or be killed. The musicians reverse the language of Boko Haram, calling on Boko Haram to repent or be judged.

Considering the sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims in the Middle Belt city of Jos since 2001, the number of songs stating the kinship of Christians and Muslims and calling for unity is somewhat surprising. Although CAN and other Christian voices have often emphasized the conflict between Christians and Muslims, in many of the music videos, musicians repeatedly recognize that both Christians and Muslims are suffering due to Boko Haram, and call on both to pray for an end to the crisis. In this way, they parallel the sort of rhetoric I heard from Hausa filmmakers who claimed a cosmopolitan Nigerian identity against the repressive forces of the state they claimed were wrongly interpreting sharia.

Some of the most striking albums come from the Christian musician Saviour Y. Inuwa, also known as Shatan Waka or Amir Jikan Shata. Inuwa is from Taraba State and looks and sounds very much like a Muslim 'Yabon Annabi' musician. In the music video productions of Muslim musicians, these singers usually dress in Arab-inspired dress, the keffiyeh and long white *jalabiya* for men, and the hijab and abaya for women – shorthand symbols for a cosmopolitan Muslim identity – as they sing praises of the Prophet in music video albums. The sound of the songs, however, is inspired by Indian film music, and the 'Yabon Annabi' singers sometimes overlap with the playback singers for the Kannywood film industry.

Inuwa's music follows these models. In the music video for his song '*Alaika Ya Rabbi*' (2018), for example, Inuwa and his backup singers are dressed in long white *jalabiyas*, wearing prayer caps and turbans. In this song, similar to the adaptation of '*Hasbunallahu*' by Muslim artists in Kano, Inuwa uses an Arabic supplication to God, '*Alaika Ya Rabbi*' – 'Unto You Oh Lord' – in a prayer of protection. He intersperses the Arabic appeal to God with Hausa-language biblical allusions and references to current events, alternating between using the Christian name for Jesus, 'Yesu', and the name 'Isa', which is more often used by Muslims. He even refers to Jesus as 'Manzo' or a 'Messenger', as Muslims would. Although Inuwa still references Christian experiences, his language and costume in this song and others blur the boundaries between righteous Muslims and Christians and appeal to an audience made up of both faith communities who are facing the threat of Boko Haram.

In his 2014 music video album *Yan Chibok*, responding to Boko Haram's abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, he sings in both English and Hausa. The opening track of the album begins with the singer dressed as he is in many of his other videos, in a



Figure 2. Still from Saviour Y. Inuwa's song 'Yan Chibok'. Inuwa (right) wears a keffiyeh, while his colleague in the middle wears a turban and a cross.

'Muslim costume' (a long white *jalabiya* and a white keffiyeh), yet kneeling in a Christian prayer position. He prays:

Dear Lord here we are before You. Giving up ourselves to you because of what is happening in our country Nigeria and the whole world to this group called Boko Haram. They are causing a lot of confusion. Father we are not praying that you destroy them, but we are praying that you touch them with the fire of your Holy Spirit so that they may repent for you said these things will happen and, when we see it happening, we should know that Your coming is at hand. We don't want you to leave them in their sin. Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, Lord grant us peace and harmony among us.¹⁵

The adoption of the Yabon Annabi costume and sound speaks to the cultural overlaps and flows of influence between northern Muslims and Christians. It also demonstrates a conscious effort to adopt a unified front and a common belief in God's justice against the destructive force of Boko Haram. Despite the assimilative gestures to Muslim Hausa neighbours, Inuwa firmly claims a Christian identity by kneeling in a Christian prayer position, praying to the Holy Spirit and inserting biblical allusions. Over the Arab-style keffiyeh, his backup singer wears a cross (see Figure 2). In this song, and in others on his albums *Yan Chibok* and *Ni Bana Duniya Ba*, he cites

¹⁵ Taken from the English subtitles of Inuwa's Hausa monologue.

prophecies about the end times. Like the songs in Iyantama's film, on both albums he invokes the day of judgement, which Boko Haram can escape only by repentance. Like Iyantama, he presents documentary evidence by splicing in actual footage of Boko Haram propaganda videos, including monologues by then Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau. He juxtaposes these with images of resistance – documentary footage of the 'Bring Back Our Girls' protests in Abuja alongside sequences where singers point at the screen, directly addressing their audience of victims and perpetrators.

Another parallel between Inuwa's albums and Iyantama's docudrama is the characterization of their antagonists as 'local' and unenlightened. Shobana Shankar argues that northern Christians have countered the 'denigration, as racially and culturally inferior, by the British and Muslim Northern Nigerian authorities' by taking on an identity as cosmopolitan 'modernizers' (Shankar 2016: 41). Saviour Y. Inuwa performs these claims of superiority, arguing that Boko Haram's evil stems in part from its ignorance and its refusal of the cosmopolitan education that connects Nigeria to the rest of the world. He explores this position in verses 2 and 3 of his title song 'Yan Chibok':

Verse 2: You said education is bad, but it is with school that cars are made, guns are made, cell phones are made. Illiteracy is not good.

Verse 3: People, here is a question, can you answer me. Is Shekau literate? No, Shekau is an illiterate. A letter was given to him but he could not read it. That is why they call themselves Boko Haram.

Although Boko Haram has never expressed any qualms about using Western technologies for their insurgency, Inuwa argues, using rhetoric popularly used against Boko Haram in Nigeria, that the very tools Boko Haram uses to claim power – guns, mobile phones and cars – are a result of the education they attack. Whether accurate or not in their representation of the 'illiteracy' of their antagonists, both Iyantama and Inuwa claim the superiority of engagement in the world.

While Iyantama represents the sympathy of the NFVCB and his visit to Hollywood as demonstrating how, despite his persecution by the censorship board, he has gained the recognition of the world, Saviour Y. Inuwa finds comfort in a litany of countries around the world that protested against the abduction of the Chibok girls. As he sings, accompanied by images of world leaders and of worldwide protests, he poses the evil of an 'illiterate' Shekau against the outrage of the entire world:

Verse 5: Here is another question. Our children that were abducted. Was it only Nigeria that was worried? No, wait and listen. Not us alone. America did worry. Chad, France also cried. The king of Mecca cried. Cameroon is also worried. Ghana expressed her dismay. China is also worried. Israel is worried.

By subversively inserting the statement that 'The king of Mecca cried' into his list of supportive world leaders, he once again draws a parallel between an international symbol of Islam, in the sacred site of pilgrimage of Mecca, and the cosmopolitan unity of the rest of the world. Although Inuwa invokes concepts specific to Christianity such as the 'Holy Spirit' and the primacy of Jesus in his album, he does not directly critique



Figure 3. Still from Saviour Y. Inuwa's song 'Yan Chibok', showing a photograph of the Muslim emir of Kano, Ado Bayero, with Christian president Goodluck Jonathan.

Islam or Muslims but rather argues that Shekau's problem is his lack of education, presumably in the very religion that he claims. Finally, Inuwa stresses the unity of the north under shared symbols. In the final verse of the song, he not only acknowledges the suffering of northern Muslims under Boko Haram, but also points to Muslim traditional rulers, despite the historical resistance of Christians to the hegemony of Hausa-Fulani rule, as representatives of a shared culture.

Verse 6: Oh! All our northern kings are also worried. If the river is on fire, how will we get water? The emir of Kano was attacked. Ado Bayero, a king who hates violence . . . they have also attacked the king of Uba, brethren, because they do not support Boko Haram.

To illustrate this verse, he includes a photograph of Kano emir Ado Bayero, a Muslim, standing with Christian president Goodluck Jonathan, further reinforcing the connections between followers of both religions (see Figure 3). The song thus becomes a message to Christians, such as the southern president of CAN (who associates all Muslims with Boko Haram), to Muslims (who might see Christians as foreigners in the region) and to Shekau that there is no justification in Islam for such killings. Inuwa's message is 'Repent. Judgement day is at hand.'

Conclusion

While the similarities between the work of Iyantama and Inuwa are striking, they are examples that illustrate larger connections between grass-roots audiences of both

religious identities in northern Nigeria. I argue that these ‘subaltern’ voices, both Muslim and Christian, from northern Nigeria use the language of ‘exposure’ and their understandings of religion to counter repressive forces, whether hypocritical politicians or the anarchic violence of Boko Haram. First, the phrase ‘God has exposed you’, which comes from Iyantama’s song, was used as a statement of judgement against his antagonist. It recounts the embarrassment of the censor’s sex scandal and foreshadows the final day of judgement when all sins will be exposed. But it can also be interpreted in other contexts as a statement of praise for the ways in which God has enabled access to education, enlightenment, and an ability to live in peace with one’s neighbours. Although certainly not all Kannywood filmmakers or all Christian artists present such open perspectives, these understandings of judgement against hypocrites and a cosmopolitan call for a peaceful Nigeria by both Muslim and Christian artists offer an activist vision to a grass-roots audience in Nigeria. It is also a kind of theorizing from below offered to the rest of the world, challenging assumptions that cosmopolitanism is performed only in European languages in Africa or is necessarily secular.

Unfortunately, these calls for unity are fragile and easily undermined. Kannywood filmmakers are caught between their desire for global recognition and national unity, and their conservative audiences and critics. Although the censorship crisis I discussed here ended in 2011 with a change of government, the denunciations of Hausa filmmakers did not stop. In response to continued condemnation from clerics at the beginning of the Buhari administration, which resulted in a planned film village being cancelled, Kannywood filmmakers again claimed virtue, but this time by passing industry rules that made it more difficult to work with filmmakers in other parts of the country.¹⁶

Similarly, although north-eastern Christian artists – Saviour Y. Inuwa being one of the most notable – have tried to make connections between themselves and Muslim neighbours, there are other Christian artists who homogenize northern Muslims as responsible for Boko Haram and use the language of ‘religious war’. As Boko Haram and its affiliates continued to commit atrocities that visibly targeted Christians, although the majority of its victims were Muslims, even Inuwa began to use such combative rhetoric. The opening song on his 2018 album *Ni Bana Duniya Ba*, ‘Leah Bata Dawo Ba’ (Leah has not returned) is dedicated to Leah Sharibu, the Christian girl kidnapped in Dapchi. She alone was held by Boko Haram after they released her Muslim classmates. In the song, which is angrier and more confrontational than his other songs, Inuwa hints at Buhari government conspiracies and proclaims that if Leah is not returned soon, ‘there won’t be any reconciliation’; ‘if we make a decision [it] is going to be very bloody’. Such language indicates a shift in sentiment, or at least strategy, from his 2014 album *Yan Chibok*. Yet, on the same 2018 album, he includes the aforementioned Arabic prayer for protection ‘*Alaika Ya Rabbi*’, appealing to an audience using Christian language in a Muslim framework. These conflicting impulses are perhaps the most representative of the voices on the ground, where Muslims and Christians maintain longstanding but fragile ties.

¹⁶ For example, Kannywood actress Rahama Sadau was punished in 2016 for embracing ClassiQ, a northern musician of Christian origin, even though male Kannywood stars have kissed women in Nollywood films. When confronted with these double standards, leaders of film associations said that all stakeholders were being held to higher standards, limiting crossover possibilities for Muslim Kannywood actors (Askira 2016).

Shobana Shankar (2006; 2014) has observed the proximity between Christians and Muslims in the early 1900s before the hardening identities of the colonial era. Nearly 100 years later, the visual media I discuss here points to possibilities for shared communal identities through appeals to national citizenship and parallel religious frameworks. Yet these cultural productions also reveal the vulnerability of such ties. These artists speak to the quiet masses of ordinary Christians and Muslims who long for friendship and unity, indicating, on the one hand, possibilities for hope, and, on the other, the loss that comes with the end of the world.

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Carmen McCain is a lecturer of West African Languages and Cultures at SOAS University of London, with research interests in Nigerian literature, film and Hausa cultural production. She co-authored the book *Boko Haram* with Brandon Kendhammer and is a former columnist with the Nigerian newspaper *Daily Trust*.

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