

The Transnational Express: Moving Images, Cultural Resonance and Popular Culture in Muslim Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper explores the migration of entertainment media from transnational sources to Muslim Northern Nigeria, and explains how the new media form attempts to negotiate the tension between cultural resonance of the media messaging and an Islamicate society operating newly re-introduced Shari'ah Muslim law. The presentation analyses this migration of media cultures in two dimensions. The first was through what I refer to as "cultural downloading"—the process by which Hindi films were directly appropriated into Hausa video films. The second was how the American "War on Terror" became a subject of comedic reinterpretation of the "clash of civilizations" in an Islamic visual entertainment through reenactment of the American response to the 9/11 incident – which provides an insight into the role of spectators in a larger transnational drama.

Introduction

The Hausa video film industry came into commercial existence in 1990 with the release of *Turmin Danya* by Tumbin Giwa Drama Group in Kano. The group was made up of TV drama artistes who wanted to extend their range of filmmaking to include the video format which was being exploited and popularized by southern Nigerian filmmakers. From about 1990 to 1999 the general format of Hausa video films tended to reflect the traditional tale of either romance and co-wife rivalry, with occasional forays into gangland warfare as typified by the social and political upheavals of urban Kano in the 1980s and 1990s.

When the debates about the cultural implications of the more commercial Hausa video film started after the appearance of video films exploring adult domestic scenes in 1999, the main focus was on the cultural implications of such video films. What brought about the debate was the clearly different cinematic techniques adopted in the video films and those used in the traditional TV drama series. And in fact in recognition of this difference of styles of storytelling, some Hausa video film stars, especially Shehu Hassan Kano (whose opinions were given in *Film*, March 2006 pp 33-34) were keen to point out that they are making "films" not "drama".

Such differences were indeed imposed on the producers. The traditional TV dramas popularized by NTA networks in northern Nigeria had distinct patterns and styles and were sponsored by established companies such as Lever Brothers, PZ, GBO etc. These companies market essentially domestic products – soap and detergents, cooking items, mattress, toothpastes, etc – and the drama series they support must reinforce family values and systems. What comes out was a series of dramas based on wholesome family entertainment values. Further, the early TV drama producers lacked the technical equipment to follow characters to every location, and therefore had to take advantage of natural lightening. This necessitated scenes being shot outdoors as much as possible.

A further technical imposition on the family values of early TV drama producers was the structure of the Hausa household. With a *zaure*, a corridor and an open atrium, “*tsakar gida*”, the division between private and public spaces are clearly delineated in typical Muslim Hausa dwellings. The TV drama series producers were careful not to reveal bedroom – conjugal family spaces – in their films, and in all circumstances avoided scenes where a man and a woman would have to be seen in bed. Further, the women who appear in the TV drama series were matronly – elderly and de-sexualized, such that they can only appear as either mothers, aunties or at the very least, elder sisters. Dialogue and interaction among the stock characters was predicated upon the strict division between the private and public spaces – female guests are received in the “*tsakar gida*”, and rarely in the inner bedrooms; male guests are received in the *zaure*. In fact to make it easier to receive male visitors, traditional houses often have a frontage *dakali*, a cement “bench” on which the head of the house receives more informal visitors.

The critical theory propounded by Jürgen Habermas in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) provides a convenient framework for further understanding the division between the private and public spaces, and most especially in Muslim communities where the distance imposed by space between genders in public is strongly enforced. The particular appeal of this critical theory is in providing an analytical base that offers an opportunity to determine the impact of extraneous variables in the delineation of space in traditional societies. At the same time, it provides an insight into the application of the critical theory in a traditional society negotiating a redefinition of its public spaces within the context of media globalization.

I would wish to make it clear, however, that in this study, I focus attention on the visual media re-enactment of the female private space in an Islamicate environment,¹ and the critical reaction of such process from the properly constituted representatives of the public sphere. As Nilüfer Göle (2002:174) notes,

The public visibility of Islam and the specific gender, corporeal, and spatial practices underpinning it trigger new ways of imagining a collective self and common space that are distinct from the Western liberal self and progressive politics.

Such public visibility includes breaking the conjugal space barrier by video cameras to film an essentially conjugal family space and bring it to the attention of the public. In this therefore I do not focus attention on participation of Hausa Muslim women in negotiating what I refer to as “space chasm” that separate their private and public spheres in their attempts to be part of the Hausa Muslim economic system.

The “public sphere” to which Habermas refers encompasses the various venues where citizens communicate freely with each other through democratic forums (including newspapers and magazines, assemblies, salons, coffee houses, etc.), which emerged with the formation of a free society out of the nation-state in 18th century Europe. The public sphere in its original form functioned ideally as a mediator between the private

¹ I adopt Asma Afsaruddin’s (1999) usage of Marshall Hodgson’s term *Islamicate* (1974:1:58-59), for the subsequent “modern” period (roughly from the 19th century on) to describe societies which maintain and/or have consciously adopted at least the public symbols of adherence to traditional Islamic beliefs and practices.

sphere of the people (including family and work) and the national authority, which engaged in arbitrary politics, although in our application dealing specifically with the sub-national issue of Muslim laws of female identity in northern Nigeria.

The public sphere exists between the private sphere and the public authority. The participants are privatized individuals, who are independent from the public authority, enjoying cultural products and discussing about them. As the institutionalized places for discussion such as salon, coffee house and theater increased, the places for family became more privatized and the consciousness about privacy strengthened more.

“As soon as privatized individuals in their capacity as human beings ceased to communicate merely about their subjectivity but rather in their capacity as property-owners desired to influence public power in their common interest, the humanity of the literary public sphere served to increase the effectiveness of the public sphere in the political realm.” (Habermas 1989:56)

Public opinion produced in public sphere started to have an influence on legislating law, which overarched the monarchic power and became the universalized. Further,

Included in the private realm was the authentic ‘public sphere’, for it was a public sector constituted by private people. Within the realm that was the preserve of private people we therefore distinguish again between private and public spheres. The private sphere comprised of civil society in the narrower sense, that is to say, the realm of commodity exchange and of social labour; imbedded in it was the family with its interior domain (*Intimisphäre*). (Habermas 1989:30)

Habermas himself even gives a schematic structure of the division between the private realm and the sphere of public authority (1989:30).

Private Realm	Sphere of Public Authority	
Civil society (realm of commodity exchange and social labor)	Public realm in the political sphere Public sphere in the world of letters (clubs, press)	State (realm of the ‘police’)
Conjugal family’s internal space (bourgeois intellectuals)	(market of culture products) ‘Town’	Court (courtly-noble society)

Thus as Talal Asad (2003) pointed out, the terms “public” and “private” form a basic pair of categories in modern liberal society. It is central to the law, and crucial to the ways in which liberties are protected. These modern categories are integral to Western capitalist society, and they have a history that is coterminous with it. A central meaning of “private” has to do with private property, while “public” space is essentially one that depends on the presence of depersonalized state authority.

While Habermas was primarily interested in “rational-critical” communication as the ideal standard of modernity, he identified its practical emergence with the intermediate space of coffee-houses and salons, where private citizens could assemble as a public, between the private space and personalized authority of kin and the public realm marked by the theatre of royal and religious ritual. It was set apart from those

by communication that had to be convincing without the external support of the authority of the speaker.

Hausa Filmmakers and the Religious Establishment

While there were continuous grumblings and complaints about cultural misrepresentation in Hausa home video films from readers of the popular magazines that were established in the period (1999-2001), none of the films up 1999 paid close attention to religious issues. A typical complaint was:

“I am calling on producers to focus attention on films that are appropriate to Shari’a. This is because of the numerous complaints from people (civil society), especially the song and dances. People are saying these are not appropriate to our religion and culture. Why should we not show our pure culture, without borrowing from others? Or is our culture inadequate? I am calling on them therefore, for the sake of Allah, to try to reduce the songs where a boy and a girl sing to each other”. (Alhaji Rabi’u Na Malam, Letter Page, *Fim* December 2000 p. 8).

The first Hausa films that started to draw the ire of the culturalist establishment were *Soyayya Kunar Zuci* (“Love Burns the Heart”, 1995, Jos) and *Alhaki Kwikwiyo* (“Sin is a puppy, it follow its owner”, 1998, Kano). Both were directed by late Mr. USA Galadima, a veteran director based in Jos. Both were shot with Betacam and not the VHS format that was to become standard for Hausa home video films. However, although *Alhaki Kwikwiyo* was subsequently released on VHS, *Soyayya Kunar Zuci* was never released on video. Each of these films were accused of being too adult for the conservative Hausa audience.

Soyayya Kunar Zuci is a story of lovers who eloped to escape their parents opposition to their friendship. While on the run, the girl becomes pregnant. Both the mother and the baby die at the baby’s birth. It was the process of the girl getting pregnant, obviously involving some form of nudity that created the most concern to the cinema audience when it was screened in 1995. Defending her role in the film, the leading actress Aisha Bashir stated in an interview:

“This is just drama (not real life), and if you know what you are doing (as a character) you should know that (the scenes depicted in the film) are not part of our culture. Our purpose in the film is to warn our people about these kinds of behaviors (elopement and unwanted pregnancy) which are typical of *Turawa* (white people). Our people should respect their culture...*Soyayya Kunar Zuci* is my best film and I am proud of it.” Interview with Aisha Bashir, *Fim*, March 1999 p. 7).

Alhaki Kwikwiyo was released in December 1998. The video film was based on a woman’s empowerment novel of the same name by Balaraba Ramat Yakubu. It chronicles the story of a woman whose husband was not happy with the fact that she gave birth to five girls. He decided to divorce her and subsequently married two younger wives, one after the other. The central themes of the film are two – *kishi*, and the empowerment of the divorced “senior” wife. It was in the way the principal character interacted with his wives, and the fact that their *kishi* was explored principally through their competition for his sexual attentions that earned the film the label of *batsa* (obscene).² According to a viewer:

² Strictly, “*batsa*” means foul – whether in language or behavior. It is a generic term for any behavior that has sexual overtones, and can include both soft and hard core of pornography; although in the context of *Alhaki Kwikwiyo*, it refers to the numerous scenes in which the principal character either

“This film is good and an improvement. But there are three places that need to be censored for the general release of the tape. First was the scene where Alhaji and his wife were shown on bed together. Second where one of the wives was seen giving her houseboy a massage in an adulterous situation. Third where a flash of the pant of one of the wives was shown in a domestic violence scene. If they remove these scenes it can be suitable for general audience. But if they don’t, then it is not proper to take it to our homes for children to see.” If they restrict it only to cinema, there is no problem.” A viewer, at Kofar Mata Stadium after the premier showing of *Alhaki Kwikwiyo, Fim*, March 1999 p. 9).

Before *Alhaki Kwikwiyo* was released on tape, already the news of the film’s content had spread throughout northern Nigeria. Cassette dealers in Kaduna were the first to react against the film when one of them stated:

“We will not sell this tape (*Alhaki Kwikwiyo*) when they release it because it goes against our culture and religion. It is clear there is some form of nudity in the film, and in our position as Muslims, it is prohibited for us to make films with nudity. We have told the producers if they want us to distribute the film, they have to remove a lot of things (nudity).” Mustapha Mai Kaset, Kaduna, in an interview with *Fim*, March 1999 p. 12.

However, in almost rapid succession three video films were released that all proved catalytic to the establishment of hitherto unheard of censorship mechanisms. The specific video films to attract the wrath of the Muslim scholars were *Saliha?*, (“pious?”), *Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka* (“Ignorance is harder to cure than lunacy”) and *Malam Kartata* (“Teacher, watch your entry point”). The first two were both released in 1999, while the third, produced, but never released in 2000, was a more serious adult-themed drama.

I will now look at the evolution of each of these films and how they contributed to the idea of censorship in northern Nigerian home video film industry.

Saliha?

Both the religious and government establishments had, up till 2001, largely ignored the home video film phenomena. Indeed except for children, youth and housewives, the entire Hausa home video remained largely ignored by the large sections of the civil society. The Muslim scholar community took notice of the industry only when *Saliha?* was released in 1999 in Kaduna. The video was widely condemned as ridiculing Islam and the Muslim female, especially her *hijab*—the head covering. According to the video’s blurb:

Saliha? is a Hausa home video portraying the importance Hausa culture attaches to the preservation of the virginity of female child before marriage.

Saliha? chronicles the life of a deeply conservative and apparently religious Hausa Muslim girl constantly clothed in *hijab* (the Muslim female head covering) to further accentuate her modesty and piety. After she got married she passed on to her husband a sexual transmitted disease (not AIDS)—clearly indicating that despite her religiosity, she was sexually promiscuous.

touches his wives or appear semi-naked with them on beds, or where one of the wives was seen massaging her houseboy.

The furor that the video created was to a large extent caused by the fact that the video was, like almost all Hausa video films, split into two parts. Part 1 was first released and told the story up to Saliha's nuptial night, when her husband was bitterly disappointed to discover she was not a virgin (the video did not explore whether he was also as "pure" as he expected her to be – reflecting a moral burden on the female character, at the exclusion of the male, in most Hausa video films), and to cap it, a few days later he discovered he had contracted a sexually transmitted disease. Tests at the laboratory showed he contracted it from her.

The release of this section of the entire drama only in Part I of the video, which did not of course show how it was resolved, gave the impression that apparently pious girls (thus the question mark on her name, *Saliha*, which meant *pious* and is also a common Muslim Hausa name) are not all they seemed to be. Thus the audience did not wait to watch part two of the drama before pouncing on the producer and the director.

In Part 2 of the video, which was hurriedly released to complete the story, the producers provided flashback scenes about how Saliha lived her life before the marriage. It would appear that despite the piety she was a "loose" girl, with a boyfriend from whom she contracted the disease. Yet if anything, it only confirmed to the critical audience the *hijab*, a symbol of sacredness, has been profaned.

The video drew massive controversy and condemnation, including a "fatwa" on the producer by a religious group in Zaria.³ In an advertorial, the producer explained his motive by insisting that he wanted to draw attention to the need for *istabra'i*, a waiting period which a Muslim woman who had lived a free lifestyle must undergo before getting married, and which in the character in the story did not observe.⁴ In a direct quotation in an interview, the producer was recorded as saying:

"I did not produce the video with the intention of causing any controversy, and Allah is my witness. I am (therefore) seeking His forgiveness for any mistakes that are in the video." (*Fim*, November 1999 p. 22).

A year later, in retrospective bravado, the producer denied this statement in another interview with *Fim* in which he stated,

"I can't recall seeking for any forgiveness over this video (*Saliha?*). What happened was that those who issued death sentence on us actually demanded an explanation about our motives in making the video. I explained myself in radio interviews. What I did was that after the furor generated by the video, I consulted learned Muslim scholars about accusations against me and the my motives for doing the video. All the scholars I consulted assured me that if I were killed on these reasons alone, it would be murder, which is contrary to Islamic ruling on such issues. So I am saying if they had killed me, I would have died a martyr." (El-Saeed Yakubu Lere, Producer, *Saliha?* in interview with *Fim*, December 2000 p. 59).

The death sentence was eventually removed. If anything, the incidence awakened the Muslim community to the fact the Hausa home video can be used a medium of

³ The producer received a threatening letter on 27 July, 1999 instructing him to withdraw the video from the market, issue a public apology for doing the video in the first place, or be ready to die. *Fim*, November 1999 p. 21.

⁴ Advertorial, "Fim 'din *Saliha?* Ya Ciri Tuta", *Fim*, July 1999 p.29.

messaging – and the message may not always be what they want. Viewer reaction was equally furious, as typified by this angry correspondent to a magazine:

“Before the appearance of *Saliha?* young girls and women who loved wearing hijab became tarred with the same paintbrush as those who don’t like hijab. Night or day, whenever a girl or woman with a hijab is sighted, you often hear sniggers of “Saliha?”, indicating a hypocrite. Almost at once, many women stopped wearing the hijab, for fear of being equated with Saliha of the film *Saliha?* Similarly, those who are not Muslims, and who hate Islam will now seize the opportunity to label all Muslim women hypocrites, especially as the film is produced by an insider (i.e. a Muslim)”. (Hajiya Ali, *Tauraruwa* magazine Letters page, August 1999, p. 2).

Like in most controversies, there was some support for *Saliha?*, as indicated by the following letter’s page correspondent:

“The critics claimed that *Saliha?* was to meant to disgrace the hijab. In my view this is not so. People seem to forget this is *drama*. Also the title says *Saliha?*, the ? is a query...the critics are just being selfish, otherwise the film illuminates us about ugly dogs biting hardest, because all those holier-than-thou types may have a secret or two to hide. And yet they are threatening to kill the producer! Why? For just producing a film? I recently heard him explaining himself in *Jakar Magori* (a Radio Nigeria, Kaduna program). I really pity him.” (Abdulganiyu A. Ango, *Fim* magazine letter’s page, December 1999 p. 7).

Eventually the furor died down, but it served as a bitter lesson to other producers, since no other film appeared that seem to cast integrity on the Muslim female. It also shows clearly the clash that is likely to occur when media technologies are used in a powerful way to portray social issues. The refusal of the critics to distinguish between drama and real life show the balance of credibility needed in using media technologies in visual messaging in traditional societies.

Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka (JYFH)

While controversy over *Saliha?* was still raging, another video with religious theme was released also in 1999 in Kano. This was *Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka*, a devastating comedic take on Hausa Muslim scholar mendicants, and at the core a cautionary tale about trusting Muslim scholars without accrediting their knowledge or authority. It portrays the machinations of some Muslim scholars in their relationship to society as well as women.

It focuses on the chronicles of a wandering marabout, “Al-Sheikh Ibro” (played by Rabilu Musa Danlasan, a comedian), with a shallow knowledge of Islam, and yet portraying himself as a scholar of immense knowledge, and preying on gullible citizens, especially women who want him to give them charms and chants to ward off a husbands intending or resident co-wife (*kishiya*). This mendicant was counterbalanced by a more knowledgeable Malam who corrects the mistakes of the charlatan “Sheikh”.

While the video film narrates his escapades in a typical community, the trigger that caused furor was a song and dance sequence in the film, the *Rawar Salawaitu* (the *Salawaitu* dance), a particularly energetic dance which was led by the Sheikh himself. The dance was performed by five women who came to the mallam seeking chants and charms. The mallam insists on the dance as part of his consultation fees. The dance involves the entire body, especially the derriere, shaken vigorously and suggestively. Even the camera artwork was rigged to focus exclusively on the breasts and derriere

of the women dancers. In one of the scenes, he became so sexually aroused that he was seen battling with a raging penile erection (“gora”⁵) after a sexually arousing dance from one his women visitors. Even the characters’ dressing, mode of speech and instruments of religious worship such as the ridiculously over-sized rosary (“charbi”) beads which is referred to as *firgita jahili* (frighten an illiterate) is a caricature of a Muslim mallam.

JYFH generated a lot of debates in Kano, principally among those who felt that the Hausa Muslim malam, a revered member of the civil society, has been desecrated.⁶ Typical reactions included:

“In his video film, *Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka*, he made women dance, and the dance was not appropriate. Malam Ibro, you should be aware that children and youth watch these films and they can imitate what they see. I hope you will correct in future. And you should stop using swear words in your films, it is not appropriate, because you are supposed to be teachers, not destroyers of good manners.” (Ibrahim Muazzam Yusuf, *Fim*, July 2000 p. 5).

And

“*Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka* is disgraceful. Has the film elevated or downgraded Islam? What does “Salawaitu” mean? Where did they get the word? If we call the women who did the (Salawaitu) dance prostitutes, are we wrong? Please take care for the future!” (Abubakar Usman, *Fim*, October 2000, p. 5)

The religious establishment did not specifically react against the film, simply because they were not even aware of it—since they rarely watch such films. However in an interview, the producer of the film (an actor who appears in the film as being the more rational mallam than Ibro’s charlatan Sheikh Ibro, and who himself is a well-versed Islamic scholar) depended it:

“Despite the complaints of viewers about JYFH, it is my best film because of two reasons. First it has brought me out as an actor. Secondly I want to express my concern about the way some Malams behave, and we used the film to illustrate the dangers of ignorant Malams.” Interview with Malam Dare, *Garkuwa*, December 2000 p. 38.

His defense for the film remained consistent, as he further clarified in another interview three years after the film was released:

“Sure I have heard (the furor against the film), and they are still at it. It is however a mistake for people to condemn the film. I have tried several times to draw the attention of people towards this ignorance about the role of film in social messaging. We have portrayed the wealthy, the poor, the ignorant, the rulers. We have shown the good and bad attributes of each of these class of people. So what is surprising when we portray Muslim scholars? There are bad ones as well as good ones among them. Thus when you show a disease, you should also show its cure. And everything that Ibro did in the film *Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka*, there are some Muslim scholars in our communities with these kinds of behaviors (Interview with Auwalu Idris (aka Malam Dare), *Fim*, August 2002, p. 21).

The fact that the Hausa Muslim scholar community had never commented on the Hausa film industry was essentially because they did not see it as a culturally threatening influence. Islamic culture has been strongly entrenched in the mindset of

⁵ A knobby stick or club – a perfect metaphor for a penile erection.

⁶ The forum for expressing these views were public gatherings, radio phone-in shows on Radio Kano, and Hausa popular culture magazines such as *Garkuwa*, *Fim*, *Annashuwa*, *Nishadi*.

the Hausa such that if years of media parenting with Hindi film bombardment did not produce a community of idol-worshippers (despite cramming thousands of Hindi film soundtracks which paid tribute, one way or other, to Hindi idols), then certainly the Hausa home video would not. The industry came to their notice only when it challenged their moral space. More was to come with the public screening of *Malam Karkata* in 2000.

Malam Karkata

With the public outcry about JYFH still ringing, the third catalytic video film appeared. This was *Malam Karkata* (2000, Kano) which was first (and only) shown at Wapa Cinema, Kano in April 2000—few months before the Shari’a was re-launched—and created the first conduit to censorship in Kano by attracting widespread condemnation from the patrons because of its seemingly sexual innuendos and suggestions. This was more so in a polity already sensitized to Shari’a and religiosity.

Malam Karkata explored an adult situation in which gullible Hausa housewives in their search for chants and charms to either dominate their husband’s co-wives or their husbands (or both), were manipulated by marabouts. The malam in the film always insists on sexual gratification from his female clients. In the course of his nefarious activities, he contracted HIV/AIDS.

The title of the film is itself a direct sexual reference to a sexual position, thus geared towards revealing the activities of such marabouts. The video film is an attempt to highlight the issue of sexual harassment in Hausa societies and how women are taken advantage of by unscrupulous marabouts. It also contained a message about HIV/AIDS.

Reaction to the film in Kano was immensely negative, and the cinema did not screen it again. As a result of this reaction, the film was never released for general viewing. The film was seen as another firing salvo at the credibility of the Muslim scholar community. However, in an interview with *Tauraruwa* (September 2000 p. 12), the Executive Producer explained that the film was targeted at adult audience, and was in fact based on real true life story, rather than fiction—proving that truth is stranger than fiction.

Similarly, in another interview, the principal character of the film, who played the role of Malam Karkata, Alhaji Kasimu Yero, a veteran TV drama star, explained his involvement thus:

“How can I regret my role in this film (that has been banned by marketers)? We had good intentions in doing the film. The film is about a godless Malam, Karkata, who uses his position to sexually abuse vulnerable women who come to him for spiritual consultations. We balanced his character in the same film with the life of a God-fearing Malam who always admonishes and advices women coming to him seeking chants and charms to harm their husbands or their husbands’ other wives, informing his clients that he did not learn such things in his studies. What is wrong with this message? At the end of the film Malam Karkata contracted HIV/AIDS from an infected girl, and his life entered into a real doldrums. Here, we want to warn Muslim teachers that beside this terrible sin of unlawful sex which will be severely punished by Allah, they are also endangering their health with their lust”. Kasimu Yero defends his role in *Malam Karkata*.” Interview, *Fim*, October 2000, p. 46).

In any event, *Malam Karkata* was never released commercially. Interestingly, the same storyline was used by a producer in Sokoto and a film, *Nasaba*, was made in 2004. In *Nasaba*, instead of a Malam sexually abusing his client, his role was taken over by a witchdoctor (*boka*)—a move to deconstruct the role of *boka* in Hausa societies.⁷

Two other Hausa video films that further contributed to the censorship debacle in Kano were *Sauran Kiris* (2000) and *Kauna* (2000). Like the Hindi cinema most copy, Hausa home video producers were careful to avoid particularly inter-gender physical contact in romantic scenes. *Sauran Kiris*, with a suggestive poster of a couple, looking deeply at each other, and seemingly *about* to kiss (thus the contextual meaning of the title, *kiris* or almost) bucked this trend and generated heated condemnation from viewers — and improved sales, since those who were not even aware of the video rushed out to buy it to see just what the fuss was all about!

Similarly, *Kauna* featured some of the most powerful acting by Abida Mohammed in her role as a deaf person, and thus focuses attention on the problems faced by those with disabilities in Hausa societies. However, the video drew a lot of criticism due to the extremely “sexually suggestive” dance routine of the same Abida Mohammed in it — thus negating the seriousness of the subject matter of disabled persons.⁸

The public reactions to these films reveal the conflicts that exist between techniques of filmmaking that reproduce the family conjugal sphere and traditional Islamic values. The reinforcement of privacy is not only a Hausa mindset, but also Islamic, as reflected in the following Islamic injunctions respecting the privacy of the individual

(Surat Nur, 24:19):

Those who love (to see) scandal published broadcast among the Believers, will have a grievous Penalty in this life and in the Hereafter: Allah knows, and ye know not.

(Surat Nur, 24:27):

O ye who believe! enter not houses other than your own, until ye have asked permission and saluted those in them: that is best for you, in order that ye may heed (what is seemly).

(Surat Al-Hujrat, 49:12):

O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it...But fear Allah. For Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.

Hadith (Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW))

‘The lowest of the people to Allah on the Day of Judgment will be the man who consorts with his wife and then publicizes her secret.’ (Muslim)

⁷ The *boka* and the *Malam* are the main spiritual consultants in Hausa spiritual world, at least for women who seem to go to either for chants (to a *Malam*) or charms (to a *boka*, as well as *Malam*) to obtain some powers to control over either a rival co-wife, or a husband. For detailed analysis of *boka* Hausa films, as well as Hausa life, see Mathias Krings (2003) *Possession Rituals and Video Dramas: Some Remarks on Stock Characters in Hausa Performing Arts*, in A.U. Adamu et al (eds)(2004), *The Hausa Home Video: Technology, Economy and Society*, Kano, Nigeria, Center for Hausa Cultural Studies; Mathias Krings (1997) *Embodying the Other. Reflections on the Bori Pantheon*, *Borno Museum Society Newsletter* 32&33: 17-29.

⁸ Incidentally, similar dance routine was popularized in the 1980s by a troupe of *shantu* (aerophone) music players from Queen Amina College, Kaduna, and drew similar cultural furor due to the “pump the volume” (“gwatso”, or “gantsare gaye”) dance routine.

Jurist...

‘One should not talk about the defects of others even if one is asked about them. One must try to avoid prying and asking personal questions about the private lives of others’ [Al Ghazali, Kitab Adab pp 242-43]

Thus the technique adopted by Hausa video filmmakers in communicating moral messages to their audience would seem to clash with these injunctions that respect privacy. Interestingly, even in India, the focus of the television dramas changed in the 1990s. According to Mankekar (2004 pp 418-419),

In contrast to earlier television shows, the programs of the 1990s displayed an unprecedented fascination with intimate relationships—particularly marital, pre-marital, and extramarital relationships—and contained new and varied representations of erotics (explicit as well as implicit). These programs included soap operas (e.g., *Tara* [Zee TV], *Shanti* [Star], and *Hasratein* [Zee TV]), sitcoms, talk shows (e.g., *Purush Kshetra* [Man’s world] and *The Priya Tendulkar Show* [both El TV]), made-for-television films and miniseries, music programs (many of which were based on songs from Indian films), Indianized versions of MTV, and television advertisements telecast on transnational networks but produced specifically for audiences in South Asia and its diasporas. The emphasis on the intimate and the erotic was strongest in talk shows (which proliferated after the advent of transnational television), soap operas, MTV-influenced music videos, and television advertisements.

And while the TV in northern Nigeria reverted to its staid and traditional self, shedding off its earlier transnationalism, the changes in Hindi television heralded the transformation of the Hindi cinema—which in turn midwived the new Hausa video film. As Rachel Dwyer (2000 p. 188) points out, in Hindi films, erotic longing is frequently portrayed in terms of romance and expressed through the use of song, fetishization, and metaphor. In most “mainstream” films, she adds, “film songs and their picturization provide greater opportunities for sexual display than dialogue and narrative sections of the films, with their specific images of clothes, body and body language, while the song lyrics are largely to do with sexuality, ranging from romance to suggestive and overt lyrics.” Thus despite the sometimes-explicit display of erotics in song sequences, in terms of narrative focus, erotics in Hindi films tended to be subordinated to and subsumed under romance (see Dwyer 2000).

This is similar to the strategies adopted by Hausa video film producers who seize the opportunity to emphasize erotica in their video films, most especially in bedroom scenes. Erotica becomes an essential motif in Hausa video films because the Hausa society, like the Hindi popular culture Hausa video filmmakers copy, is a male-dominated society. However, Hindi filmmakers had proven adroit at drawing attention to the toils, turmoil and tribulations women face in Indian social fabric, and which resulted in some of the most acclaimed cinema in entertainment history. For instance, Mehboob Khan glorified the stoic strength of a woman in his magnum opus *Mother India*. Nargis as Radha created an alluring image of a woman who could be deified. By surviving flood, famine, desertion by her husband, Radha acquired a Durga-like image. When her son Birju abducts a girl, she curbs her emotions and shoots him for the greater good of the society. The comparison of *Mother India* with Vinay Shukla’s *Godmother* is valid because *Godmother* too has a woman protagonist and like *Mother India* depicts how an errant son proves to be his mother’s undoing. Shabana Azmi in *Godmother* has no qualms about picking up a gun. She refuses to indulge her son and uses her power to get the unwilling target of his interest (Raima Sen) married off to

the man of her own choice. In Asit Sen's *Khamoshi*, Radha (Waheeda Rehman) epitomized the inner strength and indomitable resilience of an Indian woman. A nurse in a mental asylum, she, too became a patient of mental illness.

Pre-marital sex in Hindi cinema, at least until recently, generally adhered to two rules: first was that the encounter had to be understood by the couple as a genuine and committed "marriage," suggested by evocations of nuptial ritual (e.g., the prototypical scene in *Aradhana*, 1979), and two, even a single night's contact invariably resulted in pregnancy that, moreover, produced a male offspring. In *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*, the pretext for Naren and Ganga's abrupt union is the supposed "mountain custom" of girls being allowed to choose their own spouses during an annual full-moon festival (represented by the song *Sun Sahiba sun*, "Listen, Beloved [I have chosen you; will you choose me?]") as well as the pressure exerted by another local suitor. In a dramatic scene, Ganga leads Naren to a ruined temple that has been adorned as a nuptial chamber, while outside her stalwart brother Karan Singh (played by Hindi-speaking Indo-American actor Tom Alter in a rare non-Anglo role) fights off the jilted fiancé and his minions, ultimately sacrificing his life for his sister's happiness.

However, with the spate of Westernization and the desire to appeal to wider audiences beyond India's borders, Hindi filmmakers had increasingly introduced innovative sexuality in their films that focus attention not on the earlier Hindi motif of the heroic woman, but as a sex object. As noted by a columnist in *India Daily*,

"In recent days Bollywood is tending towards the blue. The core component of the movies will shift towards the explicit use of sex, say some experts watching the trends. The reason is simple that is what people want...The Bollywood bombshells use dummies to perform scenes without clothes. But they cannot perform the lovemaking or sexy scenes. That is the reason why directors are looking towards using performers from blue movies in India and abroad. Trisha Hosania, "Bollywood tends towards blue" *India Daily*, Sep. 2, 2005.

Indeed, showcasing sex 'suggestively' is not novel to the Indian film industry, considering that there were films like *Aradhana* (Rajesh Khanna seducing Sharmila with the song 'Roop Tera Mastana') and *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (Zeenat Aman's first film flaunting her body sensuously) which toyed with erotica. Amongst the innumerable that followed, one of the most talked about erotic film was *Dayavan*. Vinod Khanna and the much younger Madhuri Dixit had a passionate scene in the shower. Even *Mughal-e-Azam*, a classic of Hindi art film had one of the most erotic scenes in Hindi cinema, with a suggested kiss all properly enacted behind a studio prop.

Thus the 1990s saw an increasingly bold Hindi filmmaking which in actual fact, retrospectively pay homage to the sensual nature of the Hindi traditionalist icons of *Kama Sutra*. This was heralded by the 'era' of Hindi filmmakers such as Mallika Sherawat, Neha Dhupia and Isha Koppikar to name a few. They changed the look of Hindi cinema and were responsible for a more bold and erotic portrayal of sex in Hindi cinema. Mallika's seventeen kissing scenes with co-star Himanshu Mallik in Govind Menon's *Khwahish* took the entire Bollywood by storm and the industry was shocked at the dare-bare scenes. Then came Mahesh Bhatt's *Murder* opposite Emraan Hashmi. The film told the story of a couple that's lost interest with one another, and the wife ends up finding sexual gratification from her childhood friend. The film's success was more to its heavy reliance on bedroom sequences. *Julie*, featuring Neha

Dhupia and Priyanshu Chatterjee was a breakthrough, both in terms of portrayal of sex and showcasing women. *Jism*, starring Bipasha Basu and John Abraham went one step further depicting sexual attraction between the couple to the extent that the two decide to get rid of her husband. Karan Razdan's *Hawas*, starring Meghna Naidu, Shawar Ali and Tarun Arora also worked well with the audience because of the generous dose of sex. As observed by Saibal Chatterjee (2005 p.1) of the new tendencies in Hindi cinema,

Commercial Hindi cinema has come a long way since the era when directors had to coyly zoom in on a bee hovering over a colourful flower to suggest the onset of amorous emotions. The revolution has gathered steam especially in the past 12 months with a bevy of former models and beauty queen daring to drop more than just their clothes...

Pre-cursors to Censorship

With Hausa video films getting emboldened with sexuality, and *Malam Karkata*, coming at the doorsteps of Shari'a, it was not surprising that a censorship mechanism was ignited and provided cassette marketers with an opportunity to show solidarity with the Shari'a and create the pre-cursor to censorship. This was because the first organized reaction against *Malam Karkata* was from the powerful Kano State Cassette Sellers and Recording Co-operative Society, a loose coalition of cassette marketers.⁹ In an interview, the Secretary of the Co-operative explained why the cassette dealers will not accept *Malam Karkata*, even though it had been certified for public viewing by the National Film and Censors Board, Abuja:

"There are many ways to educate people, if only we can use our brains. What we foresee in this film is that children will also watch it, not just adults, and children can pick up bad behaviors from what they see. Since we are spreading our religion and culture through film, other ethnic groups may despise us. It is for these reasons that we resolved not to market this film until the producers have cut out the naughty scenes. We did not say the scenes depicted in the film do not happen in real life, but we want control. Even though the producers have been certified by the National Censors Board Abuja for general viewing, we will not accept it. We are not in this business for the money, but for the sake of Allah. And we support the government fully in this". (Interview with Ahmad Muhammad Amge, Secretary, Kano State Cassette Sellers and Recording Co-operative Society on why the Co-operative refuses to stock and sell *Malam Karkata*, *Tauraruwa*, Vol 4 No 6, September 2000, p. 14).

Indeed this prompted the Co-operative to set up its own censorship mechanisms to filter out films such as *Malam Karkata*. Since this will obviously affect producers, the Kano State Filmmakers Association decided to agree to this and became part of the

⁹ Cassette dealers feature strongly in the marketing of Hausa video film because most producers do not have the capital to duplicate their videos in large marketable quantities. Thus when a video is completed, the producer gives a master copy to cassette dealers *free*, and then *sells* the jackets (i.e. covers) of the tape to them at N50 (about 35 cents). The cassette dealer then takes the responsibility of duplicating copies of the master tape, placing them in the jackets and selling them to individual buyers at N250 (\$1.80), or re-sellers at N180 (\$1.28). The N50 cost of the jackets is all the producer gets out of this deal; even then, the producer is paid *after* the dealer has sold the tapes. The jackets of tapes not sold are returned to the producer, and the cassette dealer simply erases the tape and records *another* video on it! The artistes also do not receive any subsequent royalties on the sales of the video – having been paid a lump sum by the producer before shooting begins. However in 2003, a new marketing strategy was adopted by the dealers – this was the purchase of the CD rights of the films at a N200,000 to N300,000 (\$1,428-\$2,142) depending on how flashy the film is (not its storyline is tertiary to first the song and dance in the film, and second to the stars that appear). Sometimes a CD right is purchased on the strength of the song and dance routines, which if the dealer is happy with, he can then advance the producer some cash for a story to be written!

Joint Committee on Film Censorship for Kano and Its Environs, set up by the Cassette Sellers Co-operative in 2000. As announced to the press by the Chairman of the Kano State Filmmakers Association, Alhaji Isma'il Marshall:

“A very important point is that the Kano State Filmmakers Association has set up an internal committee drawing its members also from the Cassette Dealers Association, a sort of *Censorship Board*. Every video tape must first be previewed by this censoring committee, to ensure that it is in consistence with our culture, before being released in to the market. We did that to avoid criticism, disrespect to the Holy Qur'an in some artistes' dialogs, nudity and other inappropriate behaviors. Once we note these scenes, we bring them to the attention of the producers to correct. If he refuses, we will deny him a license to show this video in any form. These are some of the efforts we undertake to empower the industry.” (Alhaji Auwalu Isma'il Marshall, as the then Chairman of the Kano State Filmmakers' Association, Interview, *Fim*, August 2000 p. 14).

This committee on censorship, became the effective watchdog of the film industry in Kano. In a public announcement the committee issued out a circular on Sunday 18th July 2000 warning film makers to avoid the following in their films:

1. Sexuality – in language or action
2. Blasphemy
3. Nudity
4. Imitable criminal behaviors
5. Violence and cruelty
6. Other video nasties that can come up from time to time (my translations from an advertorial in *Tauraruwa*, Vol 4 No 6, September 2000, p. 27).

However, no sooner had the co-operative started working than complaints started trailing it. Quite simply, many producers refused to allow their films to be censored by the marketers—something they can do since the censoring was voluntary and had no legal backing. A specific case in point was a then newly released film, *Tazarce* (Kano, 2000) which the producer released in the market without waiting for the certificate from the marketers' censoring committee. In an interview, he stated his reasons for breaking the censor's rules:

“What they have done to us is not fair, unless they have a hidden agenda in preventing our progress. We have been to Abuja (NFVCB) and they have cleared us. We came to Kano and they (marketers' censoring committee) also cleared us and suggested corrections which we did; yet they refused to issue us with a certificate. So we decided to ignore them and sell our film directly to the market”. (Sani Luti, Producer, *Tazarce*, defending breaking the censorship rule in Kano, in an interview with *Mumtaz*, September 2000 p. 13).¹⁰

Further, older producers accused the marketers of divide-and-rule strategies by breaking ranks and sneaking to individual producers to get their films released without certification. Younger producers claimed that the major producers always get away without their films being censored, and that the arrangement was done to favor the older and more established producers. Yet others alleged corruption and bribery to circumvent the censoring mechanism.

It is significant that the major complaints were not against creative observations of the censorship committee, but against the logistics of censoring. In order to create a more acceptable formula for censoring, the marketers invited the Kano State

¹⁰ The full details of the meeting are given in *Mumtaz*, September 2000 pp 13-14).

Filmmakers Association to a meeting held on 21st August 2000 to discuss the issues. Some of the problems of censoring were highlighted by one of the members of the committee, Dan Azumi Baba, a veteran producer:

“We called this meeting to discuss the issues (of censorship). You set up our committee, and unless we do something about the current situation, then some of us would have no option than to resign from the committee. Many things bother us about what we doing. For instance, a producer would come and insist that he is in a hurry and demands we should issue a certificate to him, despite the fact that there are other producers waiting for their turn. Other producers sabotage our efforts; yet others accuse us of stifling them”. (Speech of Dan Azumi Baba at the joint meeting of Cassette Seller’s and Filmmakers, Kano, 21 August, 2000, in *Mumtaz*, September, 2000 p. 13).

The Chairman of the meeting, Musa Mai Kaset, defended the committee against any accusations:

“Since we started, no one has come to complain about *batsa* (obscenities) in any tape we sell. We also receive tapes from other States in the north for censoring, and the producers are always happy with out suggestions. Yet shamefully, it is only in Kano that we face problems with producers. There ought to be a law that should apply to the process of making films, not just selling them”. Speech of Musa Mai Kaset at the joint meeting of Cassette Seller’s and Filmmakers, Kano, 21 August, 2000, in *Mumtaz*, September, 2000 p. 13).

It is interesting therefore that it is the industry that has started demanding for a “law that should apply to the process of making films”. At the end the meeting agreed to continue with the censorship process instituted, and fine any producer who refuses to co-operate with the censorship committee the sum of N10,000 (about US\$76). This fine also applied to any marketer who stocks and sells an un-censored film. The producers of *Tazarce* which heighten the problem, were fined N3,000 (about US\$23). It was clear therefore that censorship, even if self-imposed by the practitioners, would have problems.

Bush War: International Politics and Hausa Video Censorship

On Tuesday September 11, 2001 two hijacked airlines smashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. A third hijacked plane slammed into the Pentagon in Washington and a fourth one crashed in Pennsylvania, apparently out of control. The United States blamed Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda Muslim network, suspected to be hiding in Afghanistan. This prompted a US military action against Afghanistan. In Kano thousands of youth participated in marches of support and jubilation for Osama bin Laden as a result of this attack. Osama bin Laden was instantly seen as a folk hero, and a boom in naming newly born male babies Osama ensued. Hundreds of Osama bin Laden T-shirts and posters became available in Kano.

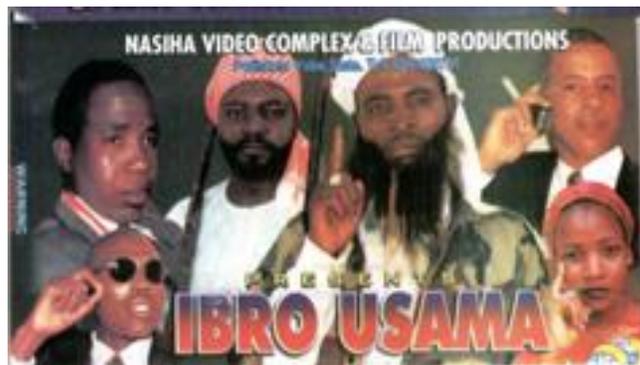
On 7th October 2001, a rally was held in Kano to support Osama bin Laden and protest American raids on Afghanistan. The issue of Osama bin Laden in Kano was therefore taken extremely seriously by government officials and security agencies. Thus there was a great unease when in 2002 a “Nigerian film”, *Osama bin La* (dir. Mac-Collins Chidebe) was released and sold in Kano. It was in Igbo language and created furor in Kano over its portrayal of Osama bin Ladan as a crook and fraudster. Plate 5a shows the video’s poster.



Plate 5a: Osama Bin Ladan...Nigerian Igbo version (2002)

Government security agencies were horrified that the video found itself into Kano markets. The “Nigerian” film market, controlled principally by Igbo merchants in Kano exists virtually independent of the Hausa home videos in Kano, and follow a different marketing and distributing network. The concern in Kano over *Osama bin La* was that it could generate riots – in a polity where Osama bin Ladan was seen as an Islamic jihadist. The video was quickly banned by the government (not even the Censorship Board, which was not aware of the film in the first place), and Hausa cassette dealers throughout northern Nigeria refused to stock it.¹¹

Right in the middle of this, a the trailer and poster for a new Hausa home video, *Ibro Usama* was released. When Igbo film makers released *Osama bin La* only the security agencies were aware of it. However, when *Ibro Usama* was announced, the religious establishment took immediate notice. Since the *Ibro* series of Hausa video were essentially slapstick comedies (with lots of facial pulling), and still fresh from the devastating attack on the Muslim scholar class in Ibro’s *Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka*, there were fears of repeat performance; this time, the short end of the stick would be an international *jihadist* hero. There was an immediate outcry against the film even before it was released. Plate 5b shows the poster and stills from the film.



¹¹ Interview with Mohammed Dan Sakkwato, major cassette dealer, Kano, October 2004.



Plate 5b: Bush War: Osama bin Laden vs. George Bush – Hausa Home video versions

The film actually details the American war against Afghanistan and the comedic antics both sides went through to execute the war. The script was poorly written and shows a significant lapse in the film producers' understanding of the war. For instance, the "Taliban ambassador to Pakistan" seems to prefer to make announcements on the Lebanese satellite station LBC, rather than Al-Jazeera. But then the film was not meant to intellectually challenge; but to provide, literally, comic relief to a serious subject matter. This point was lost on northern Nigerian Muslim scholar establishment who seized every opportunity to condemn the film and its makers.

For instance, the Hisbah— an Islamic vigilante group—under the then leadership of Sheikh Aminuddeen Abubakar went to the length of writing a protest letter to the Kano State Censorship Board, urging for a ban on *Ibro Usama*. However the Board insisted that they had seen the film, and saw nothing wrong with it from Islamic point of view. Indeed the Board even invited the Hisbah to come and watch the film in the Board's viewing room. The Hisbah did not accept the offer.

Due to the significance of the reason for *Ibro Usama* within the context of the interface between international politics of the military industrial complex and Islam, I am including the original Hausa language rationale for the film given by producers, and an English translation:

("Dalilin da ya sa na yi tunanin k'irk'iro *Ibro Usama* (shi ne) saboda shi dai Usama (bin Laden) mutum ne wanda ke son addinin Islama. Kuma mutum ne wanda yake nunawa sauran k'asashen duniya abin da ya kamata. Shi ne na ga ya kamata mu yi fim da sunansa domin mu nuna wa duniya duk wani Musulmi ya koyi irin abin da Usama yake yi domin samun ci gaban Musulunci baki daya").

"The reason for *Ibro Usama* is that Usama bin Laden is a true patriotic Muslim. He also shows other nations what is proper. These reasons prompted me to make a film about him so we can show me to the world as a model for every Muslim to copy his actions in order to further the cause of Islam". Malam Mato na Mato, Potiskum, Yobe State, Nigeria, Production Manager, *Ibro Usama*, interview with Fim magazine, August 2002, p. 22).

While this statement is apparently made in the spirit of Islamic patriotism, nevertheless it could also be interpreted as a loaded messaging encouraging the actions of the real Usama bin Laden, whatever those actions and their consequences are. It was surprising that this particular point was not a focus of concern either by the religious establishment, or by the Government. This further emphasized the

indifference with which the mainstream religious establishment and government agencies treat the entire the Hausa home video industry—unless it either touches, or sparks off “security” issues.

The film and its producers attracted a softer form of *fatawa* in the form of “*tsinuwa*” (curse) at mosques during Friday prayers at Bayero University Kano, Wudil (where the cast and crew of *Ibro Usama* were based) and Kaduna. The principal character in the film, Rabilu Musa Danlasan, who played the role of Osama bin Ladan, was defiant in an interview, about his role in the film.

“We as Muslims will never do anything injurious to Islam, but we will draw attention to how to strengthen Muslim practices in our communities. I am also very happy with the furor *Ibro Usama* generated, people abused and cursed us in mosques all over. Yet surprisingly when the film *Ibro Usama* came out, they saw it was not as they expected it. Ibro is not a Christian, or a pagan. Ibro is a Muslim, thus he will never do anything to damage Islam. But due to ignorance of wandering Malams (*malaman haure* – insulting, “not son of the soil”, wanderer) they attacked my role in the film.” Rabilu Danlasan, “Ibro Usama”, interview, *Fim*, August 2002, p. 15).

Eventually the furor died down and the film enjoyed moderate sales due to the curiosity factor it generated in many people who wanted to see what the fuss was all about.

Islam and the Video Star

The Islamicate establishment had, hitherto, developed an uncertain stand towards Hausa video films. Most were convinced by the arguments provided by the producers that the Hausa video film has weaned off Hausa youth from watching Hindi films. Also at every opportunity, the video film artistes and producers explain their vocation as educational (*ilmintarwa*), religious (*wa’azantarwa*), and more or less harmless entertainment (*nishadantarwa*). In Kano and other parts of Muslim northern Nigeria, in the light of impending Shari’a launch, Islamic scholars who had remained indifferent to the industry, suddenly started bickering amongst themselves about the merits or demerits of the new entertainment medium, and camps rapidly developed.

The first cluster maintains a neutral stand, giving the usual stock answers about the legality of the subject matter of the film storyline, rather than the practice of the filming itself. In particular, the Izala¹² leaders were cautious about the role of film in a Muslim polity. For instance, Sheikh Umar Hassan, an Izala leader in an interview with *Fim* (September 2002, p.34) urged Muslim organizations, especially the Jama’atul Nasril Islam (JNI), an umbrella organization of Muslims in Nigeria, to embrace the film industry and shoot their own films which should preach unity among the Muslim polity. Interestingly enough, the former Secretary General of JNI had something to say on the issue, when approached by journalists. As he stated,

“A young man, full of braggadocio, but ignorant of Islam or professional knowledge of the film industry will just enter into the profession. And yet the authorities are doing nothing about it, because to them it is just entertainment. Yet they don’t know where these films can end up. That is why we feel time has come for a system that will protect Islam. There should be a Censorship Board that will provide rules and regulations to bind every film producer, whether young or adult. This Board should censor films by watching them to ensure they will

¹² Jama’at Izalat al-Bi’a wa Iqamat al-Sunna, a modernist Islamic movement established in 1978. For details of the Izala movement in Nigeria, see Kane (2003).

not harm the public, before being allowed to be sold.” (“Jama’at Nasir Islam ready to contribute to improvement of Hausa films”, translated interview with Alhaji Jafaru Makarfi, former General Secretary of JNI, *Fim*, December 2002, p. 33).

A second cluster of Islamic scholars cluster condemns, in totality, the entire phenomena of entertainment. This was revealed during a meeting held on 9th August 2002, when the Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO) an NGO of Muslim women in Kano, convened a meeting between various Islamic scholars in the State and some video film producers, to understand each other. The meeting was held at the Sani Abacha Youth Center, and was interestingly enough, poorly attended by the members of the video film industry themselves. Consequently the dialog was more or less one way, and the Muslim scholars used the opportunity to color their views with the Saudi Arabian version of moral policing in a contemporary society.

Ustaz Bin Usman, for instance, in his presentation categorically stated that Hausa video film production should be stopped immediately, since “Allah did not create us for (our) amusement, but to worship Him”. He urged the video producers to choose another vocation. Malama Aishatu Munir Matawalle suggested that the film industry was introduced into the Muslim northern Nigeria by the Europeans to destroy Islam, “since some of the scenes were described in the Prophet traditions as reflecting the behaviors of the denizens of hell-fire”. She urged Hausa video film producers to produce videos in accordance with Islam. Malam Farouk Yahaya Chedi an Islamic scholar and lecturer in Islamic Studies at Bayero University, Kano, also condemned both Hausa videos and contemporary Hausa novels since they “promote alien cultural values, such as those of India, nudity and chasing women...”¹³ Only Alhaji AbdulKareem Mohammed, the Chairman of MOPPAN representing the Hausa video film industry presented a paper in which he defended their craft, and also challenged the Islamic scholars to become producers and produce the sort of videos they feel should be done. This challenge was actually taken up by one religious group, the Shiites.

Thus a third cluster of Muslim scholars saw nothing wrong with the video films, so long as they were produced according to Islamic tenets and the culture of the Hausa people; and almost without any exception, they decried the Hindi cinema-style singing and dancing in the videos. Those in this category included individual Muslim scholars such as Ustaz Yusuf Ali, as well as organized religious groups like the Shiites, or as they refer to themselves, Muslim Brothers, who embraced the new medium precisely because they noticed its potential in reaching out to a large, *young* urban audience, and could therefore be used as a recruiting and indoctrinaire mechanism. This is revealed in an interview with Malam Ibrahim Yakub El-Zakzaky, the Shiite leader in Nigeria in which he stated his organization’s stand on films:

“I urge Hausa film producers to protect our culture and Shari’a. Whatever they should do in the name of entertainment should not be against Shari’a. We thank Allah that from within our organization some of us have started thinking of producing our own films (“The position of Films in Islam”, Interview with Malam Ibrahim Yakub El-Zakzaky, the leader of “Muslim Brothers” (Shiites) in Nigeria, *Fim* September 2001, p. 52).

¹³ Conference report, *Wakiliya*, No 2, December, 2002, p. 17. Kano.

The caution which with the Shiite treated the Hausa video film industry was later revealed to be calculated, because of their intention to engage in the industry; it would look contradictory to condemn the medium on religious basis. Thus the Shiite in northern Nigeria, instead of breathing fire and brimstone over the salacity and de-acculturation of Hausa video films, took to making *their* own, preaching their messages in the way they felt their followers would most easily absorb — in effect using the same communication channels to reach to a wider audience; the video medium therefore became a powerful ideological tool for reaching un-tapped territories. To this end, about eight Shiite-flavored Hausa video films were made at the forefront of the re-introduction of the Shari'a penal code. These included *Mace Saliha: Tsiran Al'umma*, *Shaheed*, *Karbala*, *Sanin Gaibu*, *Mujarrabi*, *Taubatan Nasura* and *Arba*. Similarly, Al-Tajdid, a splinter Shiite group in northern Nigeria also produced *Tafarki* (2002) which focuses on the consequences of Shari'a law implementation on non-Muslim communities.

Enter the Dragon — Censorship Arriveth!

These controversies and cultural criticisms merely added the fuel to the fire that was raging. The Shari'a, first announced in Zamfara State served as the trigger.¹⁴ On 27 January 2000 Zamfara State re-enacted the first Shari'a Penal Code in Northern Nigeria. Shari'a courts had already been established earlier. The example of Zamfara was followed by Niger (May 2000), Sokoto (May 2000), Katsina (August 2000) Jigawa (August 2000), Yobe (October 2000), Kebbi (December 2000), Bauchi (March 2001), Borno (June 2001), Kaduna (November 2001). In December 2001 Gombe announced its intention to launch the Shari'a, but civil protests from Christian groups made it impossible. Similarly, Kwara State made the attempt to introduce Shari'a in November 2001 when some Muslims in the State forwarded a bill to the State House of Assembly, calling for the introduction of Shari'a.

The Kano State Government re-established the Shari'a penal code in June 2000, but it was made effective from November of the same year to coincide with the holy month of Ramadan. The announcement of the new penal code was received with trepidation by filmmakers, since it was clear that with a new law in force, filmmaking was to be affected. In particular, how the films portray Islam and Muslim peoples in a deeply conservative society. Government officials in Kano—just as had happened with Hausa novelists in 1990s—had by 2000 started getting worried about the spate of complaints about the cultural consequences of the new media. For instance, in a letter to the History and Culture Bureau, the Office of the Special Adviser to the Chieftaincy Affairs in Kano noted:

We have noted with concern the proliferation of the production of local Hausa films. This may be a welcome development, as it will help in the general development of indigenous film industry. However, we have received many complaints regarding some of this films (sic) and the way they are corrupting our religion, culture and good traditions and eating deep into our social fabric. The impact of these films unfortunately are more devastating on the vulnerable members of our society, children, youth and women.

¹⁴ Some form of *Shari'a* has long been part of Nigeria's legal code in the civil law governing marriage and inheritance. Its re-launching in 1999 in Zamfara State (and soon followed by about 12 other states in northern Nigeria) was part of Islamic re-awakening in Nigeria occasioned by a new democracy in 1999 that provided for greater freedom of religion than in the previous military regimes.

The HCB was consequently requested to provide a report “regarding this new phenomenon” that should focus on:

1. Statistics on the number of these film producers, distribution outlets, number of films produced, cinema houses (official and unofficial) these films are shown for a fee.
2. The nature of the regulatory environment and its effectiveness
3. Assessment of the social impact and behaviour change among the vulnerable groups.¹⁵

It is instructive that although the Hausa video film industry was born in 1990, yet 10 years later in 2000 government officials do not seem to have any specific records of its growth and development. This would seem to reflect government’s indifference to the industry, and the focus on regulation was a beginning of a process of controlling it.

Soon after the Shari’a announcement in June 2000, the Kano State Government set up a publicity committee to hold dialogues with producers of Hausa video films to discuss the modalities for regulating the contents of Hausa video films produced and distributed in Kano.¹⁶ On 29 June 2000 the committee held a roundtable meeting with filmmakers in Kano to discuss the issues. It was a heated meeting, with government team insisting on regulating the industry according to Islamic rules, and based on the constant complaints of parents and other community leaders about the contents of the storylines in the videos. Significantly, the government team also informed the gathering that they have heard that a hardcore pornographic video is being planned in Kano. This was actually based on an interview in a magazine that has just been published. The interview was with a noted Hausa TV drama and stage actor, Shehu Jibril, aka “Golobo”, who stated that:

“...I could foresee that Kano producers may even produce a hardcore pornographic film (*bulu fim*), since the trend started from where they are heading. In the past, Indian films don’t have even *kissing* scenes, but now Indian films include that scenes are amorous and are radically different from how they started in the film industry. Also the creativity of Indian film makers has finished...Thus the trend of Indian films now is likely to lead to a hardcore pornographic Indian film, and it won’t take long for Kano video film producers to do the same because they faithfully copy whatever Indians do in their films...”(Interview with Shehu Jibril, aka “Golobo”, “Kanawa Za Su Yi Bulu Fim” (Kano producers will soon film hard core pornographic movie”) in *Garkuwa*, April 2000, p. 10).

The views that Hindi films were getting steamier, and since Hausa video film producers copy almost anything Indians do in their films, subsequently Hausa video films would soon start more erotic scenes are echoed in a similar observation of Hindi cinema by Jonathan Groubert of Radio Netherlands who noted that

Anyone who has watched any Hindi Cinema knows that sex is something implied rather than done. Dances are sensual and erotic, faces are brought close together in a breathy embrace and yet...the lips never quite meet. The 21st century has seen a few screen kisses. The recent blockbuster *Mohabbatein* featured a particularly steamy one and, so far, it seems few feathers were ruffled. Nudity, however, is still far away. But costumes over the last decade have gotten

¹⁵ Special memo from the Office of Special Adviser on Chieftaincy Affairs, Office of the Executive Governor, Kano State, to Executive Director, History and Culture Bureau, Kano, Ref SAC/ADM/4/1 of 19th January, 2000.

¹⁶ Government had no regulatory mechanism for southern Nigerian and films imported from overseas – the precise arguments Hausa film makers had against censorship, since they feel it was unfair for only their works to be subjected to regulation while imports are not affected.

skimpier, and the bodies of both actors and actresses have become more taught. Gone are the days of cheery double chins and predictable paunches. Nowadays muscles ripple and breasts heave.¹⁷

During the Kano meeting, it was pointed out to the government team that foreign films, freely imported into the country, and obtainable through subscription satellite channels show worse content than any Hausa video. Further, films from southern Nigeria, freely available in Kano markets, also often contain high degree of salacious contents as well as heavy dose of Christian religious indoctrination and traditional African beliefs. The film makers wanted to know what steps the Kano State government would take to curtail these foreign influences. The answer given was that the Kano State Government was not interested in these foreign films, but more interested in cleaning up Hausa video films to conform to Islam.

Thus far the government officials were only saber-rattling and do not have any clear road map on how to curtail the Hausa video film market. The pressure on Kano State government was made more intense by the fact that the new elected governor in 1999 and was intent on proving that he intends to use Islam as his governance template, thus the creation of the office of the Special Adviser on Religious Affairs. There was a definite desire to prove to the civil society that something was being done about the perceived menace posed to public morality by the films; but no one was sure exactly how to go about it.

As I said earlier, Kano State government teams started sounding out various ways to approach the censorship issue—trying to strike a balance between public concern and marketing freedom, for it was clear that the Hausa video film industry generates a lot of revenue, most of which escapes government coffers. Further, it generates a lot of employment for the hundreds of young men and women who have finished high school, but could not continue their education for one reason or other—thus providing vital social service the Government could not provide.

In any event, it all came to pass, because quite suddenly, on 13th December 2000, the Kano State Commissioner of Information addressed a press conference in which he stated that the Kano State Government has *banned* production, sale, public showing (including in cinema houses) of Hausa video films. According to the Press Release:

Disturbed by the apparent incalculable damage and nuisance constituted by local films in our society, and in particular, its affront on the sacred teachings of the Sharia Legal System, the State Executive Council directed the immediate withdrawal of all the licenses of Film Producers, Distributors and Video Centres. By this decisions (sic), therefore, shooting, production, distribution and showing such films anywhere in the State is prohibited.

Meanwhile, the Council instructed the State Ministry of Information to articulate modalities for censorship of films in accordance with the socio-religious and cultural interest of the good people of Kano State, and further directed interested film Producers/Operators wishing to operate within the confines of new guidelines to apply and obtain new licenses.

Kano State Executive Council Secretariat Press Brief, signed by the Commissioner of Information Internal Affairs, youth, Sports and Culture, Alhaji Nura Muhammed Dankadai on the Outcome of the Meeting of Kano Sate Executive Council Held on Wednesday, 13

¹⁷ Jonathan Groubert, April 5, 2001, “Bollywood for Westerners” Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep, <http://www.rnw.nl/culture/html/bollywood010405.html>.

December, 2000. A full report of this was also published in *ThisDay* (Lagos), December 15, 2000.

It is instructive of course that the press released withdrew the license of *local* filmmakers. The overwhelming interpretation was that *Hausa video films* were affected, even though the press release *did not specifically* refer to Hausa video films, although the prohibition could also affect “Nigerian” films produced in English and other non-Hausa languages. It was also not clear whether Hausa and other “Nigerian” video films produced in neighboring states would be sold in Kano markets – the biggest Hausa-language video film market in West Africa. Almost immediately after the announcement, police teams went around Kano metropolis confiscating heaps of *Hausa* video cassettes. It was not clear whether they were responding to specific directives from the government or were simply implementing their mandate of seizing contraband materials which the Hausa video films have now become.

In any event, it was clear that this announcement was meant to appease the religious and cultural critical elements of the Hausa video film. This was because on 15th December 2000, a couple of days after the announcement of the withdrawal of film license in Kano, the Commissioner of Information held a meeting with members of the Kano State Filmmakers’ Association, Cassette Dealers Co-operative and Cinema Proprietors to assure that the government had no intention of *enforcing* the ban! The ban was announced to give the Kano State Government time to come up with a new set of regulations that will ensure the Hausa video films were produced in accordance with religious and cultural perspectives of Hausa culture in Kano. The film makers were requested to report to the Ministry of Information to apply for a license which will give permission to operate a theater house, produce, distribute and sale Hausa video films, as well as copies of the guidelines governing such activities.

The entire censorship debacle in Kano was observed with amusement by Hausa video film producers in other States of northern Nigeria. In particular, a producer from Zamfara State noted that

“They banned films in Kano for selfish reasons. After all, we here in Zamfara have not been banned from making films. And yet we are the first to start the Shari’a, which is stronger than anywhere in Nigeria. Further, recently a film, *Babu Maraya Sai Raggo*, was launched in Gusau (capital of Zamfara State) and many top government officials, including the Commissioner of Police attended.” Interview with Aliyu Garba, Producer, *Ki Yafe Ni* (2001), first video film from Zamfara in the era of Shari’a launch, *Fim*, July 2001 p. 59.

So far only Kano State banned the production, distribution and sale of Hausa video films in December 2000, two months after launching Shari’a in the state. Zamfara State, which was the first to launch Shari’a in northern Nigeria (and thus attract massive international attention) on 27th October 1999 adopted a more direct approach. It did not outrightly ban video films simply because there was insufficient production in the State to warrant too much attention. However, cinema theaters were extremely popular venues for screening American, Hindi, Chinese and Hausa video films imported from Kano.

The Government of Zamfara State issued directives just before the launch of the Shari’a that all cinema theaters throughout the state have been closed down indefinitely. The cinemas were perceived as veritable havens for all sorts of vices

including male and female prostitution, illicit drug dealership and use, alcohol consumption and robbery. The Government, however, did not simply confiscate the cinema theaters, it *bought* them from the operators and paid them immediately. The cinema theaters were converted to schools for Islamic studies. The Rio cinema in Gusau metropolis, for instance, eventually became the Yarima Islamic Center and a center for the study of Qur’anic Tajweed in February 2002.

In Kano, the draft of the Law and the subsequent Regulations were written by a committee made up of officials from the History and Culture Bureau and the Ministry of Information Legal Drafting department created the *Kano State Censorship Film Board Law 2001* which was approved by the legislators in the State and issued with effect from 1st February 2001. In a move to appease the religious establishment, the Government appointed the well-respected Sheikh Yusuf A. Gama as a Chairman of the Board. The fully constituted Kano State Censorship Board held its inaugural meeting on 1st March, 2001. The main function of the Kano State Censorship Board was to ensure that Hausa video films were censored in conformity with Islamic tenets and principles in all ramifications. Yet, surprisingly, the censorship mechanism and the law are based exactly on the National Film and Video Censorship guidelines. The Kano State Regulations simply tacked on the main censorship guidelines from the NFVCB Enabling Law, as shown, for instance, in a simple comparison between the two laws in Table 1.

Table 1: Borrowing a Page Leaf – Comparisons between the National and Kano censorship criteria

National (Film Censorship Committee)	Kano (Board)
37 (1) The Film Censors Committee in reaching a decision on a film shall ensure that:	102 (a) The Board in reaching a decision on a film shall ensure that:
a. Such film has an educational or entertainment value, part from promoting the Nigerian culture, unity and interest; and	Such a film, <i>video-work</i> or <i>publication</i> has an educational or entertainment value, apart from promoting the <i>state</i> culture, unity and interest; and
b. that such a film is not likely- (i) to undermine national security; or (ii) to induce or reinforce the corruption of private or public morality; or (iii) to encourage or glorify the use of violence; or (iv) to expose the people of African heritage to ridicule or contempt; or (v) to encourage illegal or criminal acts (vi) to encourage racial, religious or ethnic discrimination or conflict; or (vii) by its contents to be blasphemous or obscene.	
(2) The <i>Film Censors Committee</i> shall not approve a film which in its opinion depicts any matter which is:	(2) The <i>Board</i> shall not approve a film which in its opinion depicts any matter which is:
a) indecent, obscene or likely to be injurious to morality b) likely to incite or encourage public disorder or crime; or c) undesirable in the public interest.	

Thus interestingly for a censorship law created within the context of Islam, there was no clause that specifically refer to Islam in the law, or indeed in any sections of the Regulations that accompanied and interpret the Law. In drafting censorship laws that are Shari’a specific, the Kano State Ministry of Information missed opportunities to learn from best practices that work from countries with significant Muslim

populations, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran and Egypt, where film censorship laws apply to protect the Muslim polity from what were seen as excesses of creativity from filmmakers.

On the face of it, therefore, there seems to be little rationale for the Kano State Censorship Law, since it relies on the provisions of the National Film and Video Censors Board to allow a film (no matter how defined) to be shown in the State. This is because the provisions at the National level were secular, while those in Kano, were to be a solution to the concerns about preserving Islamic culture among youth. Yet the law did not reflect these concerns in any significant way differently from those expressed at the National level.

“Westernization is Modernization” Paradigm of Hausa Video Filmmakers

However, the Islamicate establishment did not also factor in the global trends in the changes affecting the Hindi film industry—which serve as a direct template for the commercial Hausa film cluster. By the end of 2001, a more powerful element than storylines had come to characterize Hausa video film. This was *rawa da waka* (song and dance routines). The songs had started creeping in the video films in the mid 1990s. In 2000 Sarauniya Films in Kano released *Sangaya*, a traditional tale of a prince falling in love with a maid in the palace. This particular video film signaled a new sub-genre of singing and dancing—Hindi cinema style—in Hausa video films. From 2002 onwards, Hausa video films started to focus more attention on the song and dance as the creative elements than the storylines.

Clearly noting the trend increasing focus on song and dance—as evidenced in the popularity of both the films and the gala events—the Kano State Censorship Board called for a meeting of industry stakeholders on 28th August 2001 to explain their stand. The meeting was chaired by the Chairman of the Board, Sheikh Yusuf A. Gama. The Sheikh explained that due to consistent complaints they have been receiving about the increasing use of sexually provocative song and dance routines in Hausa home videos, the Board has decided ban *girls* from dancing in Hausa home video films. This decision was backed by a ruling from a noted Islamic scholar from Bauchi who stated:

“Frankly it is Islamically unlawful for a woman to dance with a man who is not her husband. And since this is unlawful in real life, it is also prohibited for a woman to dance, shaking her body and enticing someone who is not her husband. This is prohibited (haram). It is not that music and dancing are prohibited per se in Islam, since this was done in front of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and he did not prohibit it. However, in a situation where men and women get together to dance, this is prohibited” (“Whatever is Islamically allowed in real life, can be dramatized” Interview with Dr. Hadi Dahiru Bauchi, *Fim*, November, 2001 p. 50).

The gender dimension of this ban is very instructive. The Kano State Government stand was that the girls—mostly non-ethnic Hausa—were used to principally as sexual enticement and reflected in their dressing and dancing in the films. This makes their dance obscene – and therefore subject to censorship. To preserve public morality, girls were therefore banned from dancing, either alone or in company of boys. As the Secretary of the Board further clarified,

“We did not ban boys from dancing in films. A girl can also dance, but she must not be animated – she can sing while sitting down, as in a flashback. But it is prohibited for a girl to

dance which involves any body shaking, or in front of a boy.” (Interview with Secretary of the Kano State Censorship Board, Alhaji Ahmed D. Beli, *Fim*, September 2001, p. 59).

The Kano State Censorship Board followed up this meeting with a letter CB/ADM/32/1/13, 21st December, 2001 to the Kano State Filmmakers Association, informing it that the State Government had banned mixed-gender singing and dancing in home videos produced or sold in the State with immediate effect. The suggested format for singing and dancing routines is that males and females will sing and dance *separately* in different locations, and the video’s editors can then make the necessary continuity sequencing. Hausa video film producers *ignored* this directive. This is shown in the trends of song and dance in Hausa video films as shown in Table 1 and Fig. 1.

Table 1: Song and Dance in Hausa Video films

Year	Absent	Present	Total
1997	1	-	
1998	27	12	39
1999	48	77	125
2000	42	145	187
2001	32	231	263
2004	23	272	295
Total	150	465	615

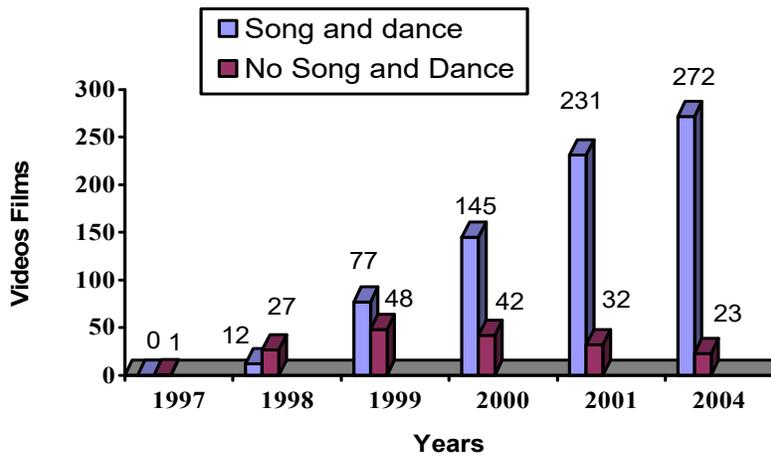


Fig. 1: Song and dance occurrences in Hausa video films

Thus the number of video films with song and dance increased from 231 in 2001 to 272 in 2004—three years after the ban. Analysis of the song and dance sequences in the films show that *none* of the sequences followed the earlier directives of the Board. Indeed, post post-Shari’a (2001) and especially from 2004, commercial Hausa video filmmakers started to directly rely on female erotica as a main selling point, most especially in the song and dance routines which are used to sell the films.¹⁸ The video

¹⁸ This is illustrated by the incidence of Taurari. The producer let it know to Kano marketers that he is producing a film which will feature every dancer and lyricist in Hausa video film industry. He recorded a trailer which he demonstrated to them. This attracted their interest and one of them gave him an advanced payment of N400,000 towards the CD rights of a film whose script had not even been written.

filmmakers use the video film to fantasize the sexuality of essentially urban Hausa youth closeted by the values of a traditional society that enforce the segregation of sexes. The Shari'a implementation in Kano, if anything, seems to further provoke the filmmakers into a more direct exploration of the sexuality of the Muslim woman, especially since the Shari'a reinforces the female *hijab*. The filmmakers defiance to both the Shari'a and the hijab resulted in the increasing Westernization of the plots and the song and dances, and most especially the costumes the female stars wear. In this regard, the Hausa video film breaks away from the more "traditional" earlier video films of the 1990s with their strong emphasis on traditional family values which in fact merely sustained the same messages in the TV dramas of northern Nigeria of the 1960s and 1970s.

As noted earlier the 1990s saw a rapid transformation of the Hindi cinema and this had echoes on Hausa video film industry because these changes came at a time when the Hausa video film was beginning to define itself. Hindi cinema's biggest hits of the 1990s were lavish musical fantasias on the intimately related themes of romance and family obligation, with *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (ripped-off from a Lollywood film, *Ghar Pyara Ghar*, and converted in some scenes to Hausa video film, *Kudiri*) and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (ripped into Hausa as *Sharadi*) setting new high-water marks at the Indian box office. These glossy *filmi* (musical) operettas broke new ground thematically in at least one respect: they insisted self-consciously on bedrock conventions of Hindi cinema that in the past would have been comfortably taken for granted. According to Chute (2000),

A succinct explanation of the shift that had occurred is offered by screenwriter-turned-lyricist Javed Akhtar, who helped create the "angry young man" persona of Amitabh Bachchan in the action scripts he co-wrote for *Zanjeer* (*Chains*, '73) and *Dewaar* (*The Wall*, '75), and who regards the movies of the so-called Hindu Family Values school as the first "really new formula" to emerge in Hindi cinema since the '70s. In an interview with Nasreen Munni Kabir, published in her book *Talking Films* (Oxford India, '00), Akhtar describes an "onslaught of consumerism" that in the 1990s "brought Indian society to the point where we are feeling slightly lost. We talk of a cultural invasion, an excess of Westernization, of a loss of family values ... But on the other hand, what's the alternative? Do I go back to the village? Western culture and glitter are very attractive. So D'Sooraj Barjatya's *Maine Pyar Kiya DI Love Someone*, '89d and *Aapke Hain Koun...!* D'94d offer the solution: a happy marriage between the two worlds. I can have everything offered by modernization and still hold on to family values and tradition." David Chute (2000), Hindu Family, online at <http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Island/3102/hfv.htm>

In a similar way, the most commercially successful Hausa video filmmakers see their success reflected in the Westernization of their craft. Ali Nuhu, the Hausa-speaking actor (and later producer and director) who pioneered the Hindi-to-Hausa cloning technique justifies Westernization of Hausa video film on the basis of progress and modernity. In an interview granted in Niger Republic, he justifies cloning American and Hindi films by arguing that

"The political systems in Nigeria and Niger Republic are based on Western models. Why didn't these countries create their own unique political systems? The Western society is the most progressive in the world, and everyone is trying to copy them. Even Arabs, who are strongly attached to their religion and culture, are now aping Americans, in their mode of dress and other things. It is modernity, and you must go with the times, or you will be left behind." Interview with Ali Nuhu, *Ra'ayi*, Vol 1 No 1, February 2005, p. 7.

To reflect this “Westernization is Modernization” paradigm, Hausa video filmmakers—especially the younger entrants into the market who appeared on the scene from 2003—rely on non-ethnic Hausa female stars to appear in erotically stimulating Western dresses of tight revealing jeans and blouses during song and dance routines. Thus even if the main storyline has what is referred to as “ma’ana” (meaningful) indicating that it might have a serious message, the filmmakers have to use sex to sell the film through dressing the female stars in revealing Western dresses. Examples include *Guda* and *Rukuni*, whose song and dance sequence is show in screenshot in Plate 1.



Plate 1 – Post-Shari’a “Erotica” in Hausa video film – *Guda* (l) and *Rukuni* (r)

However, mindful of the criticisms of the Islamicate traditionalists, and aware of the censorship of “indecent scenes”, the stars in the same song and dance routine change costumes to appeal to as wide sexual spectrum as possible. In some cases, filmmakers often cock a snook at the Islamicate establishment by including provocative song and dance routines that show both Western and Islamic dressing. This particular approach was used in almost all the song and dance routines, with a typical example shown in the screenshot of “Kachancala” in the video film *Makamashi* in Plate 2.

The preferred Western mode of dressing the female stars in the screenshots of two typical films has led to criticisms from the Islamicate establishment. A typical example is the following comment:

“The biggest problem of the films is the types of dresses worn by the stars...You will see a girl during a song wearing “dude” clothing typical of Westerners, with shirt and trousers. It is wrong for a pure Hausa girl, with her rich cultural heritage, to appear in non-Islamic clothing...We should not borrow mode of dressing from any other ethnic group because we have our own...Why can’t we use ours? We should promote our culture in Hausa films.”
Suleiman Ishaq, Farmer, Katsina, in *Annur*, June/July 2002, p. 25

Even the “Islamization” songs—where the female stars wear what might be called Islamic clothing during the song and dance routines—was not without its criticisms because it was seen as disrespectful of the Islamic mode of dressing which encourages modesty, for a girl to be seen singing and dancing in the same clothes that were designed to foster piety. As noted by a correspondent in *Fim* letter’s page

“See how (film producers) use cultures alien to Islam and Hausa in their films such as partying, without due regard to Islamic and Hausa cultural orientations...See how they dress

up beautiful girls in tight-fitting that show off their nakedness clearly; are you bowing to the Jews or copying them?...I am appealing to our filmmakers to stop copying the culture of other people because those we copy do not copy us” Hashim Abdullahi Tanko Malam-Madori, letters page, *Fim*, January 2005 p. 9.

The Westernization principle of the Hausa video film stars further reflects itself in their way they appear on magazine stories and covers—emphasizing their globalized clothing as a means of communicating urban credibility.

It is this tendency towards the image of a woman as a sex object in Hindi films that Hausa filmmakers copy, rather than a philosophical reflection of debauchery in a traditional society. Critical commentaries (especially in the Hausa popular film press such as *Fim* and *Mudubi*) of the trend adopted by the filmmakers to increasingly portray female sexuality to titillate male audience seemed baffled as to the reason for greater emphasis on sexuality in the video films. It is clear therefore, more experimental filmmaking among Muslim Hausa would have to negotiate these core prohibitions about the sacredness of the private, and often, conjugal sphere. Soon enough alarm bells starting ringing about about the possible influence of new media technologies and behavioral modification in Hausa popular visual culture. This is reflected in a few comments made either in public or in popular culture magazines—in essence, the Habermasian salons—in northern Nigeria:

“We the fans of Hausa video films have come to realize that it is the producers and the directors that are responsible for the corruption of culture and religion in these films. You know very well that every section of a woman is private. For instance, they are fond of allowing actresses without head covering, and straightening their hair; also making them wear skimpy Western dresses which reveal their body shapes, etc. In our awareness and education, we know these behaviors are immensely contrary to Islam. Don’t such actresses ever think of the Day of Judgment? Don’t forget their claims that they educating or delivering vital social message. Is this how you educate – by corrupting Islamic injunctions? Please look into this and take remediate measures immediately.” Aisha D. Muhammad Gamawa, Bauchi, *Fim*, Letter Page, March 2004 p. 6.

“In Islam there is no provision for a woman to appear onstage as an actress, especially young maidens of marriageable age. The old Hausa TV dramas had women, but they are all mature. Thus filmmaking is not a profession for a Muslim girl. It is better for them to enter into caring professions.” Ustaz Umar Sani Fagge, during a special lecture on Hausa films, Sunday 6th August, 2000, Kano.

“Quite frankly, you have spoiled your films with copying Indians especially with regards to their songs and dances...In Sokoto viewers have started ignoring Kano (Hausa) films because they have become Indiyawan Kano (Kano Indians).” Halima Umar, Sokoto State, Letters page, *Tauraruwa*, Vol 4 No 6 September 2000 p. 7.

“How can a person, claiming to be Hausa, producing a film for Hausa people copy Indian and European cultural norms, and claims they are his culture? Film production (among Muslims) is good because it an easy medium for delivering social message, but the way they are doing it now is mistake.” Yusuf Muhammad Shitu, Kaduna Polytechnic, Zaria, in *Annur*, August 2001, p. 24

Hausa video filmmakers focus on the female *intimisphäre* as a tapestry to painting the what the filmmakers perceive to be the sexuality of essentially urban, transnational and globalized Hausa woman. While the popularity of the video films indicates that contrary opinions are in the minority, nevertheless those who argue against the new trends in Hausa video films point out to Ayats (verses) in the Holy Qur’an, and the

Hadith (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) against erotic dressing as in the following quotations:

Surat Al-Ahzab (33:59)

“O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them (when they go out or are among men). That is better in order that they may be known (to be Muslims) and not annoyed...” (Qur’an 33:59)

Sunan Abu Dawood, Volume 3, Book XXVII, Chapter 1535, and Hadith number 4092, titled: “How Much Beauty Can A Woman Display?”

(4092) ‘Aisha said: Asthma’, daughter of Abu Bakr, entered upon the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) wearing thin clothes. The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) turned his attention from her. He said: O Asthma’, when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of the body except this and this, and this and he pointed to her face and hands.

However, the increasing popularity of the video films and the sheer commercial competition between the filmmakers created needs to make each video film a “standout”, and the sexuality is seen as providing that factor. This closely echoes Hindi films which as Sheila J. Nayar (2003) notes,

As the repeated mention of love songs might suggest, all Hindi films must inevitably incorporate *pyar* (“love”) into their storylines, even where it does not readily belong. As a result, the average Hindi film, which is three hours long and broken by an intermission, often feels narratively split, as well—with the first half devoted to the development of the love story, and the latter half to a crisis, more often than not one instigated by love’s being threatened by some outside force (the family, another suitor, a call to war).¹⁹

Hausa video films adopt an even more drastic technique in attaching a song to the film—often there is no relationship between the song and the video’s storyline; the song and dance are cut and pasted at any point in the story the director felt is convenient to him. Further, the song and dance routine have become so compulsory to the Hausa video film’s perceived success that they are included even in stories that are serious or philosophical reflections of life. *Waraka*, for instance, is a drama on the ways HIV/AIDS virus is transmitted and the coping mechanism adopted by the infected. The producers felt the only way to draw attention to the video was to include four song and dance routines (one of which was based directly on a Hindi film). Similarly, *Kaddara*, dealing with the devastating consequences of HIV/AIDS to a family felt incomplete without two songs. In *Madadi*, which deals with matrimonial betrayal, the subject matter seemed trivialized with two songs, obscuring the vital message about maternal attachment and familial cohesion. *Judah* also focused too much attention on its singing and dancing instead of developing its central message of bridging the cultural and religious divide between Muslims and non-Muslims in contemporary Nigeria. The song and dance routines therefore have converted the Hausa video film, whether based on Hindi film or not, into a musical, with audience reaction valued more towards the song and dances than the core message of the video film.

¹⁹ Sheila J. Nayar, *Dreams*, 2003, “Dharma And Mrs. Doubtfire: Exploring Hindi Popular Cinema Via Its “Chutneyed” Western Scripts.” *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Summer, 2003.

Effects of the Shari'a—The Hisba and Entertainment in Kano

While the Censorship Board does not have an outfit that would enforce its censoring at the beginning of its establishment, the work of Hisba in the civil society serves to support whatever ideals the Censorship Board may wish to enforce in Hausa video films, especially with regards to gender mixing in open public. Thus the prohibitions in visual media became translated into public sphere.

The Hisba rapidly emerged as the moral guardians of the Islamic civil society in Kano, with particular focus on the video films, especially between March to December 2000. Voluntary community-based Hisba groups were formed on the eve of the Shari'a launch in some states, notably Kano. Before the various Hisba groups in Kano finished consolidating under the Hisba Committee their first self-imposed assignment—preventing inter-gender mixing especially during entertainment events—was the film industry and this was demonstrated during the planned wedding “gala” activities of the then most popular Hausa actress, Fati Mohammed (*Sauran Kiris, Sangaya, Marainiya, Sartse, Mujadala*, and literally dozens of others). The gala event was planned for 14th July 2001. The Hisba, already having constituted themselves into some form of “lord’s resistance army” and in their hundreds, blocked the entrance to the venue where the event was to take place, chanting “war” songs.

Even though the organizers of the event had made arrangements for security with the Nigeria Police, yet the religious coloration of the event was enough to make the policemen present mere onlookers. Any interference on their part might have escalated into a wider religious riot. The gala event was shifted to the local army barracks for the following day.²⁰ However, the army did not allow the event to take place there either, despite initially agreeing. The reason was security reports that came to them that the Hisba groups will attack the procession after it has left the barracks. Thus in the interests of public peace, the event was also canceled—it was subsequently held in Kaduna whose implementation of Shari'a at the time was still uncertain. The filmmakers were understandably furious with this and took time out to express their feelings to journalists. For example, Hajiya Amina “Yakumbo” Garba, who often appears in Hausa video films as matriarch, argued:

“We are in a dark period. We have planned this gala to help us celebrate the marriage of one of us, yet the Hisba corps have prevented us. Yet today we had a meeting of the PDP (People’s Democratic Party, the then ruling party in Kano) where men and women mixed in the audience, and no one prevented this. But because everyone hates film stars, the Hisba prevented us from doing our party. What do (the government) expect us to do? Even in Makkah and Madina they have wedding parties...” Amina Garba in an interview with Kabir Assada, *Garkuwa*, August 2001 p. 15.

In interviews with international news agencies, the Hisba defended their actions. According to the Hisba Deputy Chairman, Suleiman Mohammed,

“Islam legitimizes celebrations which are exclusively organized for women or men. But it prohibits mixed parties of men and women...We have a legal right to stop anything that will affect the morals of our children,” Islamic Vigilantes Break Up Lewd Wedding Party in Nigeria retrieved at <http://www.islamonline.net/english/news/2001-07/17/article5.shtml>.

²⁰ To douse fears of possible religious backlash from non-Muslims resident in Kano during the Shari'a launch, government officials made it known—although refusing to document it—that the Shari'a law will only apply to the city, and that Sabon Gari and other areas containing large concentration of non-Muslims are not affected by the Shari'a.

Recognizing that these Hisba groups must be curbed if law and order were to be maintained and also aware of the ambience of the police in enforcing the Shari'a, the Kano State Government decided to establish its own, government-controlled *Hisba* group. It therefore constituted a committee—the Hisba Committee, which was formally inaugurated in November 2000 on the full implementation of the Shari'a in Kano State. The Committee was under the Chairmanship of Sheikh (Dr.) Aminuddeen Abubakar. This brought the entire Hisba groups under one central control of Hisba Corps. The rules and regulations of the Kano Hisba committee list mainly religious duties, such as counseling and guiding Muslims who are negligent in their religious duties or do not behave as a good Muslim should. They are not authorized to deal with crime, except in co-operation with the police. In order to make them recognizable to the public, they wear a uniform.

It became clear later that the Hisba in Kano was divided into two loose groups. One, predominant group is made up of former vigilante groups that metamorphosed into Hisba, while another was made up of those same groups who subjected themselves to regulation and control under Hisba Committee at the Shari'a implementation in November 2000. This became apparent when Dr. Aminuddeen was accosted by journalists to explain the actions of the Hisba in preventing the gala event. In an interview with *Nishadi* reporters held on the day of the event, he insisted he was not even aware of what was then happening, nor were any Hisba personnel authorized to carry out any attack on any civil group (*Nishadi*, No 6, August 2001 p. 17).

The relationship between the Hisba and not just the film industry, but also the civil society (and security agencies) eventually settled into a pattern of simmering antagonism. But that did little to diminish the support for the concept of the Hisba in Kano, such that a poster of the progenitor of the movement, and who later became its Commander General, was immediately made and sold in street markets, as seen in Plate 4.

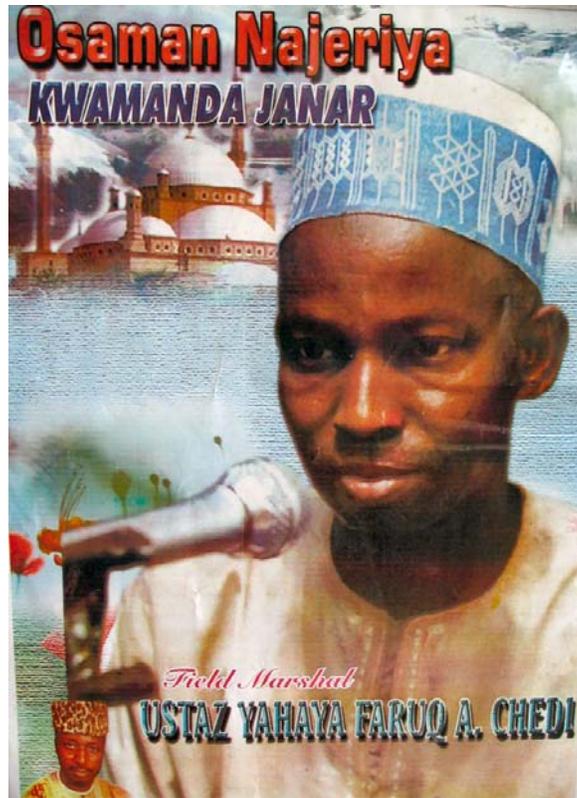


Plate 4: The “Osama bin Laden” of Hisba Corps in Kano (2004)

It was instructive that he was seen as the “Osama bn Laden” of Nigeria—apparently a moral crusader cut in the mold of the real Saudi-born Usama bin Laden, allegedly the mastermind behind the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York.

It was not just the film industry that was affected by the Hisba, it was the entire entertainment process in Kano. Subsequently the Hisba as well as the Shari’a Commission intervene to prevent any festival of the arts in any part of the city in which it is perceived that there will be mixed gender situations. Such festivals were then often held in offices of cultural attaches of overseas mission (e.g. Alliance Française with its festival of Hausa music) and British Council (with its musical improvisations between a Hausa traditional music ensemble, Arewa, and a British Muslim rap group, Mecca2Medina).

However, the presence of Hisba was much evident in the public sphere of entertainment. *Le Monde diplomatique* reporter, Jean-Christophe Servant, provides an account of how Hisba disrupted a concert by the famous *kalangu* (hour-glass drum) musician, Sani Dan Indo at Central Hotel, Kano in November 2002:

Sani Dan Indo, a Hausa *griot*...makes his money at concerts where the audience throws banknotes on the stage. He had his equipment destroyed by the *hisbah* last summer when he was performing at Kano’s Central Hotel. According to the vigilantes, his crime was that he appeared on stage. He said: “I refused to hire an attorney because if I complained, people would think I was mixing music and religion, they’d think I wasn’t a true believer. Even in Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, I’ve never heard of musicians being as badly mistreated as

they are here. I'm all for Islamic law. But the *hisbah* were only after my money.” .” *Le Monde diplomatique*, Nov 18, 2002, archived June 2003.

Musical festivals of the religious nature, however, such as the concerts offered by Islamic poet-musicians (*sha'irai*) like Rabi'u Usman Baba were not only allowed, but encouraged as more acceptable alternatives of entertaining youth, than the format favored by the film industry. The extent to which interpretations of the Shari'a law applies to entertainment industry is illustrated by the process in Katsina State

Commercial Defiance

In November 2003 the Kano State House of Assembly passed a motion for the establishment of Hisbah Board in the State, and which led to Kano Hisbah Board Law 2003 and came in force on 7th November 2003. What subsequently followed was the formal bureaucratization of the Hisba, with a Director-General to oversee its affairs. The Board itself had three loose divisions—the main Board with a Chairman, the Command, and Administration. The Hisbah Board Law empowers the Board to establish for the State Hisbah Corps who may be eligible for appointment as Justices of the Peace, under a General Commander appointed by the Governor. By 2005 Sheikh Yahaya Faruk Chedi, the Hisba progenitor in the dawns of Shari'a, had been appointed to the post of Commander General of the Hisbah Corps.

Ironically, however, by 2003 a new spirit of rebellion seemed to have been injected into the Hausa video film productions almost at the same time that the Hisba had been regularized. The depression of the market in 2001 was revived towards the end of 2002, and despite the Kano State Censorship Board (or indeed in spite of it), by 2003 more videos with more “non-Shari'a” compliancy, were released. This, despite assurances to the contrary by the Chairman of the Kano State Censorship Board, as he stated in an interview:

“...we have brought sanity into the industry. Any film with obscene contents was before our establishment as a Board. Even our leaders agree on this, such as His Royal Highness the Emir of Kano, Alhaji (Dr) Ado Bayero who commended us on how we brought about rapid improved change in the system. And the songs in the films now contain praises of the Allah and Prophet Muhammad (SAW).” Interview with Sheikh Yusuf Adam Gama, Chairman, Kano State Censorship Board, *Duniyar Fim*, April/May 2002 p. 15).

And yet subsequent developments of the industry clearly contradict this statement. If anything, the films became more defiant and less Shari'a-compliant. There are two reasons for this. First, it was not clear, even to the Censorship Board, what exactly it was supposed to censor, beside the vague mandate of “preserving cultural purity” (as for instance in an advertorial by the Board in *Bidiyo* October/November 2003, p. 24). Since its establishment in 2001, it has focused its attention on exploring ways of generating *revenue* for the Kano State government through the various fees it charges filmmakers for almost all aspects of film production (licensing, censoring, screening, distribution). There was no focus on the *contents* of the films (besides asking producers to excise a dancing scene here and there). Thus of its five main powers three are revenue-based; viz, *register* the State Film industry operators, issue *license*, charge and collect *fees*. Only two have a vague reference to the content of the films: *screen* and *censure* any film, and *impose* guidelines. As explained earlier, the nature of the *censure* and the *guidelines* were not clear in the Law, nor in the Regulations that accompanied the Law.

Secondly, there were allegations of corruption against the Board which makes it possible for filmmakers to circumvent the system and release their *original* films, and not the censored versions of the Board after paying bribes to officials of the Board (see *Mudubi* November/December 2003, p. 12; also *Bidiyo* October/November 2003 pp 19-20). This was reiterated in a letter written to the Governor of Kano State, and circulated via email networks on the Internet in May 2004 (and published in full in June 2004 issue of *Fim*, p. 14 as “Hausa Film Censorship, our plea to the Governor Shekarau”). The letter accused the Board of adopting delaying tactics before releasing a film’s censoring a film and releasing its certificate, and arbitrarily increasing the censoring fee.

Due to this alleged corruption in the Board, producers with a certificate of censorship submit the certificate and the *original* (un-censored) film to cassette dealers, who simply start marketing the video once they are satisfied with the certificate. Neither the marketers, nor the officials of the Board attempt to confirm that the released video was actually the censored video. Indeed even the Board is aware of this, as indicated by its Executive Secretary in an interview:

“What the law enables us to do is to make corrections. Most of the films with singing and dancing have thus been censored. We have asked them to effect corrections. But because of their sheer indiscipline, irresponsibility and stubbornness, they always release the un-edited version of the films. There is little we can do about this because we don’t have enough equipment and personnel to monitor the market.” Interview with A.A. Kurawa, Executive Secretary, Kano State Censorship Board, *Bidiyo*, October/November 2003 p. 23.

There were also further allegations of inefficiency against the Board which reveals many lapses in the film censoring mechanism. The principal complaint against the Board by filmmakers was that the censoring system was inefficient and unfair since it was only one person who normally screens a film and recommends the issuance of a certificate, rather than a committee. These points were revealed during a meeting of the Kano State Filmmakers Association held on 11th January 2004 where they complained bitterly against the Censorship Board. The main grouse was the way and manner in which the Board kept increasing fees it charges film makers. As noted by a participant at the meeting,

“This Board (Kano State Censorship) has not done anything useful to us (filmmakers). It just keeps coming up with a series of prohibitions against our trade. They seem to forget that they were established to protect Shari’a and Islam, not to generate revenue...We will take the matter up with the His Excellency the Governor of the State...Why should they increase the censorship fees? What do they do? Just sit and watch a film! They don’t even know how we survive in the industry, and we are just trying to educate our people. Yet they keep coming up with new ways of making things difficult for us...And they are doing this only to Hausa films!” Aminu “Momoh” Shariff, Producer, at the Meeting of Kano State Filmmakers Association to discuss the Kano State Censorship Board, as recorded in *Fim*, February 2004, p. 10.

Thus in the absence of any specific guideline governing the *text* of the films, it became clear to film makers by 2003 that the Islamism in the reasons for setting up the Kano State Censorship Board was merely token. For instance, the government reiterated its stand on the rationale for the censorship as follows:

“We keep getting complaints about singing and dancing in Hausa video films from the producers. Government did not ban singing or dancing. But what kind of dance? What the Government banned is face-to-face dancing between a male and a female...Government has even banned the solo dancing of a girl if the dance is not religiously and culturally appropriate.” (Interview with A.A. Kurawa, Executive Secretary, Kano State Censorship Board, *Bidiyo* magazine, October/November 2003 p. 23).

Yet despite this stand against mixed gender singing and dancing, dozens of Hausa video films were approved by the same Board after this which, if anything, contain what the industry itself consider more provocative scenes than before Shari’a law and the Board were established.²¹ The reason for non-compliance were simple: song and dance. A typical commercial Hausa video film is not about a storyline, but about a catchy song and dance. The interface of clash between the Board and the film makers was essentially in this area, and the particularly the costumes the female dancers wear. The Board would insist on cutting out the more suggestive routines. However, these are the same routines that the producers use in their trailers to attract audience—and generate a high expectation for the songs in the film. This was how, for instance, *Gyale*, a fairly vacuous story ended up becoming the biggest sleepers of 2004: by its incorporation of a new starlet singing and dancing in a catchy Fulani costume.

As if responding to these allegations, the Kano State Commissioner of Information announced the inauguration of a new Committee on Films on 19th April, 2004 in Kano. Inaugurating the committee in his office, the State Commissioner of Information, Alhaji Garba Yusuf Abubakar, said

“the vision of the present administration is to transform the state in such a manner that the ideals of Islam could be nurtured and become institutionalized in all spheres of societal life...the function of the committee shall be to ensure strict compliance with regards to the laid down rules and regulations guiding the establishment and operation of cinema lovers in the state, as well as to orient the society in accordance with the Islamic injunction.” Yusha’u Adamu Ibrahim, “Kano Govt Inaugurates Committee On Films”, *Daily Trust* (Abuja), April 20, 2004, Posted to the web April 20, 2004

Thus it rapidly became clear to filmmakers that the Shari’a does not seem to affect them simply because there was nothing in the Censorship Law that prevented them from doing precisely what they had been doing before the Shari’a law. Indeed attempts were even made to produce a film with alternative (to Islamic convention) sexuality, in particular lesbian relationships.

And while the Hausa video film is still far from exploring alternative sexualities, the appearance of a video film poster in 2004 signaled the way. This was the shooting and editing, but not the release of *Dabdala*. This video film became significant in Hausa video film history because it was the first Hausa video film which allegedly focused on lesbian love theme.²² Indeed the Hausa word *dabdala*, originally the name of a

²¹ See “Ba Laifin Mu Ba Ne” (It’s not our fault) column by Dan Azumi Baba, *Fim*, June 2004 p.3, in which he defends the trend in the industry.

²² The poster, announcing the arrival of the video, was plastered all over video tape stores in Kano in February 2004. The furor against the poster—containing as it did, a clear lesbian tagline, with three women in a suggestive, at least to Hausa society, position—was so strong that it was reported to the Kano State Censorship Board, which ordered the producer to appear before it, which he refused. Producers who provided technical assistance during the editing of the video later claim that it was not actually a lesbian story as such; and that the producer used the poster artwork and a tantalizing lesbian theme to generate interest in the video and boost sales when released.

long tethering rope tied to the neck of a colt, was a Hausa street slang for lesbian love. The poster of the video is shown in Plate 5.

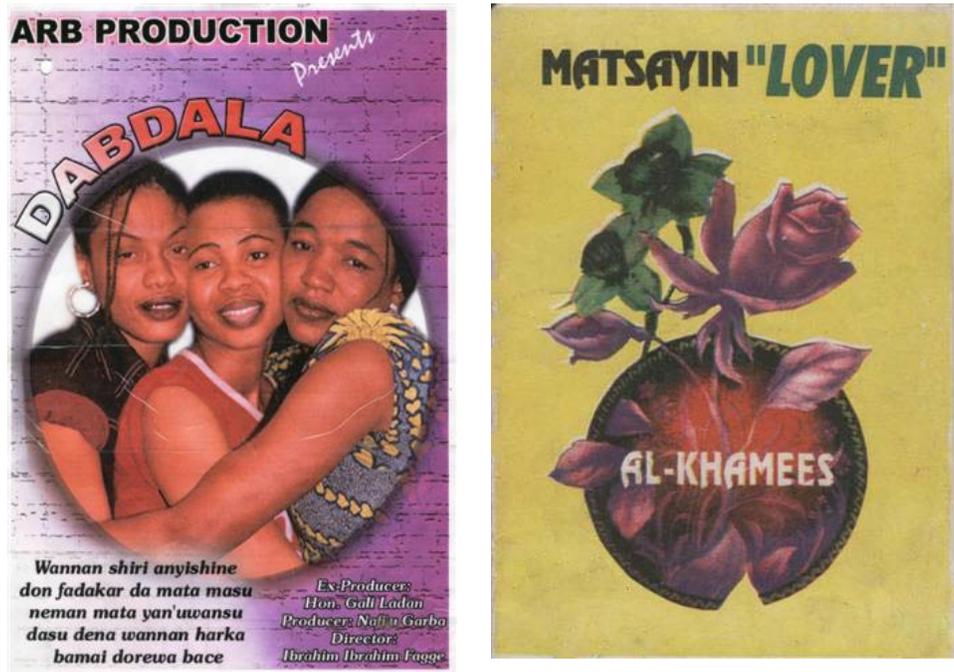


Plate 5: Gaytimes in Hausa popular media

Dabdala echoes, but is not based on, *Matsayin Lover*, a novel by Al-Khamees Bature Makwarari in 1998 and which was the first Hausa novel to be exclusively based on lesbian love theme. When *Matsayin Lover* was released in 1998, the reaction against it was swift. It drew condemnations from many fronts, including the local branch of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA, to which the author was a member) and the author's Raina Kama Writers' Association. He was forced to release a second edition of the novel with the steamier bits removed.²³

Dabdala had a similar fate. Within few days of the poster being pasted on walls in Kano, a magazine, *Mudubi* (March/April 2004 p. 2) focusing on Hausa video film, devoted half a page on the video which was yet to be released and revealed its alleged lesbian focus. This drew attention to the video which it would not have had since both the producer and the director, as well as the leading characters were total unknowns. The Kano State Censorship Board (which censors all Hausa video films sold in Kano) moved in swiftly to request the producer to appear before its Magistrate Mobile Court. Both the producer and the director went into hiding, and issued statements that they will not release the video. However, when the heat died down, they suggested they may re-title the video either *Awarwaro* or *Taro*—indicating their intention to eventually release it.²⁴ The tagline of the video on the poster states:

²³ In a discussion with the author, he insisted that he was only depicting the realities of girls' boarding institutions in Kano State at the time, based on true-life stories he has heard. Al-Khamees, Kano, October 15, 1995.

²⁴ Information accurate as of March 2004. It will, of course, has to pass the moral hurdles of the National Film and Censorship Board, Abuja, and the Kano State Censorships Board if it is to have a license which will make it possible to be sold. It will also have to pass the formidable barrier of the Kano State Cassette Dealers Association—the organization that actually initiated censorship in Kano,

This video is intended an enlightenment to lesbians to stop this business; it is not sustainable.

Incidentally, in the novel *Matsayin Lover*, similar objectives were listed for writing the book:

The main objective of writing this book is to enlighten women about the atrocious things that often happen between young girls and adult women, so that they can avoid this terrible behavior (of lesbian love). (from the author, Al-Khamees, *Matsayin Lover*, Second (censored) edition, 1998)

Exasperated with the increasing focus on sexualization of the female in Hausa video films, the Kano State Censorship Board issued yet another list of prohibitions (in addition to the earlier one issued in December 2001 banning inter-gender mixing during song and dance routines). The new directive states:

“The following are prohibited in the production of any Hausa film

1. Mixed gender dancing in the same personal space
2. Girls and women wearing trousers and blouses or shirts
2. Straightening the hair, and leaving the head uncovered
3. Wearing tight fitting clothes

Circular sent to all Hausa film practitioners in Kano State

The circular gave all filmmakers up to 20th April 2005 to comply with these directives, and even gave a grace period to enable those whose films contravened these guidelines to release their films before the expiration of the deadline. However, as was the case with an earlier directive regarding mixed-gender singing and dancing, the Hausa filmmakers ignored this directive also. Films released after this directive (e.g. *Lancika*, *Biki Budiri*, *‘Yar Gagara*) further serve to emphasize the ineffectiveness of the Kano State Censorship Board in moral policing.

The sensuality in Hausa video films, however, is shocking only because of the Islamicate environment the filmmakers found themselves. Under conventional Western filmmaking techniques, they would not even attract any attention. In an Islamic society, however, expressions of intimacy, especially between the genders is certain to lead to sermons and condemnations. Further, the intrusion of the filmmakers’ into the sacred Muslim Hausa woman’s inner private sphere (*intimiphäre*) uses a filming technique that violets the Islamic principles of female private sphere. Further, it is clear that a long running-battle between youth sexuality and implementation of Shari’a would not produce the kind of moral codes the Islamicate environment envisages through censorship mechanism.

Conclusions

As Chris Philo (2004) pointed out, commodity exchange and social labor, while normally taken as activities played out on a broader (public) canvas, are within Habermasian matrix, regarded as essentially the concerns of the private individuals who effect and experience them; in which case, these dimensions of civil society are tracked to the (inter-)personal relations, events and practices where they are ultimately

from whom the government took a cue and formed the Censorships Board. *Dabdala* would most likely end up as an underground tape, and may kick start the Hausa video soft porn sub-market.

‘real’. At this level, they parallel the more obviously private concerns of the family’s ‘internal space’, to do with affairs of the heart and hearth, all being taken as essentially private matters, individualized and contained. Philo (2004:6) then argues that

Yet, in Haberman’s schema, the point is that these private concerns *do* translate into the (emerging) public sphere, as the just-mentioned (inter-)personal relations and the like *become*, in effect, the subject-matter, or at the least the prompts, for public debate, whether in a more cultural-literary or more political (politicised) vein.

Thus in the Habermasian matrix, private concerns need public spaces. This is more so because

the impression is of private individuals starting to bring their concerns, about commodity exchange, social labour, heart and hearth, into the public debates, or rather into debates held collectively between such individuals in a range of ‘sites’ away from the family home. In the process, public opinion about such concerns is formed, abstracting away from specific instances to more generalised claims with wider relevance, and so the private is transformed into the public (as concerns are shared, pontificated over, solutions proposed, recommendations made). Thus a public sphere is constituted that, through being vocalised, circulated and in short ‘publicised’ (another key Habermasian concept), gains the potential to influence ‘the sphere of public authority’ (the state, together with its ‘police’ function)” (ibid).

In effect this means that cultural reproduction as depicted in Hausa video films re-enact the conjugal spaces of the family—as distinct from even the private-public (or quasi-public) space of the *tsakar gida* and provides a commodity exchange—film and its messages—that became a public concern—away from the conjugal space to State authority (in the example of Hausa video film, emphasized by the introduction of Shari’a and censorship laws on video films). Critical reaction about the depiction of the Hausa Muslim female conjugal spaces started in popular press in northern Nigeria, drawing the attention of the government, which set up a censorship board, complete with an implementation mechanism of police and magistrate courts, to prosecute film producers who violated the conjugal space (interpreted as showing “immoral scenes”) in Hausa video films.

The sensuality in these Hausa video films, however, is shocking only because of the Islamicate environment the filmmakers found themselves. Under conventional Western filmmaking techniques, they would not even attract any attention. In an Islamic society, however, expressions of intimacy, especially between the genders is certain to lead to sermons and condemnations. Also, the intrusion of the filmmakers’ into the sacred Muslim Hausa woman’s inner private sphere (*intimisphäre*) uses a filming technique that violates the Islamic principles of female private sphere. Further, it is clear that a long running-battle between youth sexuality and implementation of Shari’a would not produce the kind of moral codes the Islamicate environment envisages through censorship mechanism.

In cautioning the use of this theoretical framework in contemporary analysis of gender spaces particularly in Muslim world, Hanita Brand (2003:84-85) argued that the very dichotomy between the public and the private spheres needs some modification. This is because in between the public and the private are several layers of society that are more private than public but contain elements of both. These layers are especially

pertinent with regard to women, as they may turn out to be the only extra-private, or semi-public, spheres that women occupy.

In using the private/public theoretical construct, I draw inspiration from the application of the theory empirically in a study of women and spaces in Sudan as developed in the concept of Salma Nageeb's Neo-harem (Nageeb, 2002; Nageeb, 2004), which explains the gender specific ways in which women experience the process of Islamization. Salma Nageeb developed this theoretical concept—essentially an extension of Habermasian private/public dichotomy—in studying how two, quite contrasting, groups of women restructure the use of female space in Sudan. While Salma Nageeb's study is rooted in re-mapping the use of physical gender space, in my study I focus on the virtual space segregation of the genders, which indeed in Muslim societies, translates into physical space delineations, and its consequences for the critical public sphere.

Consequently in Muslim Hausa societies, as in the Middle Eastern societies Brand referred to, the participation of women in public affairs is governed by two layers. The first layer refers to their biological bodies which in Islam is *al'aura* (*intimispähre*), including their voices. When going abroad, such *intimispähre* should be well covered, although with a varying degree of interpretations of the extent of the coverage of the body acre across the Muslim world. The second layer of female space is her virtual lair, or inner apartment (*hujrat*), which again is not a public space and is non-representational in any form, reflecting, as it does, the scenario created by Hanita Brand in her description of the physical dwellings of Middle-Eastern societies. The transgressions of these layers by Hausa video filmmakers seemed to have created a tension between media globalization and tradition in Muslim popular culture.

This view has been roundly critiqued, mostly for narrowness as sexist, classist, Eurocentric, and illiberal by modern standards (see Calhoun, 1992). These critiques pertain more to how Habermas tied this conception of a public sphere so tightly and specifically to modernization, and that to rationality, than to the essential identification of the emergence of new public spheres around communications relatively freed from demands of ritual representation, particularly of mystical authority. Nevertheless, in broader comparative terms, Habermas draws attention to communication freed from status and its ritual representation; his key insight was that this is not limited to private spheres of conscience, the market, or intimacy but can take on a public life characteristic of a bourgeois public sphere (Anderson, 2003).

Further introduced by Hanna Papanek (1973) and Cynthia Nelson (1974) to place a sociological ground under discussions of honor and shame in traditional settings, the public/private distinction opened up the private world of sentiment and expression, particularly women's, but to the relative neglect of the public sphere that new media make increasingly permeable to the circulation of messages from more restricted realms, diluting and in some cases challenging the authority to represent.

What demarcates the public from the private undoubtedly depends on a complex set of cultural, political, and economic factors, and as a result of the interaction between such factors the line of demarcation inevitably has had to shift. From among the cultural factors, religion stands out as one of the most decisive components in delimiting the two spheres. Religions distinctly recognize and sanction a sphere of

private action for individuals. In Western religions—that is, the Abrahamic traditions—human identity and individuality are emphasized through the recognition and sanctioning of private life (Kadivar, 2003).

Thus it is significant that the categories of the public and private derived from Western discourse often mean different things. Discussing Islamic discourse in the Arab context, Nazih Ayubi (1995) has argued that public space or the public sphere is not conventionally equivalent to the political civic realm of public debate, conscious collective action, and citizenship as understood in Western democratic theory. Rather, Islamic authorities have historically interpreted the public not in contrast to a “free” privatized realm of conscience and religion, but instead as the space for “symbolic display, of interaction rituals and personal ties, of physical proximity coexisting with social distance” in contrast to a private sphere that is in effect defined as a residual—what is left over after the public is defined. For Tajbakhsh (2003), the public sphere is above all a space for the “collective enforcement of public morals” rather than necessarily political.

Similarly, Jon W. Anderson (2003) has argued that for well over a generation, the public sphere of Islam has been an arena of contest in which activists and militants brought forth challenges to traditional interpretative practices and authority to speak for Islam, especially to articulate its social interests and political agendas. Further, as Gaffney (1994) also noted in analyzing Islamic preaching in Egypt, opening the social field to new spokespeople—in our case, Hausa filmmakers—and new discursive practices not only challenges authority long since thought settled to interpret what religion requires, but also blurs boundaries between public and private discourse and fosters new habits of production.

Media figure in this process in several crucial respects. First, they devolve access to consumption by more people on more occasions. Passage into media conveys previously “private” or highly situated discourses from interactive contexts to public display, where they are reattached to a public world and return as information conveyed through new media technologies with different habits of reception. Detached from traditional modes of production, they become messages in a world of messages (Anderson 2003).

Islamic jurisprudence as noted earlier, fully acknowledges the sanctity of the private domain: there is ample admonition against prying into the affairs of others; preventive measures can be found that guarantee the privacy of personal information and positively support individual rights to property and promote freedom in determining one’s course of life. There can be no doubt that Islamic law can fully accommodate the notion of the private domain. The challenge lies at delimiting the private domain from what is regarded as public in Islamic environments.

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