

# **A Socio-Semiotic Analysis of Gender Relations in Hausa Proverbs**

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This paper investigates gender-relations among the Hausa via their proverbs. Using a socio-semiotic framework (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Kress, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2005), the paper analyses some gender-related Hausa proverbs, sampled from 100 proverbs. The influence of those proverbs in the socio-cultural psyche of the Hausa is second only to religious injunctions. The findings show that 99% of the gender-related proverbs project negative affordances on those relations, especially in matrimony. The negative ensembles in the proverbs are made by framing either sex in negative imaging and metaphors. This result also reflects the reality of gender-relations among the Hausa society and the socio-political orientation in northern Nigeria, especially regarding women.

**Keywords:** *socio-semiotics; proverbs; gender; affordances; negative.*

## **1. Introduction**

Language is generally defined as a means or tool of communication. The acceptability of that ‘tool’ for communication, however, resides in its users’ consensus to recognize it as such a tool. This fact is what makes a language a conventional system; it is also the factor that connects language and society (Halliday, 1978; Halliday and Hasan, 1985; Van Leeuwen, 2005). The forms and structures of any language are based on certain meanings,

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concepts and functions that the users of the language need to convey to one another via that language (Kress, 2010).

Semiotics, as a theory that has emerged and grown through de Saussure [1857-1913], Peirce [1839-1914] and Morris (1946), investigates the ‘meaning’ of ‘language’ beyond textual forms and meanings. Semiotics considers ‘language meaning’ to include both linguistic meanings and any other meaning, message or concept conveyed by non-linguistic signs to its interpreter (Chandler, 2002). Such verbal and non-verbal meanings may be encoded in either a verbal sign or a non-verbal sign or a complementation of both (Liu, 2013). For instance, the image below or the linguistic/verbal sign ‘gun’ could refer to an object/instrument for killing. Accordingly, the *image* has an *iconic* reference or relation to that object; the *linguistic sign* has an *arbitrary* relation with the object.



That is only an initial level of semiosis. On a more extensive semiotic level, the linguistic sign ‘gun’ or the image above may convey to someone else other meanings, such as death, violence, power and so on, dependent on that person’s associative experiences regarding the sign. Eco (1976) and Chandler (2002) identify such an extensive meaning as interpretant. Both the initial meanings and the interpretants are classified as affordances of the sign ‘gun’ or its image equivalent. The sign, in semiotic operation, amounts to a prompt stimulating certain cognitive/practical responses from the interpreters.

## 2. Forms and Functions of Hausa Proverbs

In formal or structural terms, many Hausa proverbs are expressed in sentences; others are formed in phrases (Bello, 2007; Skinner, 1980; Yunusa, 1978). Of the 32 proverbs analysed by this paper, 23 are sentences. Proverbs among the Hausa, as other African societies (Alabi, 2000; Akporaboro, 1994; Bashir and Amali, 2012), are more than exhibition of individual rhetorical skills (Saukko, 2003). According to Usman et al (2013), Hausa proverbs are formally:

- i) clausal or phrasal [as adduced above of the 23 sentence structures];
- ii) normally comparative/contrastive of two elements; for example:

*ƙaryaƙuretake bata'ya'ya*

“lie **flowers** does not **fruit**”

[Lies produce only flowers, not fruit.];

- iii) rhythmic: alliterative/rhyming; for example, repetition of /a/ sound in:

*ba yabo ba fallasa*

“no praise, no disgrace” [No victor nor vanquished]

They identify the functions of Hausa proverbs as philosophical, socially instructive, culturally promotive, reflective of some contemporary socio-cultural issues. In essence, they see proverbs as (a) codifications of individual and social concepts on relations, values, beliefs and the environment; (b) reservoir of those concepts, the language and culture of the people. Accordingly, (i) spontaneous and adequate uses of those proverbs by an individual identify him/her as a ‘native’ or ‘nativised’ speaker of Hausa; (ii) those proverbs are used to assert/express emotions, relations or opinions; (iii) the proverbs help to direct and/or sustain social values. These functional perspectives tally with the focus of this study: gender relations.

As posited by Skinner (1980) and Yunusa (1978), all Hausa proverbs have two layers of meaning recognized by native/nativised speakers of Hausa: (i) literal meaning, and (ii) conceptual meaning. For instance, a Hausa proverb like *matar mutum kabarinsa*, may be interpreted by any native speaker of Hausa as:

*matarmutumkabarinsa*

‘wife-of man grave-his’

(A man’s wife [is] his grave.)

INTERPRETANT ONE [LITERAL]:

A man’s/person’s wife [is] his grave.

INTERPRETANT TWO [CONCEPTUAL]:

One’s wife is chosen by destiny. / One’s destiny is inevitable.

A deeper socio-semiotic analysis of this proverb would, however, notice the *metaphor of death/mortal framing* or *mapping* used to describe the *wife* (Kress and Leeuwen, 2001). Another, less gruesome, word like *kaddararsa* [‘his destiny’] could have equally conveyed the inevitability of the course. The word *kabarinsa*, however, not only strongly conveys the *inevitability*

but also establishes a subtle, associative imaging of *wife* as an *ensemble* of *negative/morbid/fatal* partnership that is unavoidable. In essence, a *deep* residue of social *conceptual* interpretation of this proverb could be:

wife = female

wife = grave of man

wife + husband = husband's death

wife = villain ; husband = victim

Such latent but potent elements of codifying such proverbs are what this socio-semiotic study aims to highlight. The four affordances (Hodge and Kress, 1988) of *matar mutum kabarinsa* listed above will especially explain certain male-female relations among the Hausa if such negative metaphors considerably recur in framing other proverbs below.

### 3. Socio-Semiotic Analysis of Sampled Gender-Related Proverbs

Since the focus of this analysis is 'gender relations', its selection of gender-related proverbs, from a collection of 100 proverbs (Yunusa, 1978), is based on such types of gender relations as *male above female*, *female above male*, and *female versus female*. This categorization reflects the general formal and expressive patterns of the analysed proverbs, as may be subsequently seen. In analyzing each proverb, its gloss and English translation are first given below it, followed by all the *affordances* [abbreviated 'AFs'] or *interpretants* of its ensemble.

#### (A) MALE ABOVE FEMALE

In this section, proverbs that contain affordances of male superiority to female are analysed. In many of the proverbs, the surface affordances appear to be positive for the feminine gender. A scrutiny of each proverb, however, reveals latent affordances that re-assert the superiority of the masculine gender to the feminine one.

##### 1. *kallabi tsakanin rawunna*

'scarf among turbans'

(one scarf among turbans)

AFs: > A *female* who is as outstanding as *males*.

> 1 *female* + many *males*

> *few strong females / many strong males*

> *male is strong / female is weak*

> *masculine framing of a feminine feat*

##### 2. *matarmutumkabarinsa*

'wife-of man grave-his'

(A man's wife [is] his grave.)

AFs: > A man's wife is chosen by destiny.

> One neither knows nor can escape one's destiny.

> A *wife* is a *grave* [to the husband].

> A *wife* is a *fatal* destiny.

> Associating the *female* is *fatal* for *males*.

##### 3. *macemaikamarmaza*

'female withlikeness-ofmales'

(A female like males)

AFs: > A female who is as enterprising as males

> [NOTE: All the last four Affordances of No. 1 above apply here.]

##### 4. *kishikumallonmata*...

'jealousybile-ofwomen'

(Jealousy [is] women's bile.)

AFs: > Marital jealousy is as *irrepressible* to women as *bile*.

> Such jealousy is *bile*.

> Such jealousy is a *disease*.

> Such jealousy is *bad/negative/unjustifiable*.

> Such jealousy is feminine.

[NB: Is *kishi kumallon maza* not possible?]

##### 5. *yinkunnenuwarshegu*

'doing ear-of mother-ofbastards'

(feigning ears of bastards' mother)

AFs: > pretending to be as deaf to calls as a *mother of bastards*

> *Parents of bastards* are *female*.

> *Bastards* are *disgraceful/despicable*.

> *Females* are *disgraceful/despicable*.

[NB: Is *ubanshegu* ('father-of') impossible?]

##### 6. *Barimabashhegiyabace, daubanta*

'"desist" too notbastardnot is, withfather-her'

(Reprimand is not a [female] bastard; she has a father.)

AFs: > Heeding reprimands/warnings ensures safe living.

> *Indiscipline/stubbornness* is a *bastard*.

> *Indiscipline/stubbornness* is *female*.

> *Females* are *bastards*.

[NB: Is *ba shege... da ubansa* ('malebastard') not possible?]

[NB: Is *bari* not *morphologically masculine*?]

> *Discipline* is a *legitimate child/daughter*.

> *Male parents* reproduce *legitimate children*.

> *Legitimate children* are reproduced *only* by *males*.

> *Females* reproduce *only illegitimate children*. [Cf: proverb 17]

7. Matarna-tubabatarasamiji.

'woman-of-I-am-sorry not does lackhusband'

(The woman that says "I'm sorry" never lacks a husband.)

AFs: > An *apologetic wife* can always *save her marriage*.

> A *penitent woman/widow* can always *get a husband*.

> In marital disputes, *wives* are always *wrong*.

> In marital disputes, *husbands* are always *right*.

8. GadonArisaiFanna!

'bed-ofArisuits Fanna'

(Ari's bed suits Fanna.)

AFs: > What is *sauce* for *the goose*, is *sauce* for *the gander*.

> Ari is the *owner* of the *bed* and thus the *host*.

> Fanna is *not* the *owner* of the *bed* and is thus the *guest*.

> *Husbands* are *benefactors*; *wives* are *beneficiaries*.

9. Aureyakinmata.

'marriagewar-ofwomen'

(Marriage is a battle field for women.)

AFs: > *Marriage* is a *trial* to *women/wives*.

> *Females* are *hostile/negative* in marriage.

> *Males* are *peaceful/positive* in marriage.

10. karfinmatayawanmagana.

'strength-ofwomenmuch-oftalk'

(The strength of women lies in their talkativeness.)

AFs: > *Women* are *more talkative* than *active*.

> *Men* are *more active* than *talkative*.

> *Men* are *strong*; *women* are *weak*.



11. Banafkwainasaidazakara.

'not I-do egg-mysave with cock'

(I do not produce my egg except via a cock/rooster.)

AFs: > I do not venture into anything until I am prepared.

> *Cocks* are the *source* of *hen's eggs/chicks*.

> *Hens* are *dependent* on *cocks*.

> *Cocks* are *male*; *hens* are *female*.

> *Males* are *stronger* than *females*.

[NB: Can *cocks* produce *eggs* without *hens*?]

[Ironically, this proverb is said by a *female*!]

12. Dayamatar yaro!

'onewife-ofkid/child'

(One wife is only for a child/juvenile [husband].)

AFs: > Only a *child/juvenile* husband is contented with *one wife*.

> *One woman* is *not* as good/strong as *one man*.

> *One man* equals to *two* or *more women*.

13. Inaruwanmazadawankanjego.

'howcare-ofmen with bath-ofmaternity'

(What do mencare with maternitybath!)

AFs: > The affair of one person should not be a concern of another.

> *Maternity* is *female*, not *male*.

> *Maternity* is a *travail/a degradation*.

> The *males* are *above* such *degradation*.



kaza

The use of two non-human creatures of opposite dispositions in the same domain to project some human gender relations is one of the major mapping techniques of Hausa proverbs.



muzuru

14. karambaninkazaarenmuzuru

‘meddlesomeness-of hen marriage-of tomcat’  
(meddlesomeness of the hen: [it] marries the tomcat!)

- AFs: > Whatever calamity befalls the meddlesome serves them right!  
> A hen that befriends a danger like tomcat should blame itself for any consequence.  
> A hen is female; a tomcat is male.  
> A female offers friendship to male.  
> The male repays the female with hardship.  
> The female is guilty of the male's offence.  
> In marital disputes, the wife is always wrong and the husband is always right.

15. shiriritazanaaljihu

‘nonsensewrapper withpocket’  
(Nonsense! A wrapper that has a pocket!)

- AFs: > an expression of surprise at anything strange  
> Feminine affairs are unique to females, not males.  
> A wrapper is feminine; a pocket is masculine.  
> A female can never be equal to a male.  
> Anequality of females and males is nonsensical.

16. uwargidasarautarmata

‘being-first-wifepower-ofwomen’  
(Being a first wife is power among women.)

- AFs: > Being a first wife is the most powerful status among women/wives.  
> A first wife is so powerful only via marriage.  
> The leader in/of marriage is male.  
> A female is under male rule.  
> A female cannot rule over males.

- > A male can/does rule over females.
- > A female can rule only over fellow females.
- > Female rule is under male rule.

## (B) FEMALE ABOVE MALE

The proverbs in this section can be seen as the feminine response to the prompts ensembled in the proverbs above. The proverbs of this section encode affordances of female superiority to the male. In most cases, the male is projected as hostile, deceitful, unfair and ungrateful to the female.

17. Yagauwarbari.

‘hesawmother-of “desist”’

(He has finally been forced to heed the warning.)

- AFs: > He has finally been forced to heed the warning.  
> He has finally feared the ultimate consequence.  
> The warning is a mother/a female.  
> The recalcitrant/stubborn ward is male.  
> A female has authority over a male.  
> Females are upright; males are deviant and stubborn.

18. muna Fukimi jinmatabiyu!

‘hypocritehusband-ofwivestwo’

(A hypocrite: husband of two wives!)

- AFs: > a two-faced hypocrite among friends  
> A husband of more than one wife is hypocritical.  
> Such husbands are the matrimonial offenders/villains.  
> Such wives are the matrimonial victims.  
> Those husbands are male.  
> Those wives are female.  
> Males are the cause of conflicts in polygamy.  
> Males are bad; females are good.



“NAMIJI BA DAN GOYO BA” : One of the most trying and touching sacrifices of motherhood is carrying her baby at two long stages: (i) in the womb, and (ii) on the back. In this powerful proverb, woman uses this domain of motherhood to portray and condemn the ingratitude of man as spouse. She likens her marital care for the husband to that of a maternal carriage of a baby, thus mapping the metaphors of maternity and matrimony in one domain.

19. *Namijibadangoyoba.*

‘malenotchild-forcarryingnot’

(A man is not a child to carry!)

AFs: > *Man* deserves *no help/pity*.

- > *Man* does *not* appreciate help/pity.
- > *Woman* helps/pities *man* as she would pity *her baby*.
- > *Woman* is a *mother* to *man*.
- > *Man* does *not* appreciate *woman's* pity/help.
- > *Man* is *ungrateful* to *woman/in life*.
- > *Man* is *more hurtful* to *parentage* than *woman* is.
- > *Female* is *helpful*; *male* is *ungrateful*.

[NB: In P24, man becomes a *wicked father*!]

20. *Mugundanmasara, anagoyonkakanagemu.*

‘cruelpod-of maize, one carriesyou you-grow beard’

(A wicked pod of maize, growingbeard in the cradle!)

AFs: > However weakened/remorseful, one deserves no pity.

- > *Woman* pities/pampers *man* like a *baby*.
- > *Man* does not reciprocate such a pity/help.
- > *Woman* is like a *mother* to *man*.
- > *Man* does not pity/help that *mother*.
- > *Female* is *helpful*; *male* is *ungrateful*.

[NB: In both P19 & P20, *goyo* is aptly used.]

21. *Namijibarkono, saianandanaakesaninyajinsa.*

‘male pepper only iftasted is known heat-its’

(A male [is] a pepper; its heat is known only if tasted.)

AFs: > *A male* is *naturally hostile* and *hurtful*.

- > *Associating a male* by a *female* is *harmful* to the *female*.
- > *A female* is *peaceful, harmless*.

22. *Tsautsayintakaba, auredamajinyaci.*

‘fate-ofseclusionmarriage with [an] ailing [man]’

(What a fated seclusion! Marrying an ailing man!)

AFs: > A *calamity* that *should* have been *avoided* has *happened*!

- > *Marriage* is *more restrictive* to *woman* than to *man*.
- > *A female* is a *marital victim*; a *male* is a *marital villain*.
- > *A husband* can *continue* to harm *wife* even in his *death*!

> Even a *dead man* is *not* to be *trusted* by a *woman*!

23. *Uwatafuba,kodaubansarki ne.*

‘mother is greater [than] father, thoughfather-the king were’

(A mother is greater than a father, even if the father is a king.)

AFs: > *Mothers* deserve *more respect* from their children than *do fathers*.

- > *Mothers* are *greater parents* than *fathers*.
- > *Females* are *greater* than *males*.
- > *Mothers* are *more helpful* to children than are *fathers*.

24. *Kowatacemijiubane, tamutu marainiya.*

‘whoeverthat says husbandfatheris, will dieorphan’

(Whoever takes a husband as a father will die an orphan.)

AFs: > A *male* is an *irresponsible spouse*.

- > A *female* is a *responsible spouse*.
- > A *male* is an *irresponsible parent*.
- > A *female* is a *responsible parent*.

## (C) FEMALE VERSUS FEMALE

Ironically, as most of the proverbs to be analysed in this section will show, Hausa proverbs on female-female relations dominantly project mutual hostility and rivalry, mostly centred on male companionship, attention or affection. It is significant that both in their responses to male attacks above and this section’s inter-feminine proverbs, females appear to have inadvertently made man their center of attention, and thus more important.

25. *Aramawakuraanniyarta.*

‘Be-it repaid to hyenaintent-its’

(Let the hyena be repaid [according to] its intent.)



Kura / Hyena

AFs: > Let there be tit for tat.

> A hyena is hostile and greedy.

> A hyena is female.

> Female interactors are distrustful of each other.

26. *Idanmayyatamanta, uwar'yabatamanta ba.*

'If witch has forgotten, mother-of-daughter not has forgotten not'

(If the witch has forgotten, the girl's mother has not.)

AFs: > If the *offender* has *forgotten*, the *offended* one has *not*.

> The *witch*, the *daughter* and the *mother* are *female*.

> The *witch* is a *villain*.

> The *daughter* is a *victim*.

> The *mother* is *vengeful*.

> *Females* are *hostile* and *unforgiving* to *one another*.

27. *Anawatagawata.*

'happens this comes that'

(As this is happening, another one emerges.)

AFs: > Two [negative] events are simultaneously happening.

> A negative/unpleasant event is female.

> The more females that converge at a place, the greater becomes the disaster to erupt there.

28. *Anhuta, gawatamarimaiwanka.*

'Good riddance, corpse has slapped doer [of] bath'

(Good riddance! A corpse has slapped [her] bather.)

AFs: > An *irritating person/thing* has finally *gone*.

> A *female* can be *hostile* to another *female* even in *death*!

> *Females* are *naturally hostile* to *one another*.

29. *Bakukanaba, uwarkishiyatamutu.*

'Notcry-mynot, mother-of-co-mate has died'

(Not my concern: a co-mate's mother has died.)

AFs: > One does *not sympathize* with *one's enemy*.

> Even *death* of one wife does *not soften* the other's *hatred/jealousy* of her.

> *Jealousy* can make a *woman* extremely *cruel/unforgiving*.

> *Females'* marital *rivalry* can be *fatal*.

> *Females* can be extremely *cruel* to *each other* because of a *male*.

> *Females'* marital *rivalry* is *extended* to their rival's *friends* and *relatives*.

30. *Daaiikinbanzagaraaikinkishiya.*

'for work-offutility better work-of-co-mate'

(Engaging a co-mate is better than doing nothing.)

AFs: > *Half a loaf* is *better* than *none*.

> Female co-mates regard each other as *better than nobody* [the lowest status!].

31. *Da niyya, karuwatatakamatare.*

'with intention, harlot has stepped woman-of-marriage'

(It's deliberate! A harlot has stepped on a married woman's toes.)

AFs: > A *loser* has [inadvertently] *offended* a *proud winner*.

> A *female's status* is *enhanced* by *marriage* to a *male*.

> *Females* are *hostile* to *each other* over a *male*.

32. *DukanKabarinkishiya!*

'hitting-of-grave-of-co-mate'

(Punching a co-mate's grave!)

AFs: > extreme *hatred* of *everything* of an *enemy/ anger* at any *hindrance* to *revenge*

> *Jealousy* can make a *woman* extremely *unforgiving/vengeful*.

> Even *death* of a co-mate does *not soften* her living *rival's hatred* of her.

> *Females* can be *fatally hostile* to *one another* over a *male*.

#### 4. Mappings and Framings in the Proverbs

Second only to religious sayings/texts, proverbs among the Hausa deeply influence social concepts and behaviour (Gubrium, J. and Holstein, 2003; Wardhaugh, 2006). In most cases, they tend to reflect, recount and re-affirm certain social occurrences and values. The textual ensembles of the proverbs entail various techniques of framing and mapping. Most of the gender relations projected by the proverbs are framed in marital metaphor, drawing its resources from gender-based accoutrements, attire, animals, birds, mortality, attitudes, and even lexical gender cases.

## 5. Metonymic Ensembles

The mapping of the first proverb [P1] entails a female-male metonymy [“scarf” and “turbans”] to project the affordances on the gender relations. Other proverbs that use metonymy in their mappings are P11, P13, P15, P19 and P20. Such uses of metonymy not only symbolize the genders but also facilitate strong imaging of the sexes in terms of appearance and attitude (Jewitt and Oyama, 2003). For instance, there is a clear difference between an inter-gender mapping like *kallabi tsakanin rawunna* [P1] and another like *mace tsakanin mazaje* [‘woman among men’]. In the second mapping, the clarity of imaging is missing. At best, one can perceive only the *broad gender concepts* of the participants in the second mapping [‘woman’ and ‘man’]; their *imaging* [the *attire* itself is a *major code of attitude*] would have distinctly projected them as persons, not mere *sexes*.

## 6. Zoological Ensembles

Proverbs that use behaviours of non-human creatures like animals and birds to map certain behaviours of human males and females are P11, P14 and P25. Such uses of non-human creatures to project human attitudes and attributes are strategies to camouflage negative or hostile undertones/intents of those proverbs (Gursimsek, 2014) and thus provide defence to possible direct attacks/responses from the targets of the proverbs. For instance, a proverb like *rama wa kura anniyarta* [‘repay the hyena according to its intent’] could be replaced with, say, *biya tururuwa ladar aikinta* [‘pay ant the wage for its labour’], to capture that content of *payment/reward*. However, the *negative affordances* in P25 would be missing. This is evident in the contrastive affordances between *kura* [‘hyena’] and *tururuwa* [‘ant’]; between *anniya* [‘intent’] and *ladar aikinta* [‘reward for/wage of its labour’]; between *rama* [‘repay/retaliate’] and *biya* [‘pay’].

## 7. Gender-based Ensembles

Another mapping strategy employed by the proverbs is the use of *masculine* or *feminine cases* to target *males* or *females*, respectively. For

instance, P5 uses *uwar* [‘mother-of’], instead of *uban* [‘father-of’]; P6 uses *shegiya* [‘female bastard’], instead of *shege* [‘male bastard’]; P17 too uses *uwar*, instead of *uban*. In some of the proverbs, certain attributes, mostly negative, that could have equally applied to males and females, were applied to either male or female only, depending on the gender targeted. For instance, in P2, the *inevitability* of *destiny* could have been as effectively mapped by reversing the sexes [*mijin mace kabarinta*] as in the current mapping. In that case, ensembles of the positive and negative affordances would have been reversed. In P5, the deliberate choice of gender mapping becomes clear if one wonders whether only *females* [*uwar*] beget bastards. What of *males*, as in *uban shegu* [‘father of bastards’]? The same question applies to P6, because children acquire the legitimacy of their birth more via *parental marriage* than via a *mere father*. P8 links a locative imaging [*gado*] with a masculine name in a single mapping and thus projects *one ensemble* of *location + male = masculine location*. This establishes the latent interpretant of *all beds as masculine in gender and ownership*. This mapping leaves the female [*Fanna*] as only a guest! The revealing question is: Do females/women/wives not have their own beds visited by males/men/husbands? P11 projects the process of reproduction as a biological prerogative of the male. That presupposes that the reproductive essentials of egg, womb, foetal accommodation and feeding, and child birth, all belong to the male. Such techniques of gender mapping abound in the analysed proverbs.

## 8. Negative Imaging

The negative affordances interpreted from the proverbs are framed more by negative imaging than by textual mappings of gender (Caple, 2013). Negative imaging is mapped by certain words that name or express purely negative objects/concepts. Such animals/objects/concepts include: *kabarinsa* [P2], *kumallon* [P4], *shegu* [P5], *yakin* [P9], *muzuru* [P14], *barkono* [P21], *takaba* [P22], *marainiya* [P24], *kura* [P25], *mayya* [P26], *gawa* [P28], and *karuwa* [P31]. Framing such words with either of the sexes provides negative affordances on that sex. For instance, in P2, framing the *feminine* gender *matar* with the *negative* object *kabarinsa* projects the

ultimate affordance of: *female = death* OR *death = female*. In the end, a long period of use places the male *mutum* in the social psyche as a *victim* between *two converse* evils! Thus, such proverbs as semiotic signs project affordances on two main planes: (a) a sociolinguistic plane of conventional meanings and functions of those proverbs, and (b) a socio-semiotic plane that influences individual and social psyche and behaviour. It is instructive that variable situations and individual moods are revealed by such verbal mappings as *namiji ba dan goyo ba* [P19] (feminine lamentation); *rabin raina* [‘half of my life’] (romantic male/female); *matar mutum kabarinsa* [P2] (philosophical male). No native/nativised speaker of Hausa ever cites a proverb without a causative occasion or mood [happy, sad, angry, reflective]. In most instances, gender-related proverbs, especially concerning matrimonial life, are negative.

## 9. Conclusion

As observed above, Hausa proverbs are powerful banners of individual and social behaviours. For every one religious quotation made by a cleric on wife’s marital obligations to husband or vice versa, ten or more contradicting quotations of marriage-/gender-related proverbs will be made by the average Hausa man or woman, depending on the occasion and mood. An average or rural Hausa husband or wife that has been deeply hurt by a spouse is likely to be more influenced by proverbs like *kishi kumallon mata* or *namiji ba dan goyo ba*, respectively, than by some religious quotation or admonition. Most of such gender-/marriage-related proverbs are propagated or promoted by same-gender solidarity or groups. Accordingly, however timely or philosophical, an anti-female proverb will rarely be supported by the average Hausa woman. Similarly, an average Hausa man will hardly concur with an anti-male proverb like *namiji butulu* [‘male is ungrateful’].

The socio-semiotic affordances realized in the analysis of the proverbs above are encoded via the framing and mapping devices highlighted above. Such mappings serve as prompts to the social attitudinal responses that have thrived in typical Hausa gender relations in marriage, outside marriage, in courtship and so on. Most of the affordances recovered from the proverbs are negative. Accordingly, Hausa gender-relations, especially in marriages,

are largely characterised by the couples’ mutually subtle mistrust; hostility and rivalry among co-wives. The ratio of anti-co-wife/pro-co-wife proverbs among the Hausa is respectively 99/1. Most gender-related altercations are punctuated with apt quotations of such proverbs.

Both the Hausa language and its speakers constitute the largest ethnolinguistic population in not only northern Nigeria but the entire African continent. Considering the influence of such proverbs among the Hausa/Hausanised society, could greatly complement policy making on and management of gender relations and gender-related problems.

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