NOLLYWOOD NATION

(On the Industry, Practice & Scholarship of Cinema in Nigeria)

A FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR FEMI OKIREMUETTE SHAKA

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Chapter One

The Political Economy Of The Hausa Film Industry

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Introduction

Commodification of culture, an increasingly significant strand in critical studies of culture, focuses attention on what happens when culture is produced on a mass consumption scale, and distributed in direct competition with other locally produced cultural products (see, for instance, Enzensberger, 1974). While mainly used in critical studies of the tourism industry and its cultural import (e.g. Ryan & Aicken, 2012; James, 2014), the term has come to be applied to media industries with profit, rather than cultural aesthetics or preservation as the primary motive. This is premised on the assumption that while high culture sells to exclusive discerning consumers, low, mass produced culture targeted at the non-cerebral aesthetics, sell more massively. Thus the commodification of culture, especially in media studies, feeds into the political economy of production.

Synthesizing from various perspectives, Vincent Mosco distills political economy to be "the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources" (Mosco 2009, p. 24). This makes the products of communication, particularly books, newspapers, films, videos and indeed, their audiences, primary resources for studies in political economy.

However, it is instructive to note that *critical political economy* is sometimes used as a descriptor to separate its use as a tool of media analysis from classical political economy theorists such as Adam Smith. Golding and Murdock (1996), for instance, provide this separation by arguing that political economy analyses of the media are holistic; and the economy is essentially an interconnected network which includes the society, culture, and politics.

Within this context, the Frankfurt School of critical theorists headed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer pioneered the critical and multidisciplinary approach to cultural critique that combined textual analysis, audiences and political econo my of the media to understand the ideological and social impacts of mass culture and communications. Their construction of the concept of 'culture industries' paved the way for subsequent exploration of the properties and consequences of mass-produced culture for commercial purposes.

The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School subsequently analyzed a broad range of mass-mediated cultural artefacts within the context of industrial production. They identified how cultural commodities such as music (see Adorno 1932, 1938), popular literature (see Lowenthal 1949) and radio soap operas (see Herzog 1941) displayed the features of other products of mass production; specifically standardization, commodification and massification (Goodwilliam 2014). Kellner (2005) stresses their significance as the first group of social theorists to identify the ways in which mass culture industries were at the heart of leisure, affected socialization and mediated political reality.

Additionally, as Murdock & Golding (1973), Garnham (1994), and Wasko (2005) pointed out, analysis of the political economy of the media industries entails investigation of the power relations that determine participation in and ownership of cultural production. Such analysis, as noted earlier, was facilitated by the Frankfurt School in Germany. However, the subsequent center for investigation of the impact of media on the cultural industries was pioneered by the Birmingham School in the UK from about 1964.

This essay analyzes the political economy of the production and distribution of Hausa video films. I situate my arguments within a historical matrix of the development of Hausa visual cultures. Theoretically I tend to favor the economic perspective given by Wasco's (1981) analysis of the political economy of American film production. Data for the essay were collected over a period of several years of embedded fieldwork in Kano, northern Nigeria and Niamey in Niger Republic.

Foundations of the Hausa Video Film in Kano

Early Yoruba traveling theatre videos found their way to Kano's bustling "visitor" (or more appropriately, "guest settlers") communities of Sabon Gari in the 1980s where they were shown in cinemas and hotel bars. This attracted the attention of Hausa amateur TV soap opera stars and crew such as Bashir Mudi Yakasai (cinematographer), Aminu Hassan Yakasai (scriptwriter) and Tijjani Ibrahim (director). Surprisingly, despite the massive popularity of Hausa drama in the television houses, and despite government financial muscle, yet the idea of full-scale commercial production of the Hausa drama episodes by the television houses was never considered. Individuals wishing to own certain episodes simply went to the television station and paid the cost of the tape and a duplication fee and that was it. There was no attempt to commercialize the process on full-scale.

The precise decision to commercialize the Hausa video film, and thus create an industry, was made by late Aminu Hassan Yakasai in 1986, with the technical support of Bashir Mudi Yakasai, the leading cinematographer in Kano, and Tijjani Ibrahim, a producer with CTV 67. Aminu Hassan Yakasai was a member of the Tumbin Giwa Drama Group, one of the many drama groups that existed in Kano and staged their performances in local playgrounds. He was also a writer and a member of the Raina Kama Writers Association which spear-headed the development of the Contemporary Hausa Literature (CHP) in the 1980s. Thus, the idea of putting Hausa drama—and extending the concept later—on video films and *selling* it was a revolutionary insight, simply because no one had thought of it in the northern part of Nigeria. The project was initiated in 1986 and by 1989, a film, *Turmin Danya,* was completed. It was released to the market in 1990, giving birth to the Hausa video film industry. Salisu Galadanci was the producer and director, as well as the cinematographer, while Bashir Mudi Yakasai provided technical advice.

Here, it is significant to note that if Nollywood can be said to start off with *Living in Bondage,* which was released in 1992, then the Hausa video film industry was the first with *Turmin Danya,* which was released in March 1990. The moderate acceptance of *Turmin Danya* in Kano encouraged the Tumbin Giwa drama group to release *Rikicin Duniya* in 1991, and *Gimbiya Fatima* in 1992 — all with resounding success. *Gimbiya Fatima,* featured Adamu Muhammad, a novelist (*Kwabon Masoyi),* and one of the most successful and innovative television drama actors from CTV Kano soap operas.

By now it was becoming clear to the pioneers that there seems to be a viable Hausa video film market, and it was this viability that laid the foundation

of the fragmented nature of the Hausa video film industry. For while organized groups formed to create the drama and film production units, individual members of the groups decided to stake out their own individual territories and chart their own future. Thus Adamu Muhammad, the star of *Gimbiya Fatima* decided to produce his own video film, independent of Tumbin Giwa group in 1994. The video film was *Kwabon Masoyi,* based on his own novel of the same title, and outlined the road map for the future of the Hausa video film, and at the same time sounded the death knell of the drama groups. This was because Aminu Hassan Yakasai who created the very concept of marketing Hausa video films—and thus created an industry—broke away from Tumbin Giwa and formed Nagarta Motion Pictures. Others followed suit.

Other organized drama groups in Kano did not fare too well either. For instance, Jigon Hausa which released a genre-forming *Munkar* in 1995 broke up, with the star of the video film, Bala Anas Babinlata, forming an independent Mazari Film Mirage production company *(Salma Salma Duduf).* Similarly, Ado Ahmad Gidan Dabino broke away from Taurarуwa Drama and Modern Films Production (which produced *In Da So Da~auna)* and formed Gidan Dabino Video Production *(Cinnaka, Mukhtar, Kowa Da Ranarsa).* And while Garun Malam Video Club produced *Bakandamiyar Rikicin Duniya* written by San Azumi Baba; after the video film was released Baba left the group and established RK Studios.

From field studies and interview with the producers in Kano, most of these break-ups were not based on creative differences but financial disagreements or personality clashes within the groups. The number of officially registered "film production" companies that came up in Kano alone from 1995 to 2000 were more than 120. There were many others whose "studio heads" did not submit themselves to any form of registration and simply sprang into action whenever a contract to make a film was made available.

Interestingly, Adamu Muhammad of Kwabon Masoyi Productions also produced the first Hausa video film entirely in English. It was *House Boy.* Although *House Boy* was an innovative experiment by a Hausa video filmmaker to enter into the English language video genre, yet it was a commercial disaster. Hausa audience refused to buy it because it seemed too much like a "Nigerian film", associating it with southern Nigerian video films. When the producer took it to Onitsha—the main marketing center for Nigerian films in south-east part of the country—to sell to the Igbo marketers, he was rebuffed by marketers who were surprised that a Hausa video producer could command enough English to even produce a video film in the language. Further, the video had no known

"Nigerian film" actors in it, and therefore was not acceptable to them.[1] Thus, Hausa audience rejected it because it looked too much like a "Nigerian film", while non-Hausa rejected it because it used "unknown" Hausa actors, so it must be a *Hausa* film, even though the dialogue was in English!

The Professional Amateurs of the Hausa Film Industry

When Tumbin Giwa Film Productions in Kano finished editing *Turmin Danya* in 1990 they faced the problem of marketing it. The production of the video film did not come with an embedded film marketing strategy that would be cost-effective to the drama group, considering in fact the financial hurdles they had to overcome to produce just one video film. Further, cassette dealers in Kano, dominated by Nigerien Hausa immigrants had no interest in marketing a Hausa video film over the Hindi, American and Chinese films they were making a bustling trade out pirating. A Hausa video film was an anomaly because the main Television stations of NTA Kano and CTV Kano, as well as NTA Kaduna all had popular dramas that were easily available. Further, it would not be as easily pirated as overseas films because the owners are local and can control the production and distribution. On the face of the popularity of TV dramas and their ready availability, it does not seem to make marketing sense to accept *Turmin Danya.* They therefore refused to market it.

The Tumbin Giwa drama group also faced a second problem of getting enough blank tapes to make multiple copies of the video—and again the marketers who were the main distributors of the tapes, refused to co-operate as they do not wish to reveal their sources. Generally, they were not particularly keen on the development of the indigenous video film industry because it was a loose cannon in their lucrative pirating.

Most of the marketers lack modern education and sophistication to market a film within the conventional process of film marketing. This is more because creating and implementing advertising and promotional efforts designed to make a film stand out in a competitive market environment, film marketing typically uses the same methods other products do— and these require a corporate mindset the typical Hausa merchant simply does not have. The marketers did, however, accept to distribute *Turmin Danya* if the producers would find enough tapes to duplicate it themselves and bring it to them "ready-made". Thus the marketing system depended on the producer making multiple copies of a video film at his own expense, sticking the photos of the film on the cover and finding a willing marketer ready to accept it on sales-or-return basis. No marketer was willing to either invest in the industry or even purchase the video films directly.

They simply stacked them in their shops and gave the producer the sales, after taking their commission. If the video flopped, i.e. with low sales, the producer took the loss. Even if the marketer accepts the jackets, it could take up to six months for the full cost of the video film to be recouped—and even then in dribs and drabs of at most N2,000 at a go. This ties up the producer who has to wait until assembling all the money to start a new production. If a newer, more popular video film comes along, the unsold jackets of his film were returned to him.

The tape was often distinguished by a set picture pasted on the cover of the casing. In this uncertain way, the marketing of the Hausa video film industry started—with no actual marketing—especially advertising, promotion, reviewing, product endorsement—or effective distribution network. It was up to the producers to take copies of the tapes to various marketers in large northern cities of Kaduna, Sokoto, Jos, Zaria, Bauchi, Maiduguri and Gombe. The sheer finance needed for this logistics was simply too much for the early producers and therefore not feasible. It was in fact for this reason that the early-era Hausa video films were produced by associations—Jan Zaki, Jigon Hausa, Tumbin Giwa, etc., — who used the umbrella of the organization to produce and distribute the video film. The producers therefore settled with a simple advertisement on the radio informing listeners where to get a certain release. The marketers, of course, were not interested in any advertising for any video film— as doing that may draw attention to their illegal pirating activities.

However, when Tumbin Giwa released *Gimbiya Fatima* in 1992 it became a wake-up call to the viewers and the marketers. This video film opened viewers to the genre, and after a slow take-off period, the Hausa video film had arrived. *Gimbiya Fatima,* a period romantic drama in a traditional Hausa Muslim palace caught viewers' imagination and proved so successful that the producers introduced a new innovation in Hausa video filmmaking— making Parts 2 and 3. It was the first Hausa video film to benefit from a continuing story.

For the producers, the only way to get their master copies mass duplicated was to enter a deal with the marketers. The release of *Tsuntsu Mai Wayo* in 1995 by Bala Anas Babinlata created a pathway for this collaboration instead of a usual set picture of a scene from the video on the cover of the cassette, it had as near a professional quality colour printed cover as possible at the time. It was the first Hausa video film with a "ready-made jacket": the slipcase container for the video tape was the "jacket". This ensured that his video films would be more easily distinguishable. He still had to find his own blank tapes and duplicate the original master and distribute to the dealers—much the same way "Nigerian"

video films were distributed to all dealers in Kano. A few months later, his colleague, Khalid Musa changed all this with the release of *Munkar* when under Jigon Hausa Drama Club he came up with the idea of giving a master copy of the video film to a marketer, and then selling the number of "jackets" the marketer needed initially at N30, later raised to N50 per jacket. The cassette dealer then takes the responsibility of duplicating copies of the master tape—on the tapes he refused to sell to the producers, and which had massive supply of—placing them in the jackets and selling them to individual buyers at N250, or re-sellers at N180. The N50 cost of the jackets was all the producer got out of this deal; even then, the producer was paid *after* the dealer had sold the tapes. The jackets of tapes not sold were returned to the producer, and the cassette dealer simply erased the tape and records *another* video on it. The actors 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.

By the time Gidan Dabino released *In Da So Da ~auna* to the marketers 1996, the marketers had started showing slight interest in the marketing of the Hausa video films. This was more so because the video film was based on a best-selling novel of the same name and had caught the imagination of Hausa school girls across northern Nigeria. A way still needed to be worked out on mass production of the tapes—which the producers could not afford to do. Gidan Dabino came up with another formula—selling the "copyright" (meaning the right to duplicate) the video film for either a year for N2,000 or "for life" for N5,000. This, however, was specific to a particular marketer. Thus as many as five different marketers could all come and lease—for that was actually what it entailed—the copy of the same video film, duplicate it themselves and distribute as they see fit. The creative copyright of the video film, however, remained that of Gidan Dabino. This system was not adopted by other producers and the original formula suggested by Jigon Hausa seemed acceptable to the marketers. In fact it was consolidated when RK Studios released *Bada ala* in 1997 and sold the jacket to the marketers as per Jigon Hausa formula. Indeed only Ibrahimawa Studios in 2000 with *Akasi* followed the example of *Tsuntsu Mai Wayo* of releasing a ready-made video film to the marketers. But by then the marketers had cottoned-on the act—the future of Hausa video film marketing lies in the sale of jackets to the marketers. The filmmakers were now firmly in their grip.

The early (1990 to 1996) Hausa video films had a distinct characteristic: they were written mainly by novelists and/produced by structured drama groups and clubs. They were thus artistic in the sense that they were genuine attempts at interpreting the society using a new media technology which was just getting

available to young urban Hausa. For instance, *Turmin Danya* was a period drama that portrays the intrigues of a Hausa traditional ruler's palace. *Munkar* was written by a novelist (Bala Anas Babinlata) and a screenplay writer (Khalid Musa), who approached the screenplay with professionalism associated with Babinlata's widely successful novels. It was also a product of a drama group, thus having to go through various committees of Jigon Hausa Drama Group before the script was approved for screening. Finally, it had a strong social message—trying to stamp out prostitution among young Hausa girls. *In Da So Da~auna* explores the essential tension between tradition and choice in marriage by tracing the roots of forced marriage phenomena in one family. *Ki Yarda Da Ni* is a study of *kishiya*—(co-wife)—micro-culture in Hausa marriages. It was adapted from a book by a best-selling author, Bilkisu Ahmed Funtuwa. It thus became the *first* novel by a Hausa female author to be adapted for video film. It also inspired adaptation of a similar novel that explores the same theme, *Kara Da Kiyashi*, by Zuwaira Isa, and signaled the entrance of women into Hausa video film phenomena.

Subsequent producers, however, were not novelists, but experienced stage and drama artistes who maintained the tradition of producing their video dramas on tapes and marketing them to an audience that was beginning to become aware of the new popular culture. Within a relatively short period of time, particularly from 1995 to 1999 more producers emerged. The initial route into the industry was for a greenhorn producer to give a "contract" to an established producer to make a film for him—or quite often, her—and become involved in every aspect of production. Once the newbie producer had learnt the ropes, he also became a producer, and often a director; not so much for budgetary control of the production, but also to be part of the industry. Further, in the early stages those individuals who had the capital to form some sort of production companies became easily the market leaders. The search for fame and contracts as producers led to the breaking up of these production companies and the Hausa video film industry became an all-comers affair. For instance in about 1995 Alhaji Musa Na Sale, an audio cassette recordist (recording traditional Hausa musicians such as Sani Sabulu, Ali Makaho, and Garba Supa) came across Hamdala Drama Group in Wudil, a town some 50 kilometers from Kano during their stage performance. The group featured a comedian, Rabilu Musa Sanlasan with the stage name of Ibro. In a genre defining business deal, Musa Na Sale paid for the video production of a comedy by the group featuring Ibro in his first film. The film was *Kowa Ya Sebo Da Zafi* and established history in Hausa popular culture in two respects. First it was the first commercial Hausa video

film by a marketer. Second, it established the *Chamama* category of Hausa video films—cheaply produced films, and this served as an attraction to other marketers. Thus from 1995 some marketers also became producers.

The Takeover: Marketers and Hausa Video Film Industry

By the end of 2003 independent marketers - not associated with any drama club or filmmakers association, simply took over the Hausa video film industry, successfully edging out many of the mainstream Hausa video filmmakers in Kanywood's nerve center (e.g. Sarauniya, Ibrahimawa, Dukku). With video films from these newly established independents swamping the markets, it became difficult to recoup enough money from a film to make another one—especially for those who wish to maintain a semblance of creativity in their films. Noting a lull in the production, cassette marketers (referred to as 'diloli' or dealers) in Kano simply took over the Hausa video film production in 2004. This became inevitable because, as Jonathan Haynes (2007, p. 40) pointed out,

> The basic structures of the video business are similar in Nigeria and Ghana. The marketer/distributors, based in Opera Square in Accra and in Idumota Market in Lagos, with other Nigerian centres in the Igbo cities of Onitsha and Aba and the Hausa city of Kano, have effective control of the market. They are the main source of capital, as banks and other formal sector institutions are wary of the film business. Most of the marketers were traders in electronics or other goods before getting into the film business; they are vigorously condemned by the filmmakers as semi-literates with no knowledge of cinema, throwing their weight around like the Hollywood moguls of old but without the far-sightedness or instinct for talent that built the American industry. They are resented for mandating storylines and casting and held responsible for the repetitious flogging of the same faces and plots, aiming only at quick returns on minimal investments by pandering to the lowest and most predictable tastes of their audiences.

Similar trends were noted in the "Nigerian", i.e. Nollywood film industry. According to a report, by 2004 the "Awka Mafia", a cabal of powerful marketers in Awka, Anambra State in South Eastern Nigeria controlled the Nigerian film industry:

> ...completely with the marketers not only dictating who should act in films but also which films should be released into the market and which ones should not. It was that same year that the marketers exercised the biggest power of all when they banned 10 top Nollywood stars alleging indiscipline, very high fees and other sundry matters.... Initially, they started by choosing the kind of stories they wanted and cajoling the producers to use certain locations. In no space of time, they started dictating the actors and actresses they wanted on films. Before anybody could guess their next move, some of them even became directors and established their offices among the film makers themselves. "How marketers hijacked Nigeria's movie industry" *The Tide* (Nigeria), Saturday, Jun 17, 2006, online edition at http://www.thetidenews.com.

Thus Hausa video film marketers who rejected the industry in its infancy, and with neither background nor training in cinematic arts in any form—like their southern counterparts— adopted two strategies to take over the Hausa video film market from 2004.

Purchase of CD Rights

The first strategy was the introduction of "sayen CD"—the purchase of CD rights of a film. The purchase of CD rights actually started with *Tawakkali* in 2001 at the time when southern Nigerian films were increasingly becoming available in the CD format manufactured by media production companies, such as Sontec in Singapore. This created a stampede of interest among Hausa video filmmakers to get their own films on CD—seen as the ultimate symbol of cinematic cool. This created a brisk business for Iyke Moore Enterprises—which was the main marketer of Nigerian language, especially Igbo films in Kano—to purchase the CD rights for many Hausa video films at N20,000 per film. However, Hausa marketers, who had not shown any interest in marketing the Hausa films on CDs—preferring to stick to the old formula of buying "jackets" from the producers—suddenly realized that more profits could be made from the CDs than the VHS tapes, and they moved in, effectively undercutting Iyke Moore and purchasing the Hausa video films at significantly higher prices from local producers—and at the same time using the ethnic factor to favour them. For instance, while Iyke Moore was an Igbo, the Nigerien Hausa marketers point out their ethnic affinity to the Hausa film producers and this as a negotiating base in effectively edging Iyke Moore completely out of the business. Since the

producing costs were cheaper with CDs than with VHS tapes, the sales from the latter were left as sheer profit for the producers.

The purchasing appeal of a CD right of a film, especially from 2003 hinged on a trailer which focuses on a song and dance routine with catchy tunes and girls dressed in skimpy dresses (e.g. *Rukuni, Numfashi, and GuWa).* These trailers are then shown to the merchants who purchase the CD rights of the film before it was even shot (and often before even the script was written). With CD rights purchased from N350,000 to N500,000 (depending on how flashy the film was, not its storyline, which was tertiary to first the song and dance in the film, and second to the stars that appear), the producers suddenly have enough cash to continue production of more titles—with cash backing from the CD rights as well as the profits from cinema ticket sales and VHS tapes of the film.

Financing of the Industry

In the second process of dealers taking over the industry, by 2004 they had become the major financiers of Hausa video films by sponsoring the kind of market-driven films that can be sold through their network, often at the expense of independent productions. Table 1 shows the trend of control of the Hausa video film market within seven sampled years, based on fieldwork data.

Table 1. Financing Control of Hausa Video Films, 1998-2004

Year	Total output	Dealer-owned	
		Number	Percentage
1998	33	10	30
1999	111	22	20
2000	171	51	30
2001	230	71	30
2002	212	63	30
2003	164	35	21
2004	293	136	46

In all the years, an estimated 32% of the Hausa video films were financed by cassette dealers. Indeed, so total was their stronghold on the industry that by 2005 they controlled the entire process from scripting to post-production through the sponsorship of the type of films guaranteed to garner maximum sales. Thus a sudden upsurge of the production of the video films in 2005 was attributed not to the individual studios, but to the cassette dealer's cartel that simply took over the industry. This surge is shown in Fig. 1.

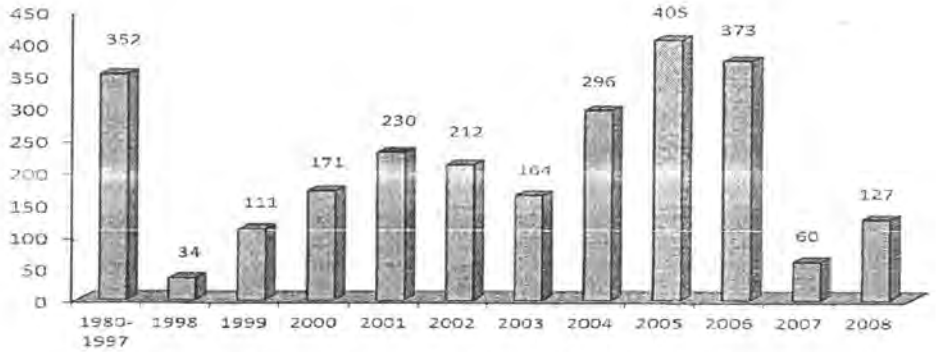

Fig. 1: Upsurge in Hausa Video Film Production
Source: Kano State Censorship Board

The decline from 2007 was caused by a scandal involving a high profile Hausa video film female star, Maryam 'Hiyana' Usman whose cellphone video clip of a sexual encounter with a boyfriend in 2007 led to a public crisis of confidence in the Hausa video films and caused a significant slump in the sales.

Alternative financing became inevitable because the major production studios lacked the capital to sustain themselves after the market crashed in 2003 due to stricter implementation of censorship regulations from 2001 that followed the re-launching of Shari'a in 2000. Seeing an opportunity to cash in, the marketers simply took over in 2004 and pumped cash backing to the studios—with the condition that the productions will be purely commercial. Studio heads with the capital to compete must ensure they produce the same type of films. Interestingly, this echoes the commercialization of other cinema in developing countries. A typical example narrated was in the Egyptian film industry which Abu Sayf (1949 in Armbrust 2000: 317) described thus:

> Nobody who has written about the "crisis of the Egyptian cinema" has investigated the causes of the crisis. The first reason is that the number of cinema production companies increased in Egypt during World War II because of the entry of war profiteers into the field of cinema production. They were eager to exploit the money they made without any of them knowing the slightest thing about filmmaking. This led to chaos that helped destroy the Egyptian film, causing an increase in competition for artists, thereby raising their fees to unimaginable levels. It also increased the cost of studios, developing labs, and raw film, and led to a doubling in production costs.

Consequently, in Egyptian cinema, as in Hausa video films,

> Tasteless producers catered to a low-class audience, which had also been enriched by the British war effort (Salih 1986, 196) Lebanese producers, who Salih and others say were interested only in quick profits, put another nail in the coffin of "quality" Egyptian cinema. Lazy directors, who adapted foreign films rather than pay writers to produce scripts, then combined with the marketability of dancers, slapstick comedy, and melodrama, in what some see as a powerful alchemy of tastelessness (Armbrust 2000: 317).

Since the Hausa video film marketers were not in the market for the sake of 'art', criticisms of the marketing strategies or even the films, especially from the participants of the first international conference on Hausa films in 2003, did not affect the fact of the films being disposable commodities in Hausa cultural trade.

Movie Stars as the Nouveau Rich

The massive popularity of the Hausa video film as well as the emergent stars created the Kanywood appeal that further attracted more young independent producers. Thus the period of about 1999 to 2003 can be considered the golden age of Hausa popular visual culture. For the vast majority of these new video moguls, it was a full-blown business—complete with investment risks and "stock" options. It has to be; with no steady jobs or educational career, this became their own mainstay. And since the industry was not professionalized, it had no specific standards as applied to the standard norms of the film industry the world over. It became a cut-throat world, with every producer keeping their stories (or the film they are about to rip-off) close to their chests for fear of being beaten to production (a process called Sheraton—borrowing the name of the world-famous hotel chain in linguistic similarity to the Hausa word, sharewa, which means to sweep away (one's ideas), and thus beat one to the market. Rivalry and intense competition in a restricted market became the norm, with studio heads often at loggerheads with each other due to conflicts of interest (in either stars, storylines or marketing) or personality clashes, with each claiming superiority in his own turf, like a gangland war. A new commercial expression became coined by the up-and- coming producers in the middle of 2001. This was "mu hawu a Bata" ("let us meet at Bata"). The old Bata building, facing the bustling Sabon Gari market in Kano was the initial marketing center for the video films and the hub where all Hausa video film marketers were networked.

Success at Bata means one's video has been accepted ("ya samu karSuwa"), and this was guaranteed success for subsequent projects. Thus producers-cum-directors-actors whose videos were bankable became sought after by financiers.

On commercial terms the new stars were not really making a lot of money. Most appeared in the video films to gain popularity and fame, rather than fortune. And because they lacked an organized negotiating basis—there were no agents in the system—the stars were paid according to the whims of the producers. For instance, from 1994 to 1996 fees paid to artistes were at the discretion of the producer. Indeed in most of the early video film efforts, the artistes appeared free, adequately compensated by their rising profiles and popularity as video film stars ("'yan fim"). The first Hausa video film that signed contracts with the artistes and paid them fees—and thus set the tune for the rest of the industry to follow—was RK Studio's Bada ala in 1996. The total cost of producing the video film was N250,000. The leading artistes in the video were paid between N7,000 to the highest N10,000—a considerable fortune at the time. Towards the end of 1998 to early 1999 the average payment was about N500 per scene, by the end of 1998 it had started climbing to N2000 depending on the commercial appeal of the artiste. For instance in 1998 a female lead actor was paid N5,000 in~arshen Makirci. Yet the following year, in Alhaki the main female character was paid N20,000, reflecting the rising profiles of some of the stars. From 1999 the fees stabilized. Up to early 2002 leading role artistes with "megastar status" received between N20,000 to maximum N40,000 per film. These same "Superstar" list artistes were paid between one to two thousand naira per scene, depending on the relationship with the producer. After the market became unstable, sales could not be guaranteed. The fees also started coming down to N10,000 from N40,000 for "Superstar" video film star. The stars became at the mercy of the producers because the concept of negotiating a contract through an agent was never thought of as part of the process.

However, by 2017, the prices had gone up. A 'superstar' by then was commanding N500,000 for appearing in a film of two or more parts - in reality a single film, but split into multiple parts to recover as much of the costs as possible. Those not categorized as 'superstars' earn about N50,000 per 'difficult' film (which demands either a lot of physical exertion or extreme skillsets).

Cost of Production and Volume of Hausa Video Films

The cost of production of Hausa video films follows the vagaries of the economy, as the case with all aspects of economic life. Sandago and Imam (2002) sampled about 13 studios in Kano and Kaduna States to determine the

average cost of production of Hausa video film based on specific film genre. The results, juxtaposed against 2017 costs of production are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Average Cost of Hausa Video Film Production

S/N	Types of films	Average Cost (N) 2002	2017
1	Comedy films	400,000	2,000,000
2	Love story films	500,000	2,500,000
3	Religious films	600,000	1,500,000
4	Children's films	600,000	3,000,000
5	Action films	700,000	4,000,000
6	Horror films	1,000,000	4,000,000
7	Social films	1,200,000	3,000,000
8	Family films	1,500,000	1,000,000
9	Traditional films	2,000,000	5,000,000

Source: Sandago and Imam (2002).

The fluctuating economy, as well as introduction of more costly filmmaking gear (from VHS camcorders to digital cameras) as well as higher costs of actor fees and post-production costs were responsible for the almost doubling of the fees in the 15 year period. Surprisingly, there seemed to be a drop in the costs of producing 'family' films. My informants suggested that by 2017, such films had lost their appeal, with Hausa video film 'superstars' shunning them. Further, they are mostly shot in one location, thus reducing overhead costs.

No less voluminous than the acrimonious structure for the young industry was the output. Indeed the large volume—caused by a bandwagon-effect—was the core of the acrimonies. In Nigeria, the Hausa video films were second only to Yoruba video films in volume production. From 1952 to 1995 about 15 celluloid Hausa films were produced. These were *Baban Larai* (1952, a video film remake was produced in 1995 with the same title), *Mama Learnt A Lesson* (1960), *Back to Land* (1970), *Child Bride* (1970), *Kanta of Kebbi* (1976), *Shehu Umar* (1976), *Idon Matambayi* (1982), *Ga Fili Ga Doki* (1985), *Maitatsine* (1985), *KulSa Na Arna* (1993) and *Asarmu Ce* (1995). *Nur Al-Zaman* (1993) and recorded with Betacam was a biopic of the 19th century Hausaland Muslim reformer Shehu Usman Sanfodiyo and was never released. Others, of uncertain dates, included *Ruwan Bagaja, An Kashe Maciji,* and *Musa Yazo Birni.*

Following the typical style of Hausa storytelling, these films were didactic, linear and steeped in either history (e.g. *Shehu Umar),* patriotism and nationhood

(asarMu Ce), biopics *(Kanta of Kebbi, Maitatsine* and *Nur al-Zaman)* social services *(Baban Larai, Child Bride)* or commercially produced by big firms to promote their products, as in *Musa Ya Zo Birni*, produced by Nigerian Tobacco Company to encourage the production of the tobacco plant. These films were produced either at the time of limited media globalization on Hausa filmmakers, or were studied attempt at cultural preservation through the mass media. They were also clearly expensive to make and could not have been sustained at an individual filmmaker level. For instance, *Maitatsine*—a biopic about a Muslim preacher with a particularly violent approach to mass conversion in Kano in about 1983—was not officially released in any medium after its theater showings because the producer was worried about piracy (Interview with Alhaji Sule Umar, Producer and Director, *Maitatsine, Mumtaz* magazine, April 2001, p. 18). The total number of such Hausa feature films, so far recorded, was 11.

However, of the estimated 1,961 Hausa video films produced from 1980 to 2005 (see Fig. 1), only about 1,609 were officially recorded by the National Film and Video Censorship Board (1998-2003 figures) which started censoring Hausa films submitted to it from 1996 as well as the Kano State Censorship Board (2004 and 2005 figures). Between 1980 and 996 a total of 352 Hausa video films were allegedly produced, although many of them were not recorded anywhere except with the producers who announced their production in interviews in *Fim, Tauraruwa* and *Garkuwa* magazines. However, the popularity of the genre is reflected by the fact that in only 2005 a total of 394 video films were released—eclipsing the 352 produced in the 16 years from 1980 to 1996. And despite censorship, which imposed certain regulations, the two years from 2000 and 2001 saw a total of 20.4% of the Hausa video films. The biggest boom, however, was in 2005 when a total of 20% of the total number of Hausa video films were produced in that year alone.

The success of the first Hausa 'block buster' *Sangaya* in 2000 led to an avalanche of filmmakers and Hausa video films as reflected in the 14.2% total share of the officially censored video films in 2001—a significant increase over the previous years. Further, according to the National Film and Video Censorship Board (2002) there were a total of 121 officially recognized Hausa film producers in Nigeria in 2001, and 23 directors (who, in Kano at least, constituted themselves into Directors' Guild of Kano, Dgk). However, data from the Associations themselves in Kano show that there were 218 members of the Kano State Filmmakers Association in 2005. The Kano State Guild of Artistes also recorded a total of 505 members. From fieldwork studies in Kano and Kaduna—the largest centers of production—most of these production companies

do not even have an office; nor were there any specific studios. Filmmakers often rely on rented equipment to shoot a film and take the rushes to an editing studio—many of whom were converted computer business centers.

The Crash: Marketers, Blouses and Chicken Noodles

By 2016 the Hausa film industry had literally crashed. The major marketers-cum-producers had all pulled out from the industry. Their shops in the major video markets in Kano were subsequently filled with clothing—particularly blouses and football jerseys; for these make more money than selling films. Others took to selling Smartphone accessories, while others returned to the farm and became serious farmers. The few Hausa megastar actors took to commercial advertising of noodles, milk and other household commodities - often moving from house to house with products' marketers - relying on their faces and voices (making sure they introduce themselves in all the commercial jingles) to sell to increasingly hungry population caught in the vortex of economic depression. The frequency of releasing films drastically dropped because no one was buying. International Satellite channels like the Indian Zee World, especially their English-dubbed TV series caught Hausa urban attention more than recycled Hindi film clones that were the hallmarks of Hausa video films. Consequently, many reasons combine to lead to the crash of the Hausa film industry towards 2016.

Market Congestion

The popular cultural industries in Kano were marketed into market hubs. The Bata market at the edge of Sabon Gari controlled the predominantly foreign films and music sales, as well as became the main centre of distribution to other parts of Nigeria and Africa, where a sizeable market existed in Niger, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo, Cameroon, Chad and the Congos. When the Hausa video film arrived in 1990, it found a ready template to attach itself. The other was Kasuwar ˜ofar Wambai, located at the edge of the walls of Kano city, and near a cluster of old colonial cinemas. The Wambai market focuses mainly on leather, textile and plastics. However, it was also the hub of audio tape sales - with marketers making brisk business pirating old EMI, Polydor and HMV tapes of traditional Hausa musicians recorded in the 1960s. Road construction work at Bata in about 2003 created unfavorable conditions for many of the stall owners, and some decided to shift to Wambai market. By 2005 the video film market had completely moved to Wambai which now became the new Bata.

The Wambai market, hitherto occupied by cassette dealers who ignored the Hausa film industry, suddenly became a virgin territory for film marketers and producers, with each opening a stall. In less than five years it had reached its ascendency and crashed due to the massive congestion of producers and marketers - all selling the same thing. When I visited the market in May 2017, I counted less than 10 stalls selling either videos or audio; contrasted to some five years ago when it was bursting at the seams with these products. The stalls have now been taken over by stocks of cheap blouses, football jerseys and cloned Smartphone accessories.

Lack of New or Captivating Scripts

By 2005 the Hausa video film industry had become fully established with over 1,600 officially censored releases. With an extremely few exceptions of less than 0.5%, they all revolve around a pastiche of Hindi films in one form or other aimed, as the video filmmakers themselves kept insisting, at urban Hausa children, youth and housewives. Since such youth commercial Hausa video film echoes its Hindi film antecedents, let us first look at the defining characteristics of commercial Hindi films. According to Ravi Vasudevan (2000, p. 101), the negative features of commercial Hindi cinema are:

> A tendency to statis at the level of narrative and character development; an emphasis on externality, whether of action or character representation, melodramatic (florid, excessive), sentimentality; crude or naive plot mechanisms such as coincidence, narrative dispersion through arbitrary performance sequences, and unrestrained and over-emotive acting styles.

Thus most Hindi films could be classified as musicals, especially due to their reliance on a strong dosage of song and dance sequences, blended with a melodramatic storyline, which employ formulaic ingredients such as star-crossed lovers and angry parents, love triangles, corrupt politicians, kidnappers, conniving villains, courtesans with hearts of gold, long-lost relatives and siblings separated by fate, dramatic reversals of fortune, and convenient coincidences.

This stylistic technique provides a vehicle for echoing fundamental Hausa emotional tapestries in three main creative motifs: *auren dole* (forced marriage, the *love triangle,* and the obligatory *song and dance* sequences—with an average of about six songs in a two part video. With every producer trying to outwit everyone with more love triangles, song and dance routines, the market became

saturated, and audiences got bored - and indicated this by refusing to buy the films.

Monopoly by Megastars

Those actors lucky enough to be accepted early enough in the film industry came to dominate the system. This was actually imposed by the marketers who insisted on a particular actor appearing in a film they will either sponsor or market because such actors were more bankable and were guaranteed quick sales of their films. With this economic force behind them, such few (perhaps less than five) came to dominate almost every 'big' budget Hausa film. By 2017 their stars had started fading; audiences became tired of seeing them in almost the same film with different names, and marketers dropped them. While still making films, they diversified their faces and voices to commercial advertising for major telephone service providers and essential commodities such as chicken noodles and milk and soup seasoning.

The fading of the fortunes of the megastars became evident with the ascendency and popularity of relatively unknown stars of a TV series, *DaWin Kowa,* shown on Arewa24 satellite TV from 21st January, 2015. *DaWin Kowa* (pleasant to everyone) is an imaginary town that serves as a melting pot, housing Nigerians of various ethnicities and religions, and yet living peacefully. In 2016 it won Africa Magic Awards, over *Sarki Jatau,* an expensive lavish traditionally cultural Hausa period drama.

The coming of Arewa24, initially conceived and funded by the United States State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism to counteract insurgency in 2014 merely placed another nail in the coffin of the Hausa video film market. Transnational in its outlook, the Arewa24 TV series provide a level of script sophistication unheard of in Hausa film industry. Other Satellite TV stations, such as StarTimes, Hausa Channels on Africa Magic DSTv including GoTV became increasingly affordable. Showing a massive amount of Hausa films, they eclipsed the purchase of CDs and DVDs of Hausa films. Audiences prefer to watch free than to go through the hassle of purchasing DVDs that often do not work, and requiring DVD players, mostly Chinese knock-offs of international brands that often turn out dodgy.

New Media, New Poverty

The Internet provided the biggest blow to the decline of Hausa video films. With telecommunication companies competing for customers and subsequently undercutting each other in the provision of data plans, Hausa youth have more

access to social media sites such as Instagram and YouTube. The latter, in particular, provided them with opportunities to upload hundreds of Hausa films for all to see. While this has increased the visibility of Hausa films worldwide, such popularity does not translate to return on investment, as most of the films were illegally uploaded to YouTube.

Another dimension of new media political economy was the proliferation of Download Centers in northern Nigeria, with the largest groups in Kano. Operators of these Centers rip the CD of DVDs of Hausa films and convert them into 3gp formats and make them available to customers at N50 per film—with discounts given for volume purchase. A 1GB microSD card can pack as many as 20 films. The 3gp format makes it possible for people to watch the films on their Smartphones, which readily and rapidly replaced DVD players which require a TV and electricity - something not always guaranteed in Nigeria. Often the Downloaders 'lease' the films from street vendors - children hawking the CDs and DVDs at traffic lights - for N100 per film, rip it off, and return back to the hawker who simply puts it back into its pristine cellophane wrapper and eventually sells it - thus gaining double profit. Both the various Associations of Hausa filmmakers and the Kano State Government's Censorship Board had tried to stamp out the Downloaders, but without success, as the latter had become so powerful and organized that they form various Associations. The punitive steps taken were usually to arrest them, fine them, and order them to delete the illegal ripped-off films from their computers. These measures proved so ineffective, that a deal was worked out in 2017 between the filmmakers and the Downloaders to 'officially' lease the films to the Downloaders for a fee in a form of 'legal license'. These measures did not work because the Downloaders prefer to obtain their films cheaply, rather than being registered with the Government as licensing the films. The Kano State Censorship Board, on the other hand simply asks them to register their business and charge them fees, regardless of their downloading bootleg business.

Southern Indian Competition

A final factor in the decline of the Hausa film industry by 2017 was the massive popularity of 'Indiya-Hausa' films. These were Telugu and other southern Indian films that have been dubbed into Hausa language by first, Algaita Studios in Kano. When the marketers at Wambai market noted the popularity of these dubs, they also moved in and commissioned their own dubbed translations.

The original Telugu films were brought to Kano by an Indian national with full license to translate into local African languages. The first film translated by

Algaita Studios was the Bhojpuri film, *Hukumat Ki Jung* (dir. S.S. Rajamouli, 2008). It was translated as da Rashin Adalci' (Fighting Injustice). Others that followed included *Dabangg* (dir. Abhinav Kashyap, 2010), *Racha* (dir. Sampath Nandi, 2012) and *Nayak: The Real Hero* (dir. S. Shankar, 2001). In an interactive session in June 2016, Buzo Sanfillo, the CEO of Algaita Studios and whose voice is used in the translations, told me that the Algaita Studio had translated 93 films by 2016. They were paid N80,000 by the Indian licensee of the films.

The first few films that appeared from the Algaita Studio from 2012 were considered novelties, providing a relief from watching complete remakes of Hindi films by Hausa filmmaker, or even the originals themselves. What made them more attractive, however, was the translation of the titles of the films in a single powerfully expressed word, or couple of words, that seems to take a life of their own and communicate either adventure, danger or defiance. For instance, *Nayak: The Real Hero* (dir. S. Shankar, 2001) was translated as 'Namijin Duniya' (lit. Brave); *Indirajeet* (dir. K.V. Raju, 1991) as 'Fargaba' (Fear), and *Velayudham* (dir. Mohan Raja, 2011) as 'Mai Adda' (Machete). Referred to as 'India-Hausa' (Hausa versions of Indian films), they quickly became the new form of transcultural expression in the Hausa entertainment industry.

The Indiya-Hausa translations were massively successful and attracted audiences not attuned to Indian films in the first place. This can be deduced from the numerous comments on the Facebook pages of the Algaita Dub Studio (https://www.facebook.com/algaitadub/). Their success created a public debate mainly online in social networks about their cultural impact. In the first instance, there does not seem to be any attempt by the translators to mute some of the bawdier dialogues of the originals - translating the dialogue directly into Hausa. Kanywood filmmakers latch on to this as an indication of cultural impropriety of the translated films. Additionally, the often romantic scenes revealing inter-gender sexuality were not edited out by the translators, since their focus is not the visuals, but the voices. This, again, was pointed out by Hausa filmmakers as a direct attack on Hausa cultural sensibilities. Kanywood filmmakers do accept that they appropriate Hindi films; but they argue that they culturally adapt the stories to reflect Muslim Hausa sensibilities.

Conclusion

Cultural commodities - whether tourism related or popular culture - are marketed with the assumptions of their impact on daily lives of their consumers.

Marketing determines the success of especially media industries, often with a disregard of the contents. The commodification of the Hausa popular cultural industries was premised on profitability motive, not art or aesthetics. Financiers were ready to continue investing in the industries as long as they can make effective profits. It is this profit motive that commoditizes art and elegance to common supermarket product with a short shelf life.

Yet the commoditization of culture is not necessarily a reflection of a failed economy as happened in the case of the Hausa popular cultural industries. Nor was it an uncouth lack of appreciation of 'high' culture, or obsession with capitalism. Not only was it universal, it was also necessary if it is to be free. True enough governments can support art and archiving of culture - but at a doctrinaire expense - choosing what to support and what to discard in line with its own ideology. This compromises art and denies artists freedom of preservation of cultural heritage, if they have to follow a particular state ideology to get funding for their art. Either way, the artist is caught between government ideology and capitalist marketers, both who care not about his art and its cultural import, but about the payload - in terms or ideological entrenchment or profit - to themselves. For instance, Wasko (1981, p. 135) points out that 'in the early beginnings of the film industry in the United States, there was a strong relationship between bankers and the film industry, and subsequently, banks played a very powerful role in the development of the industry.

Such collaboration between banks and the film industry did not happen with regards to the Hausa cultural industries, nor even in the Nollywood film industry. As Haynes (2017, p. 48) noted, 'the government's interest in Nollywood led to the establishment in 2010 of a $200 million load fund to support the entertainment industry. ' However, the bureaucracy attached to the accessing the funds became too much such that many filmmakers did not bother to apply. Further, 'banks make occasional personal loans to filmmakers who put up their houses as collateral, but no bank tried to establish a serious relationship with the film industry'. It was only in 2007 that EcoBank came up with a Project Nollywood, which failed. Even in Hollywood, the profit motive was strong in financing, for as Wasko (1981, p.136) further noted, 'bankers and financiers have been attracted to the American film industry for reasons other than an interest in film or filmmaking per se. Film as a creative art form or communications medium has been less important to bankers than film as a commodity.'

And yet, as this essay has demonstrated, filmmakers, producers and marketers were motivated by the commodification of culture, rather than

preservation of culture. Data from the larger fieldwork indicates the chagrin of Hausa filmmakers whenever references were made to the cultural dysfunctionality of their films. Their arguments had always been that film is a business, not art, which explains their opting out of the 'business' when it became no longer viable.

Yet art and artistry, as expressions of creativity and imagination first, and second as cultural practices, illuminate our inner lives and enrich our emotional world. They provide a map of our ethnographic journey through life and keep fresh our ethnicities and identities. Commodification trivializes this significance and robs us of the opportunity to preserve our creativity for the future generation—something which Renaissance artists, innovators and creators had been able to do for us.

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