

# Sacred Sound, Public Wealth: Female Qur'an Recitation and Capital Formation in Nigeria

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*Abstract.* This paper explores how public female Qur'an recitation in Nigeria functions as a powerful form of capital that extends beyond spiritual merit into economic, social, and symbolic realms. Drawing on over a decade of ethnographic research—including participant observation, interviews, and personal experience as a reciter—the study examines Qur'anic competitions as dynamic arenas where gender, religion, and capital intersect. It shifts focus away from jurisprudential debates on the female voice ('*awra*'), instead asking: What kinds of empowerment does public recitation afford women? And how can the female voice be theorized as capital?

Through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's framework on forms of capital, the paper theorizes recitation as embodied cultural capital that women convert into social recognition, material wealth, and elevated public status—manifested in rituals of 'turbaning' and titles such as *Gwana*. It introduces "vocal nudity" as a concept to analyze ongoing controversies over women's sonic presence in Islamic rituals, and introduces *mobility capital*—the ability to move and be heard—as a key mechanism through which women navigate and negotiate patriarchal constraints.

The paper contends that female reciters challenge dominant interpretations of Islamic propriety not only by voicing sacred texts in public but by transforming those acts into public authority, wealth, and political influence. In doing so, they disrupt the binary of *dīn* (the spiritual) and *dunya* (the worldly) by revealing how sacred labor is embedded in worldly economies of prestige. Ultimately, this study illuminates the ways in which Nigerian Muslim women are reshaping religious authority, gender norms, and the value of the Qur'anic voice in contemporary West African Islam.

**Keywords:** Female Qur'an Recitation, Capital Formation, "Vocal Nudity," Islam and Gender, Public Religious Authority

On January 16, 2015, after eight days of an intense Qur'an-recitation competition, known as *musābaqāt* (literally, 'competitions'), Muslims across Nigeria were anticipating a momentous event. It was the closing ceremony of the Dan Fodio National Qur'an Competition, named after the revered 19th-century reformer, Usman Dan Fodio, who established one of the largest Islamic caliphates in West Africa.

In the preceding days, people from diverse regions of the country had journeyed to Auchi, the second-largest city in Edo State, to partake in the occasion. On a bright and sunny day, the people of Auchi warmly welcomed their guests. More than a religious gathering, the Qur'an ceremony was a confluence of faith, politics, and culture.

The arrival of the royal emirs (Sarakuna) was a spectacle of grandeur and tradition. Accompanied by their entourages, the emirs' entrances were heralded by the rhythmic beat of drums, the haunting notes of the *algaita* (a double-reed trumpet), and the melodic praise by eulogy singers. Dressed in dazzling robes, the emirs wore colorful *alkyabba*—long, flowing cloaks adorned with intricate embroidery—and turbans that crowned their heads in regal elegance. Their aristocratic staffs signified both their authority and wealth.

The Emir of Zuru, the Otaru of Auchi, and the Shehu of Borno were among the first to arrive. Soon after, the 14th Emir of Kano, Sarki Sanusi Lamido Sanusi II, made a striking entrance. His procession was marked by a group of *algaita* blowers and drummers, escorting a luxury car that glided slowly through the gathering. Red-and-green-robed courtiers (*fadawan Sarki*) flanked the vehicle, walking with measured grace. The emir, seated majestically in the rear, held his royal staff, its tip extending beyond the window.

When the vehicle came to a halt, the courtiers stretched their flowing robes wide to shield the emir from the gaze of onlookers, a time-honored tradition that protects a Hausa/Fulani king from the envious eyes of his subjects, known as *idon talaka guba* ('the eye of the commoner is poison'). Only after emerging from the car beneath the canopy of a royal umbrella did the emir become visible. Holding his staff aloft, he walked majestically to his seat.

Later, the then Governor of Edo State, Adams Oshiomhole, a Christian, addressed the crowd with a call for national unity and security. "Islam is about peace and justice," he proclaimed, urging Nigerians to embrace the values found in both the Qur'an and the Bible. He stressed that genuine and sustainable development in Nigeria would only be possible through adherence to these shared moral principles. In a gesture of goodwill and encouragement, he announced that

*the state government would award two Lexus SUVs to the overall winners of the competition. To underscore the importance of gender equality, he emphasized that the same model of car would be awarded to both the male and female champions.*

The above vignette that portrays the ceremony in Auchi exemplifies how Qur'an recitation competitions are intricately entwined with Nigeria's political and social dynamics. Over the years, *musābaqāt* ceremonies have become prominent arenas where Muslim and Christian elites and politicians converge to honor Qur'an reciters. These competitions function as hubs for raising and discussing current political issues and serve as platforms where politicians and royalty bestow valuable gifts upon participants. They also operate as spaces where various forms of capital are produced, exchanged, and *traded*.

This paper does not delve into Islamic jurisprudential debates concerning the female voice or the positions held by different Muslim organizations on female Qur'an recitation, topics which I have addressed elsewhere (Muazu 2019). Instead, it focuses on the tangible, worldly benefits that arise from the public visibility of the female voice in Qur'an recitation. In the context of the female voice being regarded as something to be concealed (*'awra*), this study poses two critical questions: What kind of empowerment does public recitation afford to women? And how can we understand the female voice of recitation as a form of capital?

The spiritual motivations behind Qur'an recitation, such as receiving divine reward for each recited letter and the honor of being crowned on the Day of Judgment, have long been the focus of Islamic scholarship, particularly within the field of *tajwīd* (the rules governing correct recitation). However, sociological and ethnographic research has yet to fully explore the worldly benefits of public recitation. In a separate article (Muazu 2022), building on other works (Hill 2018, Mack 2004, Mack and Boyd 2000, Boyd and Mack 2013, Callaway and Creevey 1994, Sa'd 2004), I argue that women, through the public use of their voices, are shaping contemporary Islam. In this paper, I contend that public recitation offers female reciters not only spiritual rewards but also tangible, worldly advantages.

To examine this phenomenon, I draw upon the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his concept of different forms of capital—cultural, economic, social, and symbolic. In the context of the public perception of the female voice as *'awra*, I explore the notion of the female voice as a form of capital (*jari* in Hausa). This framework offers a compelling way to understand the nexus between the female voice, public recitation, income generation, and women's empowerment. While Bourdieu's theory is limited in addressing the

spiritual dimensions of recitation, it remains instrumental for theorizing the worldly benefits that accrue from these contests. Specifically, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital reveals how culturally marginalized groups can leverage their cultural capital to either bridge or expand social class disparities. This study is grounded in a decade of active participation, participant observation and interviews. As a Qur'an reciter myself, I participated for many years in state and national competitions, representing Plateau State and the Izala-A Muslim group until the latter ceased female public recitations at the state and national levels. Additionally, I have been actively engaged in *tafsir* (Qur'an interpretation) sessions—delivering them on occasion and attending as part of the audience at other times. Since 2011, I have conducted interviews with female reciters and preachers, particularly in Kano and my home city of Jos, Nigeria.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first two sections discuss recitation as a form of embodied cultural capital, which reciters can transform into symbolic capital by assuming the status of *neo-royals*. This transformation highlights how the embodiment of the Qur'an, as a communal responsibility within the Muslim ummah (community), is rewarded with honor and prestige. The final two sections explore the convertibility of recitation into economic and mobility capital. These sections demonstrate how female reciters not only acquire opportunities for financial prosperity but also gain avenues for physical and vocal mobility. By engaging with these themes, this paper sheds light on the multifaceted benefits that public Qur'an recitation confers upon women, challenging traditional notions of the female voice and offering new insights into the intersections of religion, gender, and social capital in contemporary Nigeria.

### **Muslim Women's Voices in Nigeria**

Over the last three decades, the increasing visibility and audibility of Muslim women in Nigeria within the fields of Qur'an recitation, *ḥalāl* (permissible) music, and female preaching have triggered intense debates concerning the *'awra* (Arabic: a part of the body that must be covered in front of others) of the female voice. These debates on vocal *'awra* illuminate questions of propriety, morality, modes of perception, and the conflict between cultural and religious norms regarding women's public engagement.

The term *'awra*, rooted in Arabic and Islamic tradition, appears in the Qur'an in reference to spaces of vulnerability (Qur'an 33:13), moments of privacy (Qur'an 24:58), and aspects of the human body (Qur'an 24:31). This term applies to men, women, and former enslaved people. When extended to the female voice—often perceived as having seductive properties capable of

tempting male listeners—it becomes a compelling entry point for examining contemporary debates on Islam and gender, especially regarding women's visibility and audibility in public life.

The concept of vocal '*awra*, translated here as “vocal nudity,” refers to the perception of the female voice as part of a woman's '*awra*, something that should not be overly exposed due to cultural and religious understandings. In northern Nigeria, two prevailing notions coexist: the female voice as '*awra* and as a marker of dignity, femininity, and suitability for marriage. A chaste woman is expected not to speak loudly in public spaces, such as markets. Simultaneously, a well-mannered girl should speak softly, slowly, and with a lowered, “feminine” voice as she matures into womanhood.

These dynamics, stemming from divergent interpretations of Qur'an 33:32 – which I have explored in detail elsewhere (Muazu 2019; 2022) – drive two opposing trends regarding the female voice. The first trend is the growing prominence of the female voice in religious activities, such as Qur'an recitation and *qaṣīda* (laudatory) songs. The second trend reflects an increasing perception of the female voice as part of a woman's '*awra*. This latter perception has gained momentum in recent decades, particularly with the rise of public Qur'an recitation competitions, stimulating debates on “proper religious practice” and women's roles in society.

This debate reached a critical point when the Izala-A movement – an influential Muslim organization with millions of followers in Nigeria and neighboring countries – banned female members from participating in national Qur'an competitions. While Izala cited multiple reasons for this ban, the dominant argument resonating with ordinary Muslims is that the female voice constitutes '*awra* and should not be publicized. Another contributing factor is the exclusion of women from public Saudi Arabia's international Qur'an recitation competitions, where male Nigerian reciters frequently excel.

Since its inception in 1978, Izala has been instrumental in promoting female education, a role it maintains despite restricting female voices – a restriction accepted by many female adherents. This acceptance contrasts sharply with the resistance some women exhibited when barred from attending Izala schools during the group's establishment in the late 1970s to early 1980s—a conflict that, in some cases, even led to divorce. Nonetheless, Izala's ban has not deterred other Muslim groups, such as Jamā'at Nasril Islām – a nondenominational umbrella body representing diverse Muslim interests—and various Sufi groups, including the Tijaniya and Qadiriya, from encouraging female participation in competitions. Consequently, while the ban has decreased the number of girls memorizing the Qur'an within Izala, non-Izala groups have witnessed an increase, fostering more female Qur'an reciters proficient in *tajwīd*.

Beyond social mobility and economic advancement, female participation in public Qur'an recitation also highlights how gendered spaces are sonically contested and negotiated in public Islamic socio-religious rituals. By vocalizing the sacred text in competitive settings, female reciters carve out an auditory presence that challenges conventional limitations on women's voices in Islamic spaces. The very act of public recitation transforms these competitions into arenas of negotiation, where the boundaries between private and public spheres are tested and sometimes redefined. While Izala's prohibition reinforces the traditional stance that female voices should not be publicly projected in ritualized settings, the growing visibility of female reciters among non-Izala groups signals a shifting landscape. These recitations do not merely reflect individual piety or mastery of *tajwid* but also serve as performative claims to religious authority and inclusion in male-dominated sacred soundscapes. Consequently, the Qur'an competitions function as both devotional exercises and contested sonic spaces where gender norms in Islamic practice are continually renegotiated.

The concept of "vocal nudity" is particularly relevant in this context, as it underscores the ways in which female reciters navigate the religious and social perceptions of their voices. While some Islamic traditions equate the female voice with *'awra*, many women who participate in public Qur'an recitation challenge this notion by framing their voices as vessels of divine expression rather than as objects of sensuality. For these women, the act of reciting the Qur'an in a public and ritualized setting serves to religiously legitimize their voices – and, by extension, their presence in Islamic public spaces. By grounding their participation in sacred recitation rather than in ordinary speech or song, they carve out an acceptable auditory role that enables them to engage publicly while circumventing accusations of impropriety. This perception has broader implications for women's public engagement in contemporary Islam, where debates over female religious authority and visibility remain deeply contested. Through Qur'an competitions, women not only assert their mastery of sacred knowledge but also subtly challenge restrictive gender norms by reconfiguring what it means for a female voice to be 'naked' or permissible in religious spaces. Thus, their participation represents an ongoing negotiation of religious legitimacy, embodiment, and gendered sonic authority in contemporary Islamic practice.

The exclusion of women from participating in Qur'anic recitation by some Islamic sects, including the Izala-A group, needs to be examined beyond the commonly framed Salafi-Sufi divide or the Nigeria-Saudi Arabia connection. While the broader debate of "Africa is not Islamic enough and Islam is not African enough" is relevant – given that African Islam has often been regarded as syncretic by some anthropologists (see, for instance, Tringham 1959; Brenner

2000) – this framing alone does not fully explain Izala-A's gender restrictions. It is true that many Muslims view Arab Islam, particularly Saudi Islam, as the purest form of the religion, and that Saudi Arabia itself does not permit women's public Qur'anic recitation. However, while Izala-A is influenced by certain Saudi positions, it does not simply replicate Saudi practices. There are instances where Izala-A has diverged from Saudi rulings, such as in the case of *mahram* (male guardian) requirements for women traveling for Hajj (see page 69 below). While Saudi authorities strictly enforce this condition, Izala-A scholars have found ways to evade it, demonstrating their agency in adapting Islamic rulings to local contexts.

Furthermore, it is important to avoid oversimplifying this issue as a strict Salafi-Sufi divide. While Sufi groups may appear more tolerant of women's public participation – evidenced by their involvement in *qaṣīda* recitations – opponents of female vocal visibility exist within both camps. Some prominent Sufi scholars also maintain that a woman's voice should not be publicized (Interview with Shaykh Haris Sufi, 2016). The gendered restrictions on public Qur'anic recitation, therefore, should not be reduced to a binary of Salafi vs. Sufi or Nigeria vs. Saudi Arabia, but rather analyzed within the complex and often contradictory negotiations of religious authority, gender norms, and localized Islamic interpretations.

The prohibition of women's participation in public Qur'anic recitation reflects not only theological arguments but also cultural baggage reinforcing long-standing patriarchal structures that dictate who should have access to religious authority and who is permitted to shape public expressions of faith. Even when theological justifications are invoked, they often operate within deeply embedded social norms that prioritize male voices and marginalize women's presence. This exclusion mirrors broader patterns across many religious traditions, where male gatekeeping restricts women's access to sacred spaces, religious education, and public authority. While appeals to modesty and gender roles are frequently cited, the practical effect is the continued reinforcement of male dominance in defining religious legitimacy. By restricting women's participation in public Qur'anic recitation, groups like Izala-A contribute to the perpetuation of a patriarchal framework that views women's voices as sites of social anxiety rather than as integral to Islamic learning and spiritual leadership. However, it is also important to acknowledge Izala's significant efforts in promoting women's education, which complicates any straightforward analysis of its stance on the female voice ban.

Through public Qur'an recitations, *qaṣīda* (poetry) performances, preaching, and media engagement, women have entered traditionally male-dominant

ed spheres, reshaping structures of authority in African Muslim societies and transforming religious practices and sociopolitical dynamics. This increased participation, driven by democratization, media proliferation, and various Islamic and political reforms, has become a hallmark of modern Islam, providing women with opportunities to occupy public spaces, influence Islamic learning, and articulate sociopolitical agendas, thereby asserting a distinct form of female agency. Today, a convergence of social, educational, and technological advancements has further facilitated Muslim women's participation in public religious activities. Greater access to formal Islamic education has empowered women with religious literacy and the confidence to engage in public discourse. Women-led religious spaces – such as female-only mosques, study circles, and digital platforms – have created new avenues for leadership. Additionally, modern interpretations of Islamic texts and jurisprudence increasingly affirm women's rights to public engagement. The forces of globalization, women's advocacy movements, and the visibility of female scholars and preachers have further challenged traditional gender norms, paving the way for broader acceptance of female voices.

In Nigeria, women's contributions to Islamic knowledge parallel those of their counterparts across the globe in major centers of Islam such as Indonesia, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, and Pakistan, among others. Although Africanist scholars have covered several themes on Muslim women in Africa, and Hausa women in particular, the role of the female voice and '*awra* debates remain underexplored, with exceptions like Hill's work. Hill (2019) focuses on Senegalese Sufi Muslim women who occupy important positions of religious authority and use their voices publicly without contestation. His studies reveal that despite resistance in some cases, women's voices remain pervasive. They occupy public spaces and play a central role in shaping contemporary Islam. However, while women assert their voices in the public sphere, the acts of restraint, shyness, and self-disassociation – which Hill describes as 'reserved feminine piety' (221) when discussing the *sikkarkats* (Senegalese women performing Sufi chants to mixed-gender audiences) – should not only be understood as passive piety. Instead, these actions should be interrogated further as possible instances where women strategically balance assertiveness with restraint to mitigate controversy surrounding their visibility and audibility.

### **Bourdieu's Forms of Capital**

In offering a non-Marxist conceptualization of capital and responding to the work of Gary Becker, Pierre Bourdieu argues that "it is, in fact, impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one re-

introduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory.”<sup>1</sup> For Bourdieu, *capital* is defined as “accumulated labour in its materialized form,” which, when mobilized, enables an individual to “appropriate social energy in the form of ratified or living labour.”<sup>2</sup> As “the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world,” capital transforms the dynamics of society, making them “other than the simple game of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle.”<sup>3</sup>

Bourdieu identifies three primary forms of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Economic capital is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights.<sup>4</sup> Cultural capital, on the other hand, is convertible under specific conditions into economic capital and can be institutionalized as educational qualifications.<sup>5</sup> Social capital comprises social obligations or connections, defined as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition... or to membership in a group, which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital.”<sup>6</sup> In certain contexts, social capital may be converted into economic capital and institutionalized as a title of nobility, a process that Bourdieu refers to as symbolic capital. Symbolic capital represents the resources available to an individual through honor, prestige, or recognition.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars have extensively employed Bourdieu’s theory of capital to elucidate the structure and dynamics of the social world, particularly focusing on class inequality, the reproduction of social hierarchies, educational success or failure, habitus, female agency, feminine capital, emotional capital, spiritual and sacred capital, and the intersections of ethnicity and education.<sup>8</sup> In this context, I draw on Bourdieu’s framework to analyze the complexities within the domain of Qur’an recitation and the politics surrounding recitation competitions.

### **Recitation as Cultural Capital**

Pierre Bourdieu conceptualizes cultural capital as a set of socially valuable assets, encompassing culturally sanctioned tastes, skills, consumption patterns, attributes, and forms of recognition. These social assets – including education, intellect, manner of speech, and style of dress – facilitate or constrain social mobility within a stratified society. Cultural capital is intimately linked to one’s habitus, or embodied disposition, and the social structures in which one operates, known as the field (Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1984).

Bourdieu defines *habitus* as the process through which individuals “become themselves,” developing attitudes and dispositions, and through which they en-

gage in specific practices (Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 1977). The elements of cultural capital – skills, manners, and tastes – vary by social class and are internalized by children through their habitus. This internalization can either facilitate or hinder social mobility, ultimately influencing educational success.

Cultural capital also functions within the context of a field, which Bourdieu describes as a “series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, and appointments” that create an objective hierarchy and authorize particular forms of discourse and practice (Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 1993). Participation in a field necessitates *cultural literacy* – a nuanced understanding of both the rules and principles governing that field, as well as its *doxa*. The doxa represents fundamental beliefs that form the core doctrine of a field, accepted as self-evident and essential. It shapes one’s perception of the social world and their place within it (Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 1990).

In his analysis of the French educational system of the 1960s, Bourdieu used the notion of cultural capital to explain disparities in academic performance among children, highlighting how knowledge acquired outside of school reinforces social stratification. His framework elucidates how dominant groups leverage cultural capital to maintain social hierarchies, while marginalized groups often struggle to access these resources (Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, 1977).

However, while Bourdieu’s conceptualization emphasizes the dominance of the culturally powerful, the Nigerian context of Qur’an recitation presents a compelling divergence. In Nigeria, the poor and marginalized can acquire cultural capital that is highly esteemed by dominant groups. Unlike Bourdieu’s binary model of dominant versus dominated classes, this phenomenon reveals that mastery of Qur’anic recitation by marginalized individuals can lead to wealth, status, and social recognition. The dominant class actively values and rewards this form of cultural capital, evident in tangible gestures such as purchasing cars or financing Hajj pilgrimages for accomplished reciters. This case necessitates a rethinking of Bourdieu’s model, demonstrating that cultural capital is not exclusively monopolized by the dominant class (Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1984).

For many reciters, the acquisition of Qur’anic recitation skills is deeply embedded in their upbringing, facilitated by family traditions or the broader social milieu characterized by a Qur’anic lifestyle. This lifestyle involves early and consistent exposure to the recited Qur’an – whether at home, in neighborhood madrasas (schools), or via mosque broadcasts. Teachers of recitation are readily available, and in recent decades, media platforms like radio, television, smartphones, and social media have amplified access to recitation practices. Unlike

contexts where family economic capital heavily dictates educational outcomes, here, Qur'anic education thrives on minimal economic investment, making it accessible to various socioeconomic groups. Success in this domain is not necessarily measured by competition victories but by a family's achievement in enrolling their children in Islamic education – a pathway that may or may not lead to economic gains. However, beyond its role as a cultural practice, Qur'anic recitation also operates as a form of religious capital, one that can be transformed into social, economic, and even political capital. Women who excel in recitation gain spiritual merit, but they also tap into the symbolic power of religious authority, which, in turn, can grant them access to public recognition and material opportunities.

Through its embodiment, Qur'an recitation serves as a unique form of religious and cultural capital – one that is both personally internalized and institutionally recognized. Institutional recognition comes through titles such as *ḥāfiẓ* (male memorizer of the Qur'an), *ḥāfiẓa* (female memorizer), *Gwani* (male master of the Qur'an), or *Gwana* (female master), and through official certifications from institutions like Usman Dan Fodio University. Accumulating this capital demands significant personal effort, as reciters invest considerable time and energy to master the art of recitation. Once internalized, it becomes an inseparable part of their identity, with the potential to be converted into other forms of capital – social, economic, and symbolic. This dynamic transformation is particularly evident in how women leverage their expertise in Qur'anic recitation to access public platforms, “*halal*” musical performances and spoken-word expressions of devotion, which further expand their social and economic mobility. This intersection of embodiment, effort, and institutional recognition underscores how Qur'an recitation, as a form of both religious and cultural capital, transcends Bourdieu's original framework. The Nigerian context illuminates the fluidity of these interrelated capitals and challenges assumptions about their exclusivity to dominant social classes, highlighting how marginalized women strategically navigate and repurpose religious authority for broader social and economic gains.

The closing ceremony of a Qur'an competition, as described above, brings together a diverse array of influential figures to honor the Qur'an and its reciters. It is a dynamic social field where actors possessing different forms of capital interact and negotiate their status. Royalty, the wealthy, and politicians holding government positions attend the event, offering winners monetary rewards and valuable gifts such as cars, plots of land, houses, furniture, and jewelry. Through a nuanced understanding of the “*doxa*” of this social field, these actors strategically convert the capital they possess into new forms. The affluent and members

of royal families gain social capital by bestowing generous gifts on the reciters. Politicians, on the other hand, accrue political capital; their presence at these events, coupled with their financial contributions, can influence voters and bolster their electoral prospects. Even though the gifts originate from public funds and are presented on behalf of local, state, or federal governments, the individual holding political office at the time often takes credit for these acts of 'generosity', regardless of their religion or party affiliation.

During the celebration, the winners convert their cultural capital into economic, symbolic, and social capital. Economic capital manifests in the form of cash and material gifts awarded to them. Social capital derives from the public's recognition and trust, as the reciters are seen as individuals who shoulder the sacred responsibility of preserving and reciting the Qur'an. Symbolic capital is achieved through the honor and prestige conferred upon them, symbolized by their immediate transformation into royals, a practice known in Hausa as *nadin sarauta*.

The concept of symbolic capital draws from Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, introduced in his seminal work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Veblen describes conspicuous consumption as the purchase of luxurious goods and services to display economic power, signal wealth, or enhance social status (Veblen 1994, 75). Marcel Mauss further expanded this concept, noting that those who rise suddenly from lower to higher economic classes (*nouveau riche*) often engage in ostentatious displays of wealth to signify their entry into elite society (Mauss 2002, 65). These ideas underpin Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, which suggests that symbolic capital lies between class and status – it is not merely about possession, but also about the ability to appropriate objects imbued with perceived or actual value (Bourdieu 1984, 291).

Sociologists and anthropologists observe that symbolic capital accumulates when individuals fulfill responsibilities rooted in positions of high regard. This capital can be converted into tangible benefits within one's community, though its value is contingent on the historical and social context in which it is accrued. In Muslim communities, for example, those who memorize and recite the Qur'an (*ḥuffāz*) gain significant symbolic capital.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in the Hausa context, where many competitors hail from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (*talakawa ko marasa wadata*). By winning the competition, these individuals gain symbolic capital and are celebrated as royalty. Each year, the top winners are ceremoniously turbaned as Kings and Queens of the Sokoto Emirate. Male winners are adorned in elaborate regalia, including a colorful cloak embroidered with silk, a sleeveless

robe (*Babbar riga*), a long-sleeved inner kaftan (*yarciki*), a cap, a white turban (*rawani*), a brown hand-woven hat (*malafa*), and a ceremonial staff. Female winners receive a similarly ornate mantle (*alkyabbar mata*), beautifully embellished to mark their elevated status.

The *nadin sarauta* ceremony is a significant moment of symbolic transformation. The titles of *Gwani* (for men) and *Gwana* (for women), which denote mastery in Qur'an recitation and memorization, are conferred upon the winners. These titles signify the winners' fulfillment of a sacred and reputable role within their community.

For example, in the 2015 Auchi competition, the overall winners Khadija Tanimu and Abubakar Adam were summoned to the podium for what is referred to in Nigerian English as the 'turbaning' ceremony. This ritual, akin to both coronation and knighting, saw Gwani Abubakar Adam dressed by the Shehu of Borno, a traditional ruler whose lineage traces back to the early 19th century. Assisted by aides, the Shehu dressed the Gwani in a sequence of garments, starting with the inner kaftan, followed by the robe and cloak. The final touch involved tying a long white turban in an intricate style, with ear-like shapes framing the head. The 14th Emir of Kano, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi II, then presented the ceremonial staff, solidifying the transformation.

Amidst chants of "Allāhu Akbar" (God is great), Gwani Abubakar recited the *Fātiḥa* (Opening Chapter), a choice reflecting gratitude and reverence. Similarly, the female winner, Gwana Khadija Tanimu, was dressed by the Queen of Otaru, who holds the title "Ogbaichi of Auchi" and presides over women's affairs. Her shorter but equally symbolic ceremony culminated in chants of joy from the audience. These ceremonies illustrate how symbolic capital is constructed and conferred, socially elevating the status of Qur'an reciters through deeply embedded cultural and religious practices.

Why are the *Gwana* and *Gwani* honored as royals? How can we understand the public perception of such ceremonial 'turbaning' of Qur'an reciters? Pierre Bourdieu's conception of symbolic capital offers a compelling framework to explain the symbolic power vested in this practice. Bourdieu (1984) argues that symbolic capital accrues primarily through the fulfillment of social obligations that are inherently imbued with potential for prestige. For Qur'an reciters, 'turbaning' symbolizes their social elevation to a status similar to royalty due to their fulfillment of a profound communal duty: the memorization and recitation of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an, as an embodied text, requires human bearers (*ḥamala*) who safeguard it not physically, but through memory. According to Islamic law, the memorization of the Qur'an is a collective obligation (*farḍ kifāya*), meaning



Photo of a turbaned female and male reciters at the national competition in 2021.  
Picture, Nura Bello Alkali.

that Muslim communities must ensure that at least some members commit it to memory. Those who undertake this task absolve the rest of the community of this duty, thereby earning honor and recognition. Moreover, while the decision to memorize the Qur'an is voluntary, forgetting it is not; reciters must continuously engage with the text throughout their lives.

The symbolic capital derived from this practice is closely tied to its historical and cultural context. The 'turbaning' ceremony's significance is anchored in the historical regalia of northern Nigerian traditional states. The garments worn by the *Gwani* and *Gwana* are emblematic of old kingdoms, states, and caliphates. Although British colonial rule diminished the official power of these traditional states, they continue to exert considerable influence over their subjects and retain traditional, religious, and even political authority. For many, allegiance to these pre-colonial entities remains stronger than to the modern nation-state of Nigeria.

As Dr. Abdullahi Imam, a scholar of Hausa language and culture at Yobe State University, explained during interviews, the garments bestowed upon the *Gwani* resemble those of contemporary Hausa emirs and are visual representations of the Sokoto Caliphate. These garments blend traditional Hausa rega-

lia with Islamic dress. For instance, Hausa kings traditionally wore a two-eared headgear (*hula mai haɓar kada*). Following the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, this attire acquired religious significance. When Usman Dan Fodio, the *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (Commander of the Faithful) and first Caliph, dispatched emirs to over thirty emirates, each *Sarki* (emir) received a turban, a cloak, a staff, and a book of sermons. On Fridays, the *Sarki* would don the royal cloak and the two-eared turban, symbolizing Allah, lean on the staff, and deliver the sermon. These ceremonial items reflect the scholarly legacy of those who introduced Islam to Hausaland, incorporating new elements over time, such as embroidered cloaks and the distinctive turban style.

The process of wrapping the turban follows a deliberate pattern that visually evokes the calligraphic structure of “Allah.” The central folds and loops of the fabric correspond to the strokes of the Arabic letters, with the two distinctive “ears” representing the dual vertical elements in the script. The curvature of the draping often mimics the flowing calligraphic style of traditional Islamic writing, reinforcing the sacred association.

This symbolic rendering serves multiple purposes. It transforms the act of wearing the turban into a form of embodied devotion, where the individual becomes a living inscription of divine remembrance. It also underscores the significance of material culture in Islamic spirituality, where garments, adornments, and their configurations become expressions of religious identity and theological meaning. Further exploration of this symbolism can contribute to the broader discourse on Islamic semiotics, visual piety, and the intersection of material culture with sacred text. Understanding how the turban visually encodes “Allah” provides a unique perspective on the interplay between textual and embodied religious expression, enriching both historical and contemporary discussions on Islamic aesthetics and devotional practice.

The *malafa* (a brown hand-woven hat) worn by the *Gwani* predates the Sokoto Caliphate but was imbued with religious significance by Shehu Usman Dan Fodio and his followers. The *malafa* served as protection against the sun during their outdoor preaching sessions. Notably, Shehu's daughter, Nana Asma'u, wore the *malafa* during her classes and gave it to female leaders of the *Yan-Taru* movement, who spread education among women in rural areas. Consequently, the *malafa* came to symbolize education, particularly female education.

The practice of ‘turbaning’ winners of Qur'an competitions dates back to the inaugural national Qur'an competition held in Sokoto in 1986. As the historical seat of the Sokoto Caliphate and the residence of the Sultan of Sokoto, Sokoto holds immense spiritual significance for Nigerian Muslims. At the

closing ceremony, *Sarkin Musulmi* Abubakar Sa'ad III proclaimed that winners would be honored with the titles of *Gwani* and *Gwana* and turbaned as "Kings and Queens of the Emirate" (*masarauta*). He affirmed that producing masters of the Qur'an was the emirate's duty, and those who fulfilled this duty deserved the traditional honors and titles of the emirate. This tradition has continued annually, with the garments provided by one of the emirs (*Sarakuna*).

For many Nigerian Muslims, the turbaning of Qur'an reciters resonates deeply with both Hausa and Islamic history. However, none of my interlocutors explicitly linked this practice to a similar event believed to occur in the afterlife: the 'turbaning' in heaven of not only the reciters but also their parents. Several *hadiths* mention that, on the Day of Resurrection, the Qur'an will appear in the form of a pale man who says to its companion: "Do you recognize me? I am the one who made you stay up at night and thirsty during the day." The reciters will then receive dominion in their right hands, eternity in their left, and a crown of dignity upon their heads. Furthermore, the reciters' parents will be adorned with garments surpassing any in this world. When they ask, "Oh Lord, how did we earn this?" the reply will be: "Because you taught your child the Qur'an" (*Jami' at-Tirmidhi*, 2914).

This "heavenly turbaning" symbolizes the eternal reward for fulfilling the communal obligation of preserving the Qur'an. The responsibility of carrying the Qur'an in their memory ensures reciters a place among the noble and obedient angels in the afterlife. According to *hadith* traditions, they will be invited to "recite and rise," ascending higher in paradise with each verse they recite until they reach the last verse memorized. At this point, a crown of dignity will be placed upon their heads.

In the following section, I will explore how the public honoring of reciters intersects with economic benefits and the empowerment of female reciters.

### "I got everything"

In August 2015, Maryam Muhammad, a professional Qur'an reciter from Kano State, invited me to her home. We were joined by three other prominent female public reciters: Amina Garba, Shafa'atu Muhammad, and Khadija Zakariyya. Maryam, a seasoned competitor and former *Gwana* at national Qur'an recitation competitions, is a married mother of six. Her achievements include several national and international Qur'an recitation awards. At the time, she had recently moved to a new house in an affluent, tranquil neighborhood.

Maryam's home reflects her success. The expansive compound contains one of her cars, though she has won a total of six vehicles in different Qur'an competitions. The house features four bedrooms, each stylishly tiled in beige and

cream hues. The kitchen, a modern and minimalist space, is immaculately clean, tiled from floor to ceiling, and equipped with a gas cooker, refrigerator, built-in cabinets, microwave oven, washing machine, and other modern amenities that may not be readily available to ordinary people in the community.

The living room displays comfort and achievement, furnished with two large sofas, two single chairs, and a plush rug. One wall prominently displays large photographs capturing Maryam's award-winning performances. At the center of the room is a home theater system, which includes a large television connected to a satellite receiver offering access to over two hundred Arabic-language and Islamic channels. During my visit, I noticed many unopened packages of household items and electronics – such as a refrigerator, stove, and washing machine – still in their original packaging, neatly placed in a spacious corner adjacent to the living room. Nearly everything in the house appeared to be new, seemingly obtained through competitions.

Curious, I asked Maryam which items in her home were gifts. Smiling, she responded in Hausa, “There is nothing that I have not won – just look around; there are many things in cartons that I have not even unpacked” (*ba kyautar da ban sa mu ba, ki duba ki gani, ga wasu kyaututtuka ma ban bude su ba*). Her prizes include six cars, six Hajj pilgrimage packages (each worth approximately 10 million Naira or about \$6,000 USD in 2024), refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, sewing machines, furniture sets, kitchen utensils, books, and substantial amounts of cash. Although she refrained from specifying the exact total, she mentioned winning hundreds of thousands of Naira on multiple occasions: “I have won a million Naira, eight hundred thousand Naira, at another competition five hundred thousand... seven hundred, nine hundred thousand... at some I cannot even remember the amount” (Interview with Maryam Muhammad, Kano, 2015).

This portrayal exemplifies how Qur'an recitation, traditionally regarded as a spiritual practice, can yield significant economic capital. The intersection of spiritual endeavor and financial reward has not been without controversy. Muslim scholars have long debated the propriety of accepting worldly compensation for recitation. This debate is further complicated by issues such as the vocal '*aw-ra*, which often casts female Qur'an competitions into contested territory. Central to these discussions is the question of whether receiving economic rewards for Qur'an recitation is permissible. Some scholars argue that such compensation contradicts the practices of the early Muslim community and consider it impermissible. Their stance is supported by certain hadiths, such as one that states: “Whoever recites the Qur'an should petition Allah by it, for there will come a people who will recite the Qur'an and then ask people [for money]” (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, 2917).

Nevertheless, some scholars allow for exceptions. For example, accepting payment for teaching the Qur'an, using recitation as part of the *mahr* – the obligatory gift or payment from the groom to the bride in an Islamic marriage contract – or reciting for healing purposes are generally considered permissible (Ibn Qudamah, *al-Mughni*, 5:589). These nuanced positions illustrate the ongoing tension between maintaining the spiritual integrity of Qur'an recitation and acknowledging the material realities faced by contemporary reciters.

Regardless of where one stands on the issue, it is undeniable that Qur'anic recitation can be transformed into economic and other forms of capital. Qur'anic competitions, supported by state funding to encourage students to learn the Qur'an, offer significant monetary rewards and valuable gifts to successful reciters, potentially leading to substantial wealth. For some, particularly those with limited access to secular Nigerian institutions, these competitions could provide a rare opportunity to escape poverty. For instance, male contestants who participate in competitions held in Saudi Arabia often receive substantial financial rewards, which, when converted from Saudi riyals, amount to millions of naira. Upon their return, these winnings enable them to accrue even more social and symbolic capital by acquiring property, starting businesses, and marrying first or additional wives. Although female reciters are barred from male-only public Saudi Arabian competitions, they too can achieve considerable success and earn valuable prizes through state and national competitions in Nigeria, as well as international competitions in countries like the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia and Morocco.

It is crucial to emphasize that many Qur'an reciters come from middle, upper, or even elite families, illustrating that Qur'an recitation is not exclusively the domain of the poor. However, for lower-income families – particularly those in the Almajiri system, whose destitution is rooted in poverty, lack of state support, colonial legacies, modernity, and parental neglect, as thoroughly analyzed by Hannah Hoechner (2018) – Qur'an competitions offer a pathway to elevate their social status, even though these students do not form the majority of competitors. Narratives from Hoechner's interlocutors and my own interviews reveal how Qur'anic education, often the only affordable option for these families, has empowered the Almajirai. While aspirations to become medical or engineering professionals may have been out of reach, these students redirected their efforts into Qur'an recitation. The modest fees for their education – often less than a dollar – were frequently waived by compassionate malamai (teachers). Despite this minimal financial investment, these students have elevated their social status as bearers of the Qur'an.

Nigeria's transition from military rule to democracy incentivized politicians to invest in religious activities to court voters. Additionally, Nigeria's reliance on



Young boys from the Izala *yān agaji* aid group during an Izala Qur'an recitation competition in Jos South, helping in organizing the event and providing information to audience. Photograph by the author.

oil exports – and the resulting economic boon from rising oil prices – fueled government spending on Qur'an competitions and pilgrimages to Mecca and Jerusalem. Although some religious leaders view these investments with suspicion, they have revitalized the competitions, infusing them with “petro-naira” (money earned from oil exports) and substantial rewards for winners.

A striking example is Malam Ahmad Sulaiman, a renowned reciter who played a pivotal role in President Muhammadu Buhari's 2019 reelection campaign. Sulaiman's distinctive voice and widespread popularity earned him the moniker “campaign warrior,” as his recorded Arabic prayers, repurposed with political messages, mobilized voters. His involvement highlights the evolving nexus between religious figures and political power in Nigeria, sparking debates about religion, politics, and corruption. This visibility also made him a target: shortly after the election, armed kidnappers demanded a ransom of 300 million naira for his release.

Notably, investment in Qur'anic recitation extends beyond politicians and royalty. Under the principles of *al-amr bi-l-mar'uf* (enjoining what is right)

and *fi sabīl Allāh* (for the sake of Allah), community members also contribute generously to these events. Even those with limited financial means offer their services by cleaning venues, arranging seats, or managing traffic. This communal spirit underscores the reciprocal relationship between the reciters and their communities: while reciters embody the Qur'an, the community supports and elevates them. In essence, Qur'anic competitions not only transform individual lives but also reflect broader socio-political and economic shifts within Nigeria. They reveal how traditional religious practices adapt to contemporary realities, creating new avenues for social mobility and communal cohesion.

### **Mobility Capital**

Although Pierre Bourdieu did not explicitly address mobility as a form of capital, the context of female Qur'an reciters illustrates how mobility can become a crucial factor in transforming cultural capital into other forms of capital. Mobility, in this paper, extends beyond the physical movement of bodies; it encompasses the movement of voices as well. It is both the capacity to travel and the ability to have one's voice travel with them. Mobility, in its broadest sense, refers to the long-range flow of people, capital, ideas, objects, and technology, as well as the ordinary, localized movement of people and material or nonmaterial things (Kaufmann et al. 2004; Sheller and Urry 2006).

Moret defines mobility capital as the ability that enables individuals to cross borders easily, feel comfortable in different places, engage in various activities, and return with ease. This concept also includes the capacity to be both mobile and immobile, encompassing accumulated past experiences of movement and the potential for future mobility (Moret 2018). To refine this further, Kaufmann et al. propose motility as a theoretical construct that focuses on the interactions between actors, structures, and contexts. Motility captures how entities – whether people, goods, or information – acquire and utilize the capacity for socio-spatial mobility depending on their circumstances (Kaufmann et al. 2004).

Scholars have debated the scope and nature of mobility capital, questioning whether it truly qualifies as a form of capital and, if so, how it relates to other forms of capital. Research exploring the intersection of mobility and migration studies has shown that cross-border mobility practices can yield significant social and economic benefits (Moret 2018; Sheller and Urry 2006). For marginalized refugees, mobility capital involves controlling when and how to move, fostering a sense of comfort in different locales, engaging in activities, and returning home. In modern societies, spatial mobility is closely associated with individual freedom – the ability to travel anywhere, select relationships, and choose places to live and work. This spatial mobility, or motility, is vital for social integration and managing daily life (Kaufmann et al. 2004).

In light of these discussions, I propose vocal mobility as a subset of spatial mobility that can lead to social mobility. This is particularly significant in gendered Islamic spaces where women's physical and vocal freedoms are restricted. How can mobility be analyzed in the context of Nigerian female Qur'an reciters, and to what extent does it constitute a factor of social discrimination? How does having mobility empower women and allow them to transform cultural capital into other forms of capital?

The above-mentioned 1997 Izala-A ban of their female members' participation in state and national competitions cited concerns rooted in the *'awra* debate and potential promiscuity associated with girls' mobility. Despite these restrictions, female reciters outside the Izala group continue to travel and perform publicly. Within the Izala-A group, female recitation is confined to restrictive district-level competitions, with strict rules prohibiting travel and overnight stays. As Malam Muhammad Haris, the head of the Izala Council of Scholars in Jos North Local Government, explained during our interview:

We allow girls to participate only in school and district-level competitions. We do not permit them to compete at state, national, or international levels. District competitions are held within local areas, so the girls can stay with their parents and travel from home to the venue, avoiding the need to stay overnight. Do you understand? Girls should remain at home. Allowing them to compete at the state level would require travel to other parts of the state. For example, if a competition is held in Shandam or Langtan (approximately 80 kilometers from Jos), this distance necessitates travel, accommodation, and overnight stays. This is what Izala opposes. To avoid this, we impose restrictions—we do not want girls to spend nights away from home. Our aim is to keep them secure and separate from men. Therefore, we do not permit participation beyond the district level. Even at district-level competitions, events are held in the morning with only women in the audience. Men are not allowed to attend, except those who are necessary, such as brothers, uncles, and teachers.

Although Izala imposes strict mobility restrictions, the movement has not addressed the structural issues that could genuinely enhance the security it claims to prioritize. Rather than banning travel, Izala could have implemented measures to mitigate the perceived risks associated with the Dan Fodio competition, such as strengthening safety protocols, providing organized security, or fostering community-based protections.

It is also important to note that historical record does not support the notion that unaccompanied travel inherently poses a significant danger. The au-

thor's observations highlight that, historically, rural *Yan Taru* processions traveled without harm, contradicting contemporary justifications for travel restrictions (Mack 2023: 33). Furthermore, while Nigeria is currently facing serious insecurity issues, these challenges affect both men and women. The selective restriction of women's mobility under the guise of safety, while men continue to travel freely despite facing similar risks, raises critical questions about the motives behind Izala's policies.

This debate on women's mobility intersects with the discourse on *safar al-mar'a* (women's travel) with or without a *maḥram* (male guardian). Hadith literature seems to prohibit women from traveling alone, but some scholars interpret this prohibition as contingent on safety conditions (Al-Qaradawi 2003). In their view, it is not the act of travel that is forbidden, but the potential harm that could arise from it. Malam Muhammad Haris did not cite this *maḥram* discourse as a rationale for restricting female mobility. This omission is notable given Izala's tacit acceptance of unaccompanied female travel during the annual Hajj pilgrimage, where women travel under the supervision of Nigerian Pilgrimage Authority officials. Instead, Izala frames its position as adherence to the authority of *ulū al-amr* (those in charge), as prescribed in the Qur'an (4:59). While Izala has facilitated some forms of female mobility – through neighborhood *madrassa* and increased *hijab* usage for public appearances – years of restricting female reciters' physical and vocal mobility have significantly diminished their numbers.

Despite these constraints, some women have leveraged their vocal mobility to transcend traditional gendered and religious boundaries. Women who successfully navigate the restrictions on physical movement by using technology, such as social media, radio, and online Qur'an recitation competitions, have found ways to assert their voices in public religious spheres. The use of digital platforms not only extends the reach of their recitations but also provides them with visibility, recognition, and, in some cases, economic capital. This shift from physical to virtual mobility highlights the adaptability of female reciters in negotiating the socio-religious limitations placed on them.

Moreover, mobility capital in this context is not only about movement but also about the ability to accumulate prestige, religious authority, and public recognition. Female reciters who travel internationally – whether for Qur'an competitions, Islamic conferences, or religious leadership roles – demonstrate how mobility capital operates within the nexus of religion, gender, and politics. The success of Nigerian female reciters such as Fatima Muhammad<sup>9</sup> and Maryam Habibu<sup>10</sup> in gaining international acclaim underscores how mobility (both physical and vocal) functions as a tool for empowerment. By capitalizing on

their Qur'anic skills, these women gain access to platforms traditionally dominated by men, shifting the boundaries of acceptable female public participation in Islamic spaces.

Thus, the case of Nigerian female Qur'an reciters illustrates the broader intersections of religion, politics, and women's (dis)empowerment. While religious authorities may impose limitations on women's travel and visibility, the dynamic ways in which female reciters reclaim their mobility – through strategic navigation of physical space, digital presence, and international engagements – challenge static notions of women's roles in Islam. Their experiences compel us to reconsider how mobility, as both a structural constraint and a form of agency, influences the evolving landscape of gendered religious authority in contemporary Nigeria and beyond.

## Conclusion

This paper began with a straightforward inquiry: What forms of worldly empowerment does public recitation bring to women, and how can we understand the public use of the female voice as a form of capital? Rather than delving deeply into the spiritual nature of recitation or the jurisprudential debates surrounding the *'awra* (nudity) of the female voice, this study has demonstrated that even spiritual practices like Qur'an competitions possess a distinct worldly dimension. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's non-Marxist conceptualization of capital, I have theorized the convertibility of non-economic capital and examined how Qur'an recitation – understood here as a form of embodied and institutionalized cultural capital – can be transformed into social, economic, and symbolic capital.

As revealed through my ethnography, Qur'anic competitions serve as a compelling example of the convergence between *dīn* (the spiritual) and *dunya* (the worldly). This intersection is frequently overlooked in studies of Muslim piety and spirituality, which often contrast *dunya* as secular with *dīn* or *ākhirā* (the Hereafter). My research shows that within the *dunya* sphere, what were once purely spiritual skills are converted into tangible forms of capital. Women reciters are rewarded not only with financial compensation and property but also with social recognition and prestige.

In examining the position of the Izala movement, it is important to clarify that this paper does not suggest Izala – despite its advocacy for women's education – is uniquely strict or conservative compared to Sufi groups. The notion of the female voice as *'awra* has roots stretching back centuries. Muslim jurists have debated this issue for over a millennium, and societies have adopted various interpretations and implementations. My reference to Nana Asma'u

bint Fodio, an iconic figure in women's education, and her group, the *Yan Taru*, underscores the historical precedent for women's public engagement. Yet, even under the support of the Sokoto Caliphate, there is no historical record of Nana Asma'u or the *Yan Taru* directly addressing male audiences. Thus, both the concept of vocal 'awra and restrictions on women's mobility are overarching principles within diverse Islamic movements, though applied differently.

In this context, recognizing the significance of public recitation in women's lives is essential. Traditionally, men have held intellectual and spiritual authority, benefiting from broader educational opportunities and freedom of movement. As more women gain religious expertise through Islamic education, perceptions of their voices – and the ongoing discourse surrounding vocal 'awra – influence the positions they can hold in public spaces. Even as women rise in prominence, they often negotiate patriarchal expectations to preserve respectability and avoid social backlash. These discussions not only define what women can express, to whom, and in what settings, but also impact their ability to earn a livelihood and shape their social status.

## Notes

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241.

2. *Ibid.*, 241.

3. *Ibid.*, 242.

4. *Ibid.*, 243.

5. *Ibid.*, 243.

6. *Ibid.*, 248.

7. *Ibid.*, 247.

8. For studies engaging with these concepts, see Diane Reay, "Feminine Capital and Emotional Capital," *The British Journal of Sociology* 55, no. 4 (2004): 487–506; and Shirley R. Steinberg, *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011).

9. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVH35hflXC8>.

10. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPw6k4yp\\_eM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPw6k4yp_eM).

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