

Enter the Dragon: Shari'a, Popular Culture and Film Censorship in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper deals with the question of the tension between the form and the content of the media in influencing the nature and the potentials of media technology as a public sphere in the Hausa Muslim community of northern Nigeria. Opening the social field to new spokespeople 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 and consumption tied to media and particularly to new media.

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. When the sacred, in the form of community of Muslim scholars, became profaned by Muslim Hausa video film makers—making the private, obscenely public—the result was a recourse to religious framework, the Shari'a, to control the textual discourse.

Introduction

Censorship of the arts is nothing new, nor restricted to quaint “traditional” societies afraid of liberal challenge to enforced traditional authority. The very icons of Western Civilization deemed it fit to regulate artistic expressions to protect civil society from the excesses of creativity. For instance, Plato was one of the earliest recorded advocates of rigorous censorship. His imagined utopian state imposed strict censorship in order to promote virtue and good morals in the young (*The Republic*, III:401).¹ Although he focused his criticisms more on heretical poetry and music than on the visual arts, he also disapproved of painting (*The Republic*, X:603)² and sculpture (*Sophist*, 235-36)³ and argued that they should be submitted to state censorship so that their moral content could be monitored and if necessary corrected.

Freedom of speech in ancient Rome depended on one's social rank, and in the republican era many poets were exiled for their writings. The Romans established the office of Censor as early as 443 B.C.⁴ Initially, the office was only to make a census of citizens and assess their wealth and taxes. However, the censors eventually acquired the power of *regimen morum*, or general control over the morals of citizens to determine their fitness for office. For the Romans, art was occasionally associated with decadence and corruption of morals. The Roman general Sulla was accused of corrupting his

¹ Plato. *Republic* (Vol. 1) (G. P. Goold, Ed., & Paul Shorey, Trans. 1978). Cambridge: Harvard.

² Plato, *The Republic* (Vol. 2) (G.P. Goold, Ed. & Paul Shorey, Trans,1980). Cambridge: Harvard.

³ Plato, *Sophist* (Nicholas P. White, Trans,1993). Indianapolis: Hackett.

⁴ Gail Blasser Riley. (1998). *Censorship*. New York: Facts on File

soldiers in foreign lands through art: “for there it was that the army of the Roman people first learned to indulge in women and drink, to admire statues, paintings and chased vases” (Chambers 1928, 55).

The early Christian world merely sustained the Platonian ideals of censoring the believers from any act of the civil polity that offended public and religious morality (Clapp 1972, Carmilly-Weinberger 1986, Jones 2001, Mango 1977, Gimpel 1969, Alexander 1958). For instance, after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, musical instruments were banned in worship (Kaplan 1997). Saint Augustine of Hippo explained this ban as distancing Christianity from the “sensual heathen cults...and shameless performances of the degenerate theatre and circus (Kaplan 1997).” The ban persisted until 670, when the organ was permitted to be played at the Eucharist. But in the Eastern Orthodox church the ban persists to this day (Jones 2001).

Islam is far more regulative than Judaism and Christianity to artistic freedom. In addition to the prohibition of idolatry, Islam prohibits the representation of the human figure; it is regarded as the creation of Allah, depiction of it as therefore a divine prerogative. Given such strict prohibitions, portrait and other painting in Islamic societies were and remain rare. Islamic artists focused their creative energies on calligraphy and ornamentation, where they faced few constraints (Papadopoulos 1979, 602-07). Arabesque ornamentation, where human and animal figures are blended into the designs, was generally acceptable to religious authorities.

Even in contemporary climes, liberalism always gave birth to censorship. By the outbreak of war in 1914 most nations had established film censorship regimes that embraced film production, distribution and exhibition. Feature film production and promotion by that time had moved from a cottage industry to a more corporate basis, involving substantial investment and increasingly involving an integration of studios, distribution networks and exhibition chains—offering regulators a number of places to put restraints, and encouraging caution by industry executives.

In the United States, liberal atmosphere lead first to the development of the film industry through photography and its subsequent offspring – salacity. To forestall official censorship, the industry in 1909 formed the New York Board of Censors to evaluate films before public release. This became the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures in 1915. Film regulation became a national issue in 1930, when concern over what was perceived to be increasing immorality in early American sound films led to the creation of the Motion Picture Production Code (popularly known as the Hays Code after its creator, Will H. Hays). Its guidelines, together with those laid down by the influential Catholic Legion of Decency, had a far-reaching effect on mainstream film production in the US.

By the mid-1960s, social changes rendered existing guidelines inadequate - the Legion of Decency was ridiculed for condemning distinguished films such as *La Dolce Vita* (1960) and *The Pawnbroker* (1964), and producers increasingly ignored the Hays Code’s recommendations. When *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966), a film that blatantly breached the Code in several respects, got thirteen Oscar nominations (winning five), it was clear that the system had irretrievably broken down. The Motion Picture Association of America therefore introduced a ratings

system that sought to distinguish between films suitable for children and those clearly made for adults.

The history of British film censorship is as much social as cultural: the reasons films were banned in the 1920s (revolutionary politics) and 1950s (nudity) say as much about the society of the time as anything in the films (Mathews, 1994). It is also revealing that in an era of far greater equality the British Board of Film Classification, BBFC, is noticeably tougher on sexual violence today than it was thirty years ago, though correspondingly much more relaxed about most other issues (Robertson, 1985).

It is significant that in both Britain and the United States, censorship of the visual media was initiated by the industry. For instance, in Britain the BBFC is not a government organization. Just as the MPAA in the US is an industry initiative, so too in Britain were BBFC's activities. In fact, in Britain the central government has no direct involvement in film censorship beyond passing legislation affecting the BBFC's activities. Local authorities have considerably more power, including the final say in whether or not certain films can be shown, though in the vast majority of cases they are happy to accept the BBFC's verdict. Indeed, this is why the BBFC was created by the film industry in the first place.

In the Arab world, the media have long played an important role in political discourse. In the past few years, Arab journalism has begun to face forces of change; globalization processes have had a significant impact on Arab media by providing transnational Arabic and non-Arabic print and broadcast options for Arab audiences (Amin, 2000). Arab media institutions and personnel have begun to see the need to keep up with global information systems that now address and hold the attention of Arab masses and strengthen the forces of democracy (Alterman, 1998).

Egyptian intellectual life, as the oldest and largest film industry in the Arab world, has always been plagued by censorship. Film has been considered more dangerous than literature since it can affect the larger masses in a country where most people do not read or write. Officially institutionalized by the Palace and the British Embassy in 1914, it is a part of the Ministry of the Interior. In 1914 the censorship bureau demanded from all filmmakers that they in no way, shape or form, criticize foreigners, civil servants and religion. It is forbidden to show the lifestyle of farmers, workers, or to express any opinions on nationalistic or neutral political views favorable towards socialism. No one is to criticize the past or present monarchy.

Subsequently, artistic productions in Egypt, in particular films, are subjected to a rigid administrative system of censorship which was set up under the 1955 censorship law and has since then been further elaborated. The censorship machine starts to roll when scripts are presented for approval to the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry's censors file a report to the head of the Arts Censorship Authority (the art censor), who then approves or rejects the script. If the script contains elements that deal with religious or security matters, it is then forwarded to al-Azhar or the Ministry of Defence, whichever is appropriate, for their approval. Any scenes which do not pass this scrutiny must then be removed or amended. However, the art censor may reject the entire script if the principal message of the work is perceived to run counter to the provisions of the 1955 censorship law (Article 19, 1997).

Saudi Arabia, as much as model of officially unadulterated Islam—or Wahabism—as can be found, adopts a more comprehensive approach to media censorship. Moral policing is repositied with an agency called the *al-ri'asa al-'amma li-hay'at al-amr bi-al-ma'ruf wa-al-nahy 'an al-munkar* or the General Presidency for Committees of Ordering the Good and Forbidding the Evil, the members of which are also known by the traditional colloquial designation *mutawwa* (Cook, 1989). The activities of the committees included policing attendance at prayers, enforcing closure of shops at prayer time, assuring that women are properly veiled, preventing undue mixing of men and women, suppressing licentious acts like drinking or dancing, and banning public services of religions other than Islam. This particular brand of Islamic interpretation eventually found its way to northern Nigerian Muslim communities in the late 1980s⁵ and created interesting interpretations for the use of visual medium in social discourse.

Thus, as Chiang and Posner (2003) argue,

the common element in the censorship of art is offensiveness: when art challenges strongly held beliefs, usually of a political, ideological, moral, or religious character, there is pressure for censorship. We speak of “offensiveness” rather than “harm” because censorship of art is rarely based on a plausible theory causally linking the viewing of a work of art, whether highbrow or popular, with actual antisocial behavior or consequences.⁶

Subsequently, the analytical and regulatory problem is that in a democratic, culturally and morally heterogeneous society such as that of the contemporary United States, there is little agreement on what is offensive, and efforts to suppress offensive work are therefore strongly resisted by those who derive pleasure from it that is not overborne by a sense of its offensiveness and who consider it their right to pursue leisure activities that do not cause demonstrable harm to other people. It is this liberal humanism that other societies and cultures, often with contrasting mindsets, seek to inject in their societies to reject censorship.

Film Censorship in Nigeria

The first attempt of the Nigerian Government to regulate the film industry was in 1912, nine years after the first film was shown to the Nigerian public by Messrs Balboa of Barcelona, Spain, under the management of a Nigerian, Herbert Macaulay on Monday 12th August 1903. The proposed *Theatre and Public Performance Regulation Ordinance, 1912*, failed to reach the Legislative Council of Nigeria as a result of public opposition. However, in 1933 the first Cinematograph Ordinance No. 20 was passed by the Council. The law became effective 1st April 1934. The law, titled *An Ordinance for the Better Regulation and Control of Cinematograph and Similar Exhibitions, and Purposes Connected Therewith* applied to both Lagos Colony and the rest of Nigeria. It governed as the law stated, the exhibition or showing of pictures or related optical effects produced by means of a cinematograph equipment and film designated for use with cinematograph equipment.

This law created a censorship board and a censorship committee (selected from the board of censors). It gave the then Governor-General of Nigeria the power to appoint

⁵ See Kane 2003 for a detailed study of this.

⁶ Online reference, noted in references.

150 members to the censorship board, although not all the 150 sit at the same time to censor films; about five were selected at a time to serve for short periods of time, generally a week. Members of the censorship board included government officials and leading personalities from throughout the nation. Films considered for possible censorship included those dealing with sex, crime, religion and controversial racial issues. Films were not classified for various audiences, and unacceptable films were simply denied a license for exhibition.⁷

The 1933 Cinematograph Ordinance No. 20 was amended in 1934, 1941, 1944, 1945 and 1963 when it became Cinematograph Act and Regulation, and dealt mainly with film censorship.⁸ With increasing availability of new media technologies to facilitate entertainment and create greater diversity, however, it became clear that the Cinematography Ordinance was looking increasingly out of place in a rapidly globalizing Nigeria. Three consultative meetings facilitated by the Federal Ministry of Information and incorporating the Federal Board of Film Censors were held in 1989, 1999 and 1992 to discuss new legislation, and an implementation agency, that would provide a more meaningful guide to the film industry in the country. At the last cluster of meetings in 1992 it became clear that the phenomena of videography had arrived in the country and therefore full separate legal provisions must be made to cater for the new medium. Hence the recommendation that a full-fledged parastatal be established by the Federal Government to manage the multifarious activities, duties, assignments and operations of a newly agency – the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB).⁹

The establishment of the NFVCB necessitated the repeal of the old Cinematograph/Regulations Act of 1963 by Decree No 85. This decree was published in official gazette No 25 (Vol 80) of 1st September, 1993. On 15th June 1994, the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), became an established scheduled agency of the Federal Government. Thus the main rationale for establishing the Board included:

- a) video films had then existed in the country for more than fifteen years free from any regulatory legislation,
 - b) between 20,000 to 30,000 titles of foreign films alone have found their way illegally into the Nigerian market and homes,
 - c) the negative impact of certain foreign films (depicting criminal acts, bloody horror, cruel wars, alien culture, violence, pornography, etc) was already taking its toll on the behaviour of Nigerians, especially the youths through the proliferation of video screening halls and video clubs,
 - d) public outcries on the effects of the video films had literally reached the high heavens,
 - e) the Nigerian video film industry had started to develop and their products were already gaining popularity and widespread use,
 - f) the Nigerian producers and marketers/distributors of video films were already in very dangerous state of negative competition to undo each other.
- (NFVCB, *6-Year Report*, 1994-2000, p. 11).

⁷ Federal Ministry of Information, *The Laws of Nigeria: No 20, 1933*. Abuja, Federal Ministry of Information.

⁸ Mgbejume, O (1989), *Film in Nigeria: Development, Problems*. Africa Media Monograph Series No 7. Nairobi, African Council on Communication Education.

⁹ James, C.A. (1996), The Aims, Objectives, Functions and Aspirations of the New National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), in NFVCB (1996), *The Challenges of Film and Video Censorship in Nigeria*. Lagos, NFVCB.

The policy thrust guiding the functions and activities of the NFVCB is the regulation and use of film and video works in Nigeria in order that:

The society, and particularly the very young ones (youths) might be protected from the adverse, corruptive and negative influences of these communication channels; while at the same time ensuring the orderly development and growth of the entire film and video business and industry, for without a viable film industry the Board itself could become irrelevant. (NFVCB, *6-Year Report*, 1994-2000, p. 11.)

Based on these observations, the NFVCB was expected to enforce the censorship criteria in the decree establishing it, before making a decision on a film. The criteria, according to James (1996, p. 20), included the provisions that,

- a) such a film has an educational or entertainment value, apart from promoting the Nigerian 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.

Thus the functions of the NFVCB as outlined in the decree were:

- b) to license
 - i. a person to exhibit films and video works
 - ii. a premises for the purpose of exhibiting films and video works
- c) to censor films and video works
- d) to regulate and prescribe safety precautions to be observed in licensed premises
- e) to regulate and control cinematographic exhibition
- f) to keep a register of all films and video works
 - i. submitted for approval for exhibition throughout Nigeria
 - ii. approved conditionally
 - iii. refused approval subject to such conditions as the Board may impose
- g) to keep a register of all
 - i. licensed films and video exhibitions premises
 - ii. film and video distribution companies
 - iii. video shops, centres, clubs or associations
- h) to keep a register of all film and video exhibitors
- i) keep a record of all necessary information on a film and video producer whose works is to be distributed or exhibited in Nigeria
- j) keep records of all changes in any register kept by the Board
(NFVCB, *6-Year Report*, 1994-2000, p. 8)

In addition to all these criteria, the Board considers certain technical details that altogether make a film good or bad. Some of these details are lighting, sound/audio, storyline/development and dialogue, editing, videography, photography, music, graphics/opticals/effects, acting/continuity, direction, characterization, poster, trailers, cassette and package designs.

The function of the NFVCB do not include controlling materials screened on television. Films classified as 'Not to Be Broadcast' otherwise known as NTBB, are not to be screened on television. The only ones that can be screened are those classified as Suitable for Broadcast (SFB). These SFB and NTBB classifications are

in addition to the statutory NFVCB classifications (General, '18', NC, C and RE). The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) is the statutory body empowered to check materials shown on television by ensuring that only films approved as Suitable for Broadcast (SFB) are screened by television stations.

In 2000 an adjustment was made to the NFVCB decree. Titled *Proposed Amendments to the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) Act (No 85) of 1993*, it proposed a series of amendments to the "Principal Act" which included new functions of the Management Board, Membership of the Governing Council, among others, and a whole new section, S.16 of 2000 titled *Preview of Films and Video Works Regulations 2000*, which a commencement date of 2nd February, 2000. The additional regulations were published as Government Notice No. 25 – Extra-ordinary Gazette No 14, Vol. 87 of February 2000. The amendment created conditions under which films and video works are previewed. These included, for instance, the provisions that:

4 (2) Plots, storylines, musical compositions and inserts used in films and video works which are not original to the presenter or the producer shall be backed by copyright authorization from the original owners of the said plot, storylines, musical compositions and inserts.

Further, in the contravention of this provision,

5. The Board shall have power to withdraw an approval for registration of a film or video work if a case of piracy and plagiarization of plots, storylines, musical composition and inserts is discovered or proven against a producer or presenter of a film or video work while a report for appropriate action shall be filed with the Nigerian Copyright Commission.

This will have implications for the Hausa home video film industry because most Hausa video producers exclusively base their storylines on ripping off Hindi films.¹⁰ Interestingly enough, this adjustment to the NFVCB law was made in the same year that a Hausa video, *Akasi* became the first to rip-off of an Hindi film, *Sanam Bewafa* (1991), thus creating interesting interpretations of the censorship law.

A certificate from the NFVCB guarantees that a film can be shown in any part of the country. The NFVCB thus became the central reference point for censoring films in Nigeria, and works within the secular status of the country. The introduction of Shari'a in some States of northern Nigeria does not necessarily clash with the NFVCB; but was expected to create a new mindset of values not incorporated in the NFVCB. The extent to which this is done in Kano State, as a case study, is the main focus of this paper.

State Control and Creativity

From 1984 an indigenous, specifically, Hausa language, publishing phenomena occurred in northern Nigeria which saw the emergence of indigenous creative prose fiction in Hausa language. The resultant boom in literary output was contemptuously labeled Kano Market Literature, to reflect the perception of its critics about how

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of the rip-off phenomena from Hindi films to Hausa videos, see Abdalla Uba Adamu (2003), "*Istanci*", "*Imamanci*" and "*Bollywoodanci*": *Evolutionary Trends in Hausa Use of Media Technologies in Cultural Transformation*, in Adamu, A.U. et al (2003), *Hausa Home Video: Society, Technology and Economy*. Proceedings of the First International Conference on Hausa Films, August, 2003, Kano, Nigeria (Editor-in-Chief), Kano: Center for Hausa Cultural Studies.

transient they are expected to be, just like anything in a market.¹¹ Although writing on diverse topics and themes, the predominant focus of the books was romance, and the exploration of *kishi* (competitive envy) among co-wives in a Hausa Muslim multiple-wife household.¹²

By the mid 1990s, large urban centers in the north had become thriving publishing centers. Also the home video revolution, sparked off by Igbo and Yoruba filmmakers have created a creative outlet for the 1980s Hausa drama club members and script writers to seek financial support and realize their dreams of video glory. In a decade of free expression, Hausa writers were entering their halcyon years of Freudian expressionism.

This did not go down well with society, as represented by the State governments. In Kano, alarmed at the burgeoning availability of allegedly salacious books—full of teenage love stories, in a society where love is more imagined than displayed—which will eventually be filmed as home videos, the Kano State Government set up a *Books and Films Production Control Agency* in 1996 under the Ministry of Education. The main purpose of setting up the Agency was the concern expressed by the Government about the poor final examination results from the various secondary schools in Kano. Government official thinking at the period was the obsession of students with the new novels was responsible for the poor performance in examinations. In its critique of the new literature, Government prudently avoided providing statistics about the status of schools and their readiness to teach children in a depressed economy. A scapegoat has to be found to explain to parents why the educational system was ineffective. Hausa prose fiction, with its almost near exclusive focus on love themes and thus already offensive to traditional sensibilities, became the nearest punch-bag.

Thus the Agency was established principally to monitor the publishing of books and home videos and censor their contents, and grade them appropriately for public consumption. This was to be backed by an edict which was drafted and sent to the Ministry of Justice for approval. Their proposed modus operandi, outlined at their first meeting held on 3rd December 1996, included suggestions that:

Strategies to be adopted include enlightenment campaigns, covert operations, use of Agency Informants and identification of Bookshops and film houses. Local Government Chairmen will also be intimated on the agency's assignment and will be forwarded a copy each, of the edict for clarification on the agency's work...Other strategies include identifying persons to appear on television to speak on books and films, writing Newspaper articles, making pamphlets and posters.¹³

¹¹ Malumfashi, Ibrahim., "The Hausa Writer and the Reading Culture", *New Nigerian Literary Supplement — The Write Stuff*, 20, 27 June; 4 July, 1997. This is an extremely detailed and long exposition on the history of Hausa writings from earliest part of the first millennium. It is in this paper that the sobriquet KML or *Kano Market Literature* first appeared in English (having made a debut in the author's earlier article in *Nasiha*, 3 & 29 July 1994 as *Adabin Kasuwar Kano*).

¹² For a detailed analysis of the thematic focus of the emergent Hausa prose fiction, see Abdalla Uba Adamu (2001), *Tarbiyar Bahausha, Mutumin Kirki* and *Hausa Prose Fiction: Towards an Analytical Framework*. *FAIS Journal of Humanities*. Vol 1, No 4, November 2001, [pp. 86-95]. Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria.

¹³ Minutes of the First Meeting of Books and Films Production Control Agency held at KERD on 3/12/96, Chaired by Alhaji Abdulkarim Hassan. Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Archives: Agencies.

The Agency apparently made no attempts at systematically studying the phenomenon to determine its source, which should reveal its controls. The strident fire and brimstone sermons issued by various mosques in the 1990s about the corrupting influences of the new writings were accepted as a basis for a wire muzzle.¹⁴ A further insight was shed by the same minutes of the Agency at its first meeting in which the reasons behind the burgeoning publishing and home video phenomena were postulated:

...One of the staff at KERD Mall. Sanusi, who has been identified as a resource person was invited to the meeting to shed more light on the menace of the types of books and films under consideration. Mall Sanusi explained that NNPC at Zaria doesn't publish at the moment paving way for less competent hands. Writers, he said, have financial backing from influential people. Also wives of important people in the society purchase these books in bulk thereby encouraging the writers and publishers and in the process are setting bad example to the youth because they imbibe what they read and see. He suggests inviting writers, distributors and publishers to explain the state of things to them and encourage positive creativity by getting notable people like Mudi Spikin, Halilu Getso etc to donate trophies to be competed for.

The Kano State History and Culture Bureau (HCB) was co-opted into the Agency, but in an internal memo, the Bureau balked at its inclusion expressing its reservations by stating that:

- The Bureau is already aware that it is charged with the responsibility of co-ordinating but not policing literary works in the State
- The HCB should suggest that the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Kano State Chapter be allowed to collect manuscripts, evaluate and then send abstracts of respective works to the HCB for monitoring. All certified abstracts should then be sent to the Agency for final approval. A certificate of clearance should accompany each certified manuscript and it (the certificate) must be published on a page of the book
- All published books whose abstracts had earlier on been submitted for monitoring would be deposited at HCB by ANA. At this point, the HCB shall go through the books to confirm compliance with the rules of the Agency.
- In the event of breach of laws, ANA shall be held responsible
- The offices allocated to ANA by HCB should be furnished and a staff of HCB be attached to serve as Office Secretary to carry out day-to-day administrative duties of the association.¹⁵

The Agency held a second, and last, meeting on 17th December, 1996. The decree to control books and home video production was also never released by the Ministry of Justice. With the benefit of hindsight, it is not easy to see why a censure strategy such as an edict can control the production of books and films. This is because such processes were not state-supported; but efforts of individuals. As such unless the individuals themselves introduced a voluntary form of censure on their works, then

¹⁴ A typical fire and brimstone critique is given by, Muhammad Mujtaba Abubakar, *Litattafan Soyayya a Ma'aunin Hankali Da Na Shari'a*. (Soyayya books on the scale of common sense and Shari'a). Privately published. School of Business and Publish Administration, The Polytechnic, Kebbi, 1999. This was a religious attack on Hausa prose fiction genre in which the author, using copious quotations from the Qur'an and the Hadith, argues that the only love approved by Islam is legal (married) love; any exposition on love outside marriage is un-Islamic, and on this basis, the entire lot of *soyayya* genre stand damned because they encourage immoral behavior amongst Muslim youth. He also attacks the recent crop of Hausa home videos, which perhaps not surprisingly, were hotwired to the *soyayya* writings.

¹⁵ Internal Memo from Head of Department, Research and Development, HCB, to Director: Re Books and Films Production Agency. December 21, 1996.

State control would be quite ineffective. Further, it was not clear how specifically the new media influences youth behavior. Government stand has been that it is responsible for the failures in examinations—the main reason for considering sponsorship in the first place. And yet no one has proved any cause and effect relationship between the readership and passing examinations. In any event, this gave Kano State a head start in institutionalized censoring within cultural framework that departs from what was obtained at the federal level.

Hausa video films – Basic and History Characteristics

Basic History

Censorship became a force in Hausa home video films not necessarily because of desire to protect public interest, but because of what Hausa culturalists observe to be a departure from the behavioral mindset of a “typical” Bahausha (Hausa person) in creative pursuits; specifically literary works and visual media. This was exactly the reason that prompted censoring prose fiction (and only prose fiction; other literary works were not subjected to debates on censorship in Kano). To understand the clash between creative pursuits and Hausa cultural establishment, we need to understand something of the typical Hausa mindset.

The typical—or as typical as can be—Hausa mindset is characterized by about 10 behavioral attributes, as argued by Kirk-Greene (1973).¹⁶ These included *amana* (strictly friendliness, but used to refer to trust), *karamci* (open-handed generosity), *hakuri* (patience), *hankali* (good sense), *mutunci* (self-esteem), *hikima* (wisdom), *adalc*i (fairness) *gaskiya* (truthfulness), *kunya* (modesty, self-deprecation, humble, acknowledges others’ opinion over his own), *ladabi* (respect self and respects others; also considerate of others, both older and younger).

Other typological profiles by Alhassan et al (1982) revealed additional attributes which included *zumunta* (community spirit), *riƙon addini* (adhering to religious tenets and being guided by them with attributes such as truth), *dattako* (gentlemanliness), *kawaici* (tactfulness), *rashin tsegumi* (no idle talk), *kama sana’a* (engaging one in gainful employment), and *juriya da jarumta* (fortitude, courage and bravery).¹⁷ When Hausa drama evolved in the 1950s these mindset qualities became the main focus of the storylines, reflecting an often bucolic or simplified urban lifestyles.¹⁸ When filmmaking started exploring various globalized configurations of behavior that have direct diluting influences on these core Muslim Hausa mindsets, alarm bells started ringing about the corrupting influence of new media technologies and behavioral modification. The road to this corrupting influence started with Hindi films.

¹⁶ Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, in the Third Annual Hans Wolff Memorial Lecture delivered on April 11, 1973 at the University of Indiana, in the lecture which he titled *Mutumin Kirki: The Concept of the Good Man in Hausa*.

¹⁷ Habib Alhassan, Usman Ibrahim Musa and Rabi’u Muhammad Zarruk, in their *Zaman Hausawa* (privately published), 1982, Zaria.

¹⁸ Prior to the commercialization of the Hausa video films, there were extremely popular television dramas. Indeed the home video film industry was initiated by the television soap opera stars. For a detailed analysis of the Hausa television dramas, Louise M. Bourgault (1996), *Television Drama in Hausaland: The Search for a New Aesthetic and a New Ethic*, *Critical Arts* 10 (1) and chapter 5 of *Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa* by Louise M. Bourgault (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995)

From 1937, when the first cinema was opened in Kano, to 1960, film distribution was exclusively controlled by a cabal of resident Lebanese merchants who sought to entertain the few British colonials and other, essentially Christian workers in northern Nigeria by showing principally American and British films. There was no attempt to either develop any local film industry, or even provide African-themed entertainment for the locals.¹⁹ After 1960s there were few attempts to show cinema from the Arab world, as well as Pakistan. However, these were not popular with the audience, despite the Islamic themes of such cinema. The experimental Hindi films shown from November 1960 proved massively popular, and the Lebanese thus found a perfect formula for entertaining Hausa audience. Thus throughout urban clusters of northern Nigeria, from Kano, Jos, Kaduna, Bauchi, Azare, Maiduguri, and Sokoto, Lebanese film distribution of Hindi films in principally Lebanese controlled theaters ensured a massive parenting of Hindi film genre and storyline, and most especially the song and dance routines, on urban Hausa audience. This became the dominant template when young Hausa started experimenting with videography in 1990s. This was indeed supported by the State which saw a continuous broadcast of Hindi cinema in all the Television stations of northern Nigeria every weekend, and on special days such as Eid and Christmas. Soundtrack music from the Hindi films also found its way into the Radio stations continuously, often played side-by-side with indigenous music—thus giving the impression of absorbed globalized Other, by equating Hindi film music with Hausa music.

After independence from the British in 1960, northern cities became opened to influx of ethnic identities, such as that the closeted Hausa society of the 1950s that prided itself on its cultural homogeneity—and upholding its cultural mindset—was quickly seeded by influx of other ethnic groups into predominantly Hausa and Fulani settlements in northern Nigerian cities. Interestingly, this created a group of “settlers” who do not share the same mindset as the Hausa, but who have acquired the Hausa language and were ready to boldly experiment with new media technologies in Hausa entertainment. Thus the emergence of high-life music groups and musicians such as Bala Miller, The El Cados, Sonny Lionheart (both based in Kaduna in the 1970s) and the Kano Metropolitan Band (Kano, same period). Unencumbered by the traditionally closeted mindset of the “typical” Hausa, these ethnic groups embraced the contemporary entertainment ethos, using “modern” media instruments (guitars, drums, pianos, saxophones), shunning traditional Hausa instruments of *kalangu*, *kukuma*, *goge*, *garaya*, *kuntigi*, as well as the vehicle of the Hausa language to spread their popular appeal.

It was the same elements that rapidly entered into the Hausa home video film industry, and in seeking new ways of re-inventing entertainment, not necessarily targeted at Hausa group only but at *Hausa-speaking* audience in northern Nigeria, the Hindi film motif became the most digestible template for them. Surprisingly, there were no attempts to develop entertainment culture by these minorities in their native language. When the mainstream Hausa saw the success—and the ease of production of simply ripping-off a Hindi film rather than creating a fresh storyline for a video film—they also jumped on the bandwagon, and the lines between non-ethnic and ethnic Hausa in terms of the quality of Hausa video film production merged. What

¹⁹ Abdalla Uba Adamu (2004) Space Oddities: Urban Space, Racism and Entertainment in Northern Nigeria, 1930-1968. An unpublished seminar/discussion, Department of Education, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria.

caused the clash between these cosmopolitan acculturated Hausa and the mainstream Hausa culturalists was the assumptions of the latter that any Hausa language medium entertainment targeted at Hausa audience must essentially be *Islamic* and distinctly culturally Hausa. Neither the new entertainers (referred to as ‘*Yan Kwalisa*, or young dudes), nor the culturalists understood the reasons for this tension between wider appeal of entertainment beyond mainstream societies and the more monocultural Hausa communities.

The entire commercial Hausa home video film industry started in Kano, northern Nigeria, in 1990 with a video film titled *Turmin Danya*, a traditional boy-meets-girl drama. By 2004 the industry had grown and spawned more than 800 video films, with most production and distribution facilities in Kano, which became dubbed *Kallywood* by the industry insiders.

From 1990 to 2000 the industry was left to run on its own, regulated only by the “guilds” that sprang up over the years to protect the commercial, rather than artistic, interests of their members and their productions.²⁰ The first of these was Kano State Filmmakers Association (established in 1991 by former television drama star producers) whose internecine development led to break-away members forming focused “guilds” which included Directors’ Guild, Artistes’ Guild, and Guild of Cinematographers. When the industry more or less matured, 2004 saw the creation of Motion Picture Editors Association (MPEG), and under the tutelage of the British Council, Script Writers’ Forum. All were based in Kano, which by 2004 remained the only State in northern Nigeria with an organized video film industry structure. While other States in northern Nigeria produced their own video films under their own arrangements, nevertheless all video films must be taken to Kano whose post-production facilities made it possible to complete the films; in addition to its large markets (located at bustling Bata in Sabon Gari, and Kofar Wambai) that service the entire West African sub-region, and thus provide an efficient marketing and distributing channel and network.

Entry into the Hausa home video film profession was governed simply by the amount of money one has to make a film (or *fim* as the industry refers to the productions, rather than videos, even though they all produced on videos). No specific professional standards were set—or expected—because the entire industry was an all-comers affair, with no regulatory mechanism either from the participants or the government, which had remained basically indifferent to the industry. Practitioners rely on patronage to sustain themselves in the industry, and those who started demanding for standards were quickly labeled *gumakan industiri*, or the untouchable idols of the

²⁰ Discussions with various members of Kano State Filmmakers Association revealed that the Association was more concerned with marketing and distribution of the films of its members, rather than creating professional standards around which a more carefully controlled industry could be created. The desire to see the growth of the industry thus made it possible for anyone with capital and zero experience in film making to become a bona fide member of the Association as a producer, artiste or director. This is illustrated by the metamorphosis of cassette dealers into producers (Musa Na Malam Kato, Idris Dan Zariya, Hassan Adamu and Sons) and artistes (Idris Dan Zariya and Ahmad Muhammad Amge). Ironically the main reason for setting up Filmmakers Association in the first place was because the members of the latter association felt the cassette dealers were not fair to them in terms of marketing. Thus the Filmmakers Association would negotiate a better distribution deal for its members. This, however, did not happen, and the cassette dealers still control the industry in northern Nigeria.

industry—and accused of using the leverage of their experience or capital to control the industry and muzzle up and coming producers.

Basic Characteristics

Over the 14 years (1990-2004), Hausa video films evolved three main characteristics, all borrowed heavily and inspired by Hindi cinema which, as noted earlier, was the main staple of foreign entertainment for the Muslim Hausa from 1960s.²¹ In this way they differ remarkably from southern Nigerian films with their focus on rituals, political corruption in the polity, social problems such as armed-robbery, and political issues such as resource control, sex, infidelity, fraud, intrigue, conflict and other such subjects which are designed to entertain, excite, provide escapism and appeal to the emotions. The bottom line is commercial appeal and profit.²²

The first motif in Hausa home video film is *auren dole*, or forced marriage. In these scenarios—reflecting outdated customs in a contemporary society, but nevertheless providing a tapestry to provide a good story—a girl (or in a few of the films, a boy) is forced to marry a partner other than their choice. This is a practice that is fast disappearing in Hausa traditional societies, especially with increase in a more strict interpretation of Islam brought about by post-1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran which had deep echoes in Muslim Northern Nigeria, as well as the increase in trenchant Saudi Arabian flavored *Wahabism*. This had led to emergence of Islamic groups with a more orthodox, rather than traditional interpretation of Islam in modern societies.²³

The *auren dole* theme however remained a consistent feature of social life in the Middle East, Asia, including India as well as among Hindus in diaspora, often leading to honor killings if family members suspect a daughter (rarely a son) has violated the family honor either by co-habiting with a person not of their race, religion or class. It is because honor killings remained a strong force in Hindu life that Hindi film makers consistently latched on the forced marriage scenarios in their films to draw attention to the phenomena. Hausa filmmakers use the *auren dole* motif to display youth rebellion against an unfair system that deny youth of either gender a choice. In displaying this denial, characters were made to pass through a series of conflict situations that evoke sympathy and anger against what is seen as unjust system, before finally being resolves, often via a song and dance. It is this element of bravado and “love conquering all” that creates a massive appeal for these films among Hausa youth.

The second characteristic of Hausa video films is the love triangle—with or without the forced marriage motif. It is inevitable that a narrative conflict indicating rivalry between two suitors (whether two boys after the same girl, or two girls after the same boy) be created in which antagonists will be given the opportunity to wax lyrical about their dying love for each other, and the extent they are willing to go to cross the Rubicon that separates their love.

²¹ Although drama programs were shown on State televisions, these were normally of thirty minutes duration, as contrasted to the three hours of foreign “last film” in each Television station.

²² Nosa Owens-Ibie (1998), How video films developed in Nigeria, *Media and Development*, 1 (1998).

²³ For a detailed study of Islam and modernity in northern Nigeria, see Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition*. Brill, Leiden, 2003.

This motif, although again borrowed on Hindi film style, becomes an adaptation of *kishi* – co-wife rivalry – among Hausa wives. In a traditional Muslim Hausa households, a husband can marry up to four wives as allowed by Islam. However, in most polygamous households, a husband and two wives formation is more common than three or four wives. Co-existence in such polygamous situation is not without its tensions and dramas. Hausa film makers, merely pick up the elements of those dramas and satirize the polygamous household in their films. This is not surprising considering that most of the Hausa video films are sponsored by women! It is precisely because of this fantasy play of two girls fighting for the love of a single person (in effect, two or more wives fighting for the affection of the same husband) that Hausa videos films are extremely popular with women, because they readily identify with the tensions portrayed in the storylines of the films. The youth factor is often taken care of by the display of exuberant sexuality in the films when showing a rivalry between two boys after the same turf—a girl, with each boy attempting to outdo the other in all respects (singing, dressing, macho posturing, “dude-nigga” factor).

The third characteristic of the Hausa home video is the inevitable song and dance routines—again echoing Hindi cinema style. These are used to essentially embellish the story and provide what the filmmakers insist is “entertainment”. In fact in many of the videos, the songs themselves became sub-plots of the main story in which barbs were thrown at each other by the antagonists. A Hausa video film without song and dance routines is considered a commercial suicide, or artistic bravado undertaken by few artistes with enough capital to experiment and not bother too much with excessive profit.²⁴

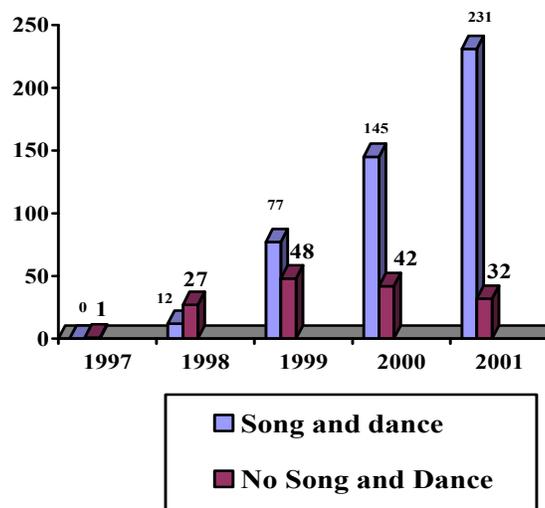
From 1990 up to 1996 Hausa video films tended to be more or less extended television dramas which were hugely popular. Although reflecting traditional Muslim Hausa societies, they nevertheless started incorporating elements of new entertainment media to experiment with Hindi-style singing and dancing and music. For instance, the soundtracks in the initial home videos form 1990 up to 1995 were based on traditional Hausa *koroso* music—which relied heavily on the flute and traditional drums. However, in 1995 a young musician in Kano, heavily influenced by Sudanese music then making rounds, acquired a Yamaha PSR-220 organ which contained a lot of sampled digital sounds of hundreds of musical instruments. These include *sarewa* (flute), *kalangu* (African talking drum) and *bandiri* (tambourine). All these were musical sounds very familiar to the Hausa, especially the *bandiri*, used in some Sufi religious activities in Kano.

In a bold experiment, he decided to use the new keyboard sounds to compose the soundtracks for a film, *In Da So Da Kauna*, and that ignited the revolution that effectively saw the relegation of the Hausa traditional instruments in Hausa music to the recycle bin. The new sound for Hausa home video films was born. *Badakala*, by Dan Azumi Baba led the way in providing the typical *dandali* – playground plaza – dancing routine between boys and girls, as indeed done in typical night time traditional entertainment in traditional Hausa society, using music from the new Yamaha organ. This was topped by *Daskin Da Ridi* (Sarauniya Films, 1998), a

²⁴ One of the companies to stop using song and dance in their films from 2004 is the highly respected Iyan-Tama Multimedia Studio, which, ironically, introduced the film soundtrack music as a genre in Hausa home videos.

modernized Hausa folktale with a disco-style singing between a boy and a girl near a river. All these were considered with amusement and bemusement by the culturalists of the Hausa Muslim society and therefore not a focus of criticism.

This routine – dancing at *dandali* with traditional music in the background as playback music – became perfected in the 2000 video, *Sangaya* (Sarauniya Films, 2000) and became the biggest selling Hausa home video, precisely because of its dance routine. Indeed it was the soundtrack that “pulled” (as the expressing goes among the industry insiders) the film. *Sangaya* sent a signal that singing and dancing can make more money than a meaningful storyline. This opened the floodgates and there was a rush among Hausa video film makers to imitate the commercial success of *Sangaya*. It also confirmed the song and dance routine on the genre, such that by 2001 of the 615 videos registered with National Films and Censorship Board, Abuja, only 150 had no song and dance routines, as shown in Figure 1.



*Fig.1: Song and dance routines in Hausa video films*²⁵

The song and dance routines became increasing experimental, bold and for many (who wrote to express their views in popular film magazines like *Fim* and *Mudubi*) were a complete departure from Islam and the Hausa traditional way of life, particularly in their portrayal of the girls.

The Road to the Dragon’s Lair

However, with the increasing availability of the VHS camera, Hausa prose fiction authors started to focus their attention on converting their novels into films, and rapidly enough, from 1994 to 1997 many videos were produced that were based on novels.²⁶ Before long, public attention moved from novelists to video dramatists, and

²⁵ Based on fieldwork analysis of the listings of the Hausa videos in the Directory of Nigerian Films, Abuja, NFCB, 2000.

²⁶ For a detailed analysis of the media conversion from novels to video, see Yusuf M. Adamu (2002), Between the word and the screen: a historical perspective on the Hausa Literary Movement and the home video invasion, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Volume 15, Number 2, December 2002, pp. 203-213.

soon enough, the latter started drawing public ire over what were seen as attempts to corrupt the morals of youth through the video film, after having failed with the novel.

Two currents dovetailed to censorship of the Hausa video films in Kano. First, some producers started cocking a snook at the Muslim scholar community. Considering the Islamic scholastic tradition of northern Nigeria which stretched back to 12th century, this is a clear case of media clashing with tradition. Something had to give.

The second current was the increasingly bold song and dance routines in Hausa video films, championed by essentially non-ethnic Hausa film makers with an eye for a more globalized concept of entertainment, than reflecting Hausa bucolic entertainment. I will start with the first current first.

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).²⁷ According to a viewer:

“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:

²⁷ 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 touches his wives or appear semi-naked with them on beds, or where one of the wives was seen massaging her houseboy.

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. Plate 1 shows scenes from the video film.

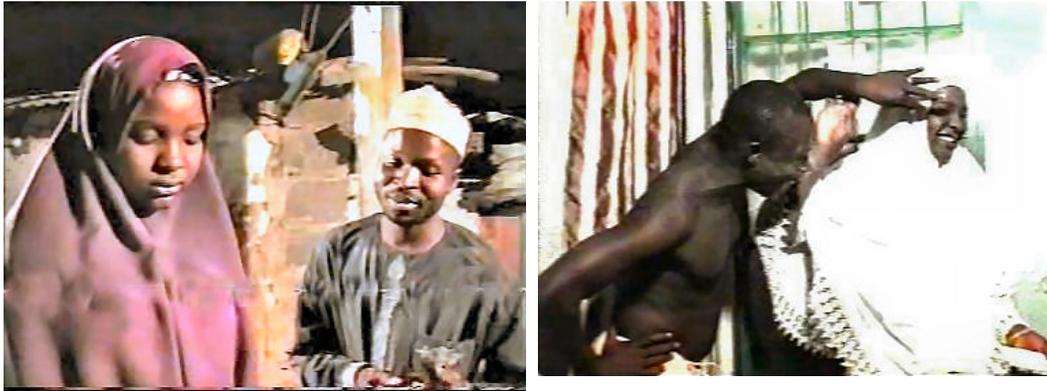


Plate 1: Double Faces of Piety – Saliha as pious (left), and joyfully canoodling with a lover after a “farewell” exercise, three days before getting married (right)

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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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 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

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ Advertorial, “*Fim* ‘din *Saliha?* Ya Ciri Tuta”, *Fim*, July 1999 p.29.

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*”³⁰) after a sexually arousing dance from one his women visitors, as seen in a screenshot from the film in Plate 2.



Plate 2: Al-Sheikh Ibro, caricaturing a Hausa Muslim mallam (left) and dealing with a raging sexual arousal during Rawar Salawaitu (the Salawaitu dance) in Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka (right)

Even the characters’ dressing, mode of speech and instruments of religious worship such as the ridiculously over-sized rosary (“charbi”) beads (left image in Plate 2)

³⁰ A knobby stick or club – a perfect metaphor for a penile erection.

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.³¹ 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 the Hausa such that if years of media parenting with Hindi film bombardment did not produce a community of idol-worshipers (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

³¹ 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*.

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.³²

Two other Hausa video films that further contributed to the censorship debacle in Kano were *Sauran Kiris* (2000) and *Kauna* (2000). Plate 3 shows scenes from the controversial videos.



Fati Mohammed and Tahir Fage about to get physical in *Sauran Kiris* (2000)



Abida Mohammed jiggling away in *Kauna* (2000)

Plate 3: Cultural Furor: Getting Physical in Hausa home videos

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.³³

Enter the Dragon — Censorship Arriveth!

These controversies and cultural criticisms merely added the fuel to the fire that was raging. Censorship is merely a matter of time. The Shari’a, first launched in Zamfara

³² 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.

³³ 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.

State in 1999 served as the trigger.³⁴ 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 film makers, 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 these 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.

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.³⁵

It is instructive that although the Hausa home 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.³⁶ On 29 June 2000 the committee held a roundtable meeting with film makers 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

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ 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.

published. The interview was with a noted Hausa television 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 home video 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 home video 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 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.³⁷

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 curtain 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.

The official who led the government team was Alhaji Muhammad Tahar Adamu, aka “Baba Impossible”, a clean-up campaigner of the use of media technologies in Hausa popular culture. He was then the Special Adviser on Religious Affairs to the then Governor of Kano, Dr. Rabi’u Musa Kwankwaso (1999-2003). A lecturer of Hausa culture at the Bayero University, Kano (and an Arabist and Islamic scholar) Baba Impossible had consistently criticized the use of media technologies in cultural expression by the Hausa youth, at least in Kano, his home base. Starting with authors of popular Hausa novels in the 1980s, he had been critical of the contents of Hausa novels and urged for the ban and boycott of many of the novels due to what he perceived to be their salacious contents—principally love dialogues. His forum for the expression of these views were seminars at the university, radio shows and public gatherings.

³⁷ Jonathan Groubert, April 5, 2001, “Bollywood for Westerners” Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep, <http://www.rnw.nl/culture/html/bollywood010405.html>.

When the Hausa home video started gaining mass popularity from 1999, he shifted his analytical focus and clean-up campaign to the new media. He often used *Saliha?* as his punch bag and a reason to either regulate the home video industry or preferably ban it altogether. Thus when the Kano State Government announced the Shari'a in 2000, Baba Impossible was already in the forefront of media censorship after being appointed Special Adviser to the Governor on Religious Affairs.

In an exclusive interview with *Fim* after the roundtable meeting, Baba Impossible narrated the genesis of the committee by indicating that it was established as a result of the numerous complaints by parents, religious organizations, community leaders on the contents of Hausa videos. These complaints were mainly addressed to the Emir of Kano (inarguably the most socially powerful traditional ruler in northern Nigeria), members of the Kano State House of Assembly, and other community leaders. It is significant that democracy (which returned to the country in 1999) provided more opportunities to censor, because during the military era in Kano, there were no thoughts of censorship of the contents of the Hausa home video. Baba Impossible pointed out that military leadership in Kano was not based on Islamic laws, and now that the democratically elected Kano State Government has launched an Islamic law, every activity in the State must conform to Islamic laws, thus the need to clean-up Home videos produced in Kano in accordance to Islamic laws. Incidentally, the censorship advocacy was only on Hausa prose fiction and Hausa home video, and does not affect the musical content of popular songs, or magazines and newspapers.

When it was pointed out that the video drama producers had persistently claimed they were also carrying out a religious duty in enlightening mass audience, Baba Impossible retorted:

“No! This is a lie! Film in its totality contravenes Islam. In Islam there is no allowance for “character-role” wife which facilitates amorous body contacts among an unmarried couple. Also their mode of dressing in the dramas is against Islam. Also in Islam you don't cure a disease with another disease; Islam says if you want to prevent a (bad) thing (such as sex) from happening, preach—but not demonstrate how bad it is before revealing its cure (or consequences).” (“Za mu ruguza sana'ar finafinai idan har masu yinta basu yi hankali ba” (We will destroy the Hausa home video industry if the producers are not careful), Interview with Alhaji Muhammad Tahar Adamu, aka “Baba Impossible”, on Kano State Government's stand on Hausa home video under Shari'a law, *Fim*, August 2000, pp 14-17).

Baba Impossible reiterated that if the Hausa home video producers did not conform their storylines to the new Islamic law, the entire industry will be banned in Kano. He was, however, less forthcoming about control of Hollywood and Hindi films sold in the market, as well as satellite reception of films which the film makers consistently argued had worse content than those shown in Hausa video films. He indicated that these were not a source of concern stating that

“(foreign films) are not as bad as those in Hausa. The English and Igbo language medium films are not as bad as those in Hausa language medium, because Hausa people can follow the dialog in Hausa films. Although many people watch Indian films (for example), they don't know what the dialogs mean all the way to the end of the film. This is not as damaging as watching a film in which a viewer can understand the dialog word-to-word. All the same, we will also purify them one by one. We will establish a *bureau* to monitor the film industry (including foreign ones). We have the power to ban their sales! We will ban their importation, we will keep an eye on them!” *Fim*, August 2000, pp 14-17.

At the end of the roundtable meeting, it was resolved that the film makers would submit a memo to the government showing their intentions on cleaning up their acts, as it were.

It was clear that even before the government team had time to study any submission from the Hausa home video producers, the Government was heading towards creating conditionalities that would lead to censorship in a Muslim polity. This therefore prompted the Kano State Filmmakers' Association to organize a one-day seminar with the theme of *The Role of Drama in Islam*, on 1st July 2000. The Guest Speaker, Sheikh Umar Sani Fage, talked about the props and other materials used in Hausa video films arguing that they contradict the typology of a typical Hausa dwelling. The speaker urged video film producers to focus on issues such as child-rearing practices, political responsibility, neighborliness, sociology of the family and other wholesome Hausa traditional family themes.

The Guest of Honor at the seminar was Baba Impossible, who used the opportunity to reiterate the Kano State government's stand on home video film censorship. His violent opposition to the Hausa home video industry – which he saw as a “jihad” – almost led to his being lynched at the seminar – further underscored the underlying tension between the State and video producers in an Islamic polity.

Pre-cursors to Censorship

Thus far the government officials were only saber-rattling and do not have any clear road map on how to curtail the Hausa home 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.

Malam Karkata, coming at the doorsteps of Shari'a, actually ignited the censorship mechanism, 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.³⁸ In an interview, the Secretary of the Co-operative explained why the

³⁸ Cassette dealers feature strongly in the marketing of Hausa home video 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!

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 *Joint Committee on Film Censorship for Kano and Its Environs*, set up by the Cassette Sellers Co-operative. 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).

The second category of regulations reflect the fees producers must pay to the Co-operative to ensure their films are “certified” (despite having a national certificate). Producers were warned to blame themselves for any consequences of non-compliance to these regulations.

However, no sooner had the co-operative started working in 2000, 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).³⁹

Other producers, including the former Chairman of the Filmmakers Association, Ibrahim Muhammad Mandawari, also accused the marketers of divide-and-rule strategies by breaking ranks and sneaking to individual producers to get their films to release without certification. Yet other 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. 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. Indeed the form designed for the censoring contains a list of the earlier published areas and a line beneath which a final judgment is made about the whether the film should be released. Neither the censors nor the censored focused attention on the *creative* aspects of the film—such as the storyline or its main message. The over-riding concern of the filmmakers was getting as much of the market share as possible, while the censors were worried about the financial implications of stocking a film with obscenities in it.

In order to create a more acceptable formula for censoring, the marketers invited the Kano State 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).

³⁹ The full details of the meeting are given in *Mumtaz*, September 2000 pp 13-14).

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.

Islam and the Video Star

The religious establishment had, hitherto, developed an uncertain stand towards the Hausa video films. Most were convinced by the arguments provided by the producers that the Hausa home video has weaned off Hausa youth from watching Hindi films. Also at every opportunity, the home video 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 after the 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 Izala⁴⁰ 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 not harm the public, before being allowed to be sold.” (“Jama'at Nasril 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 home video 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 home video industry themselves. Consequently the dialog was more or less one

⁴⁰ 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).

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 home video 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 home video producers to produce videos in accordance with Islam. Malam Farouk Yahaya Chedi⁴¹ 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...”⁴² Only Alhaji Abdulkareem Mohammed, the Chairman of MOPPAN representing the Hausa home video 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 home videos, 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:

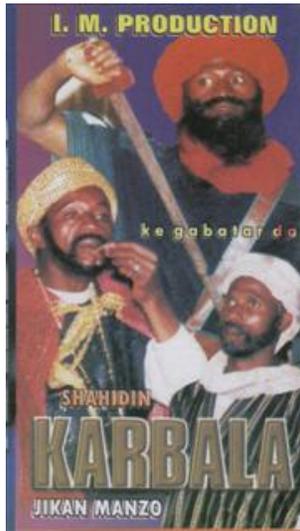
“I urge Hausa film producers to protect our culture and Shari’a. Whatever they should do in the name of entertainment should not be against Shari’a. We thank Allah that from within our organization some of us have started thinking of producing our own films (“The position of Films in Islam”, Interview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

The caution which with the Shiite treated the Hausa home 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 deacculturation 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

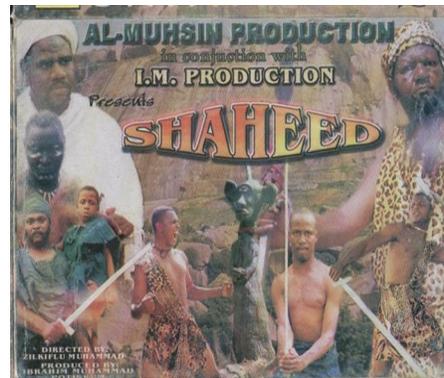
⁴¹ Who, in 2004 became the Hisbah Commander of the Kano State Hisbah Board, a moral vigilante organization set up to enforce Muslim moral standards in the State, and whose activities included banning any mixed-sex entertainment gathering. A poster of him with the title of Osaman Najeriya (the Osama bin Laden of Nigeria) was made of him and sold in Kano in August 2004, to convey the popular appeal of the Hisbah.

⁴² Conference report, *Wakiliya*, No 2, December, 2002, p. 17. Kano.

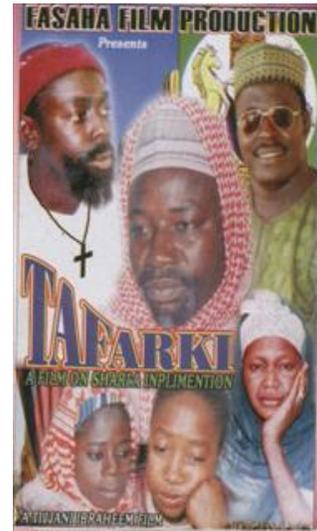
territories. To this end, about eight Shiite-flavored Hausa video films were made at the forefront of the re-introduction of the Shari'a penal code. These included *Mace Saliha: Tsiran Al'umma*, *Shaheed*, *Karbala*, *Sanin Gaibu*, *Mujarrabi*, *Taubatan Nasura* and *Arba*. Similarly, Al-Tajdid, a splinter Shiite group in northern Nigeria also produced *Tafarki* (2002) which focuses on the consequences of Shari'a law implementation on non-Muslim communities. Plate 4 shows the covers of some of these videos.



Karbala (Shia)



Shaheed (Shia)



Tafarki⁴³ (Al-Tajdid)

Plate 4: Reel Brothers: Islam and Popular Visual Media

Thus when Hausa film makers started focusing on the religious establishment, this was not taken kindly. To the religious establishment the impending implementation of Shari'a was seen as a check and balance mechanism to limit the excesses of the film makers.

Curtailing Film Production in Kano State

As stated earlier, there was already censorship mechanism instituted by the cassette dealers to monitor and refuse to sell any Hausa home video with nudity, obscenity or otherwise what are considered to be morally dubious contents. After the roundtable meeting with Kano government officials to regulate the industry on 6th July 2000, the Kano State Filmmakers Association, together with Cassette Dealers met to discuss their "assignment" of coming up with a proposal to "clean-up" Hausa home video production in Kano and make it more "Shari'a-compliant". It was decided that opinions of other members of the industry should be sought and three days were given for various opinions to be heard. This took place from 9th to 12th July 2000. At the end of this brainstorming exercise, a joint memorandum was produced and submitted

⁴³ This film almost caused another incidence in the history of Hausa home videos. The NFVCB in Abuja initially refused certification because an Igbo Christian and his wife were shown converting to Islam as a result of their understanding of the Shari'a. The Hausa home video producers rallied behind the producer and issued threats of unforeseen incidents of terrible proportions—enough to make the NFVCB rescind its decision and release the certificate for the video. I am grateful to Ahmad Salihu Alkanawy for this insightful information, Kano, September, 2004.

to the office of the Special Adviser to the Governor on Religious Affairs on Thursday 13th July, 2000.

Further outreach meetings were held between government officials and filmmakers to create a forum for better understanding of the issues—and to soft-sell the idea of censorship. For instance on 9th August 2000—few months after announcement of the Shari'a law, and a further few months before its take off in November 2000, a meeting was held between the Publicity Committee of Shari'a and film makers. The government team was led by Yahaya Faruk Chedi. It was clear this meeting, although amicable, was a warning knell from the government about its views on Islam and visual entertainment.⁴⁴

As I said earlier, government teams were 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 home video 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.

If there is a single person who initiated the establishment of the Government censorship board in Kano, it was Sani Lamma, a cassette dealer as well as the first video film cinematographer in Kano (in 1981). Increasingly worried about what he sees as sexual overtones that started appearing in Hausa video films (specifically *JYFH*, *Malam Karkata*, *Tsumagiya* and *Kauna*), he complained to the Kano State History and Culture Bureau (HCB) and requested them to come up with a regulatory mechanism for the Hausa video films. This was in October 2000, soon after a stormy meeting between cassette sellers and producers in Kano in August. Although a member of the *Joint Committee on Film Censorship for Kano and Its Environs*, it was clear to Lamma that a more legal backing needed to be given to the Committee, or preferably, the government should take over the entire process of censoring, if only to curtail the constant clashes between the member of the censorship committee and the producers.⁴⁵

It was instructive that Lamma went to the HCB seeking for regulatory mechanism to control the contents of visual performances. This was because the HCB itself was mandated to do that as part of its activities of implementing Nigeria's Cultural Policy.

The HCB, established in 1987, came into the censorship process via its mandate of monitoring the State's Cultural Policy. Further, some younger producers, who had already labeled the older producers "gumakan industiri" and claimed were muzzling their market share by instituting procedures for releasing films that were detrimental to their growth, complained to the Board in October 2000 to intervene.⁴⁶

This the HCB did by first writing to the Cassette Dealers' Co-operative and asking them to stop censoring films because they have no legal power to institute a cultural

⁴⁴ The full report of the meeting is given in *Mumtaz*, September 2000 pp 5-6).

⁴⁵ Interview, Sani Lamma, Kano, June 23, 2003.

⁴⁶ Interview with Director, Art and Culture, Ali Bature, Kano State History and Culture Bureau, November 1, 2004.

policy—of which censoring films was part of. Consequently, it was illegal for them to charge fees in respect for censorship. Secondly, the officials of the Kano State Filmmakers Association were invited to the HCB for brainstorming discussions on the best ways to tackle the issues of censorship. The Filmmakers refused to attend this meeting and as a consequence, the HCB ordered the arrest of the key officials of the Association, citing illegal collection of fees from members for an illegal service, as the main reason for the arrest. In the charge sheet, the HCB also wanted an abolishing of the Joint Committee on Censorship which is to be prevented from further censoring films in the State. All matters of censorship were to be brought to the HCB.

The Filmmakers reacted to this by writing a protest letter to the Kano State Commissioner of Information, via the Director, History and Culture Bureau on 5th December, 2000. In “urging your esteemed office to exterminate this persistent harassment (of the Filmmakers by the HCB)”, the Filmmakers explained that

We embarked on Film Censorship for these reasons here under mentioned:

- a) National Censorship Board Abuja is non-religious body and has no any guideline or regulations for censoring films based on Islamic doctrines.
- b) Due to Islamic enlightenment by Ulama and un-Islamic attitudes exhibited by film producers on the stage (sic), we were left with no option than to do the censorship by ourselves in accordance with Islamic doctrines.
- c) History and Culture Bureau said (sic) to handle Censorship, but there is no effective measure for that up till date.

Kano State Cassette Sellers Association in Conjunction with Kano State Film Makers Association Joint Committee on Film Censorship, to the Commissioner of Information, Kano State, 5th December, 2000.

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 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 videos, 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”

videos produced in neighboring states would be sold in Kano markets – the biggest Hausa-language home video 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 home video. 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.

Organized Reaction to Depend Market Freedom

These developments caused some consternation among the Hausa home video producers in Kano since it was clear the government would enforce these directives, and thus the consequences of non-compliance can be dire. At the forefront of pressurizing the government to lift this ban were Alhaji Auwalu Isma'il Marshall as the Chairman of the Kano State Filmmakers' Association, and Alhaji AbdulKareem Mohammed, the Chairman of the then newly formed Motion Picture Practitioners Association of Nigeria, MOPPAN,⁴⁷ who kept shuttling between the producers and the government officials, specifically the Special Adviser on Religious Affairs, Baba Impossible. They pointed out that a joint committee of producers and cassette dealers had earlier submitted a report to the government on the Hausa home video industry in Kano, and that it was too soon for the government to issue a ban without properly studying the report of the joint committee.

Eventually the government agreed to listen to co-ordinated response of the members of the video industry on the ban. As a result, MOPPAN called for a meeting of all stakeholders on 23rd December, 2000 to discuss the issues. Virtually all the industry stakeholders attended, but nothing much was achieved. The meeting, however, gave the government representative, Salisu Galadanchi, an official in the Ministry of Information (and the first cameraman, the director, and also producer in the first commercial Hausa home video, *Turmin Danya* in 1990) an opportunity to allay the fears of the stakeholders and hint that the State Government will soon issue definitive directives on the future of the Hausa home video in the State.

⁴⁷ MOPPAN was created specifically to serve as an umbrella agency to represent the coalition of the various guilds of filmmakers in Kano. Thus it sought to mediate between government the filmmakers, a situation the government welcomes, rather than dealing with individual guilds or the filmmakers themselves.

In any event, when it was clear that the government itself was saber rattling (what some insiders called *barazana*) and had no real enforcement mechanism to ensure the ban of production and sale of Hausa video films in the state (beside the initial raids by the Police on some cassette dealers around the town), those affected simply continued with business as usual.

This was more so because suddenly different interpretations started appearing about the ban. The press release categorically stated

the immediate withdrawal of all the licenses of Film Producers, Distributors and Video Centres. By this decisions, therefore, shooting, production, distribution and showing such films anywhere in the State is prohibited.

The then Chairman of the Kano State Artistes Council, Shehu Hassan Kano went to the government to seek further clarification, and in an interview with *Fim* the Chairman reiterated his understanding that the government had not *banned* the Hausa home video in Kano, just *revoked* all the licenses of producers (including theaters) until new Shari'a-friendly guidelines have been issued. So it was a *halt*, rather than *ban*. (See interview with Shehu Hassan Kano, *Fim*, January 2001, p. 23).

This was the same interpretation given by Hamisu Lamido Iyan-Tama, Chairman of the Arewa Film Producers Association in the same issue of *Fim* (p. 24) in which he added that if the Kano State Government did not revoke the ban, the producers will mobilize their supporters to vote for a rival political party at the next general elections in the State (due in 2003). Further, according to him,

“...Frankly we were better off during military rule, because they looked after us well, and at least, gave us freedom to practice our vocation without hindrance. Surprisingly, now in an era of democracy, we see nothing but harassment and saber rattling. We know they want to improve the business (of Hausa home video production). But it is not proper for them to publicly announce in press releases that the industry has been banned. This makes the generality of people to look down on us as if we are armed robbers...” (Hamisu Lamido Iyan-Tama, Interview with *Fim* magazine, January 2001, p. 24).

In the panic that accompanied the revoking of licenses for film making in Kano, no one noticed that the Government withdrew license to produce *films*, not *home video*. This is not just a technical point, but also legal. The Government itself based its ban on the provisions of the 1963 Cinematograph (Film Censorship) Regulation, which was the main reference point of the Ministry of Information. The proliferation of home videos as a mean of visual entertainment in Nigeria arose in the late 1980s.⁴⁸ As a result, the 1963 Regulation was in fact *repealed* on the introduction of the National Film and Video Censors Board Enabling Law, as contained in the National Film and Video Censors Board Decree No 85 of 1993. The Kano State Government therefore based its ban on the strength of a law that no longer existed. This is because it could be argued that since the appearance of the visual entertainment medium in Kano, no one has produced a single *film*. All the visual materials produced were *video works* – a terminology preferred by the NFVCB, but which was lost on the Kano State Government—at least at the time of the announcement of the revocation of the licenses of film makers.

⁴⁸ Afolabi Adesanya (1997) “From Film to Video”, in Jonathan Haynes (ed)(1997), *Nigerian Video Films*. Jos, Nigerian Film Corporation.

As a result of the government ban, some artistes decided to lead a peaceful demonstration to the Kano State Government House to protest the ban – thus giving wider publicity to their cause, and since they attract a legion of admirers wherever they go, it was anticipated to be a huge success.

However, MOPPAN stepped in quickly to prevent the planned peaceful march (allegedly organized by Hindatu Bashir, a leading actress of the period) and on 14th January 2001 the organization called for a sensitization meeting of the industry stakeholders to douse feelings and stop future planned peaceful demonstrations. During the meeting, the stakeholders advocated for media campaigns to get the ban on home videos lifted. Some also suggested that their more prominent members should form a rival political party and contest for various positions – thus gaining political control to protect the industry. Indeed this underscored Iyan-Tama's stand in the *Fim* interview in which he stated that:

“The Kano State Governor seemed to have forgotten that he was elected, and yet he is harassing us in our legitimate business. Do you think if Kwankwaso (the Governor) wants contests re-election at the next election Hausa home video producers will cast their vote for him? Unless he shows concern for us, we will support the rival parties...His Government does care about us. Do you think even if I, Iyan-Tama, cast my vote for him, other producers will do the same? (Hamisu Lamido Iyan-Tama, Interview with *Fim* magazine, January 2001, p. 24).

Similarly, Ibrahim Mandawari, former Chairman of the Kano State Filmmakers Association also urged for the political solution to the issue of continuity in the production of Hausa video films where at the MOPPAN meeting, he stated that:

“There is no doubt that we will not again vote for any political party which is insensitive to our lawful means of earning income. Therefore those who are interested in any elected post should start preparing now, and we on our part will empower them in any way we can.”(‘Yan Wasa da Masu Shirin Fim Za su Tsunduma a Siyasa? (Artistes and producers may enter deeply into politics) *Mumtaz*, February 2001, p. 15).

This particular interview with Iyan-Tama and Mandawari – both highly respected actors and producers – seemed to have sent some signals to the Kano State Government: the fact the government could lose the next election (in 2003) if the filmmakers mobilize support from the most significant portion of the voter population: the youth.⁴⁹

Since a volte-face on the ban was out of question, so a face-saving strategy was adopted in the non-strict enforcement on the ban, and at the same time, give the Government some time to tighten up the censorship laws then being passed through the State House of Assembly.

⁴⁹ The Kano State Government under the PDP leadership of Dr. Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso which banned the Hausa home video production in Kano *did* lose the election to the rival ANPP in the Gubernatorial elections held on April 19th, 2003. It was not clear how the home video industry contributed to this failure, although a Mandawari Enterprises video, *Mahandama*, a scathing attack on the alleged corrupt PDP government was produced and released to a wide acclaim, at least from purchasers. The new governor of Kano State in May 2003 was Mallam Ibrahim Shekaru, an Islamic scholar who proceeded to implement the Shari'a with greater gusto.

The entire censorship debacle in Kano was observed with amusement by 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 27 October 1999 adopted a more direct approach. It did not outrightly ban home videos 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. Indeed what the HCB proposed initially was to start off with a Censorship Committee—thus borrowing a leaf from the same practice initiated by Cassette Dealers’ co-operative—before a full Board is established. According to an internal memo from the HCB:

In this regard and out of great concern to the quality of Hausa films in Kano and to protect the values and norms of our religion and culture, the State Bureau proposed the establishment of State Censorship Committee as part of its function according to the Cultural Policy of Nigeria Article 8, section 5, sub-section 2, “promoting an effective film Censorship policy that reflects Nigerian values and national interest”. The proposal for a State Censorship Committee was an urgent measure before the steady establishment of the State Censorship Board, to pave way for the implementation of Shari’a in Kano State. The implementation of Nigerian Cultural Policy in Kano State – A memorandum by the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, March 2001).

By the time this particular memo was released, the Kano State government had already finished all the groundwork on a new censorship law. In the subsequent structure for the management of the Board that ensued, neither the Ministry of Information nor the HCB were made any part of the censorship system.

The Kano State Censorship Film Board Law, 2001

Thus the *Kano State Censorship Film Board Law 2001* was approved by the legislators in the State and issued with effect from 1st February 2001. As stated in the Law,

There shall be established a Board known as “State Censorship Board” which shall be charged with the general management and control of films, phonography Books (sic), publications and materials.

The Board shall be a body corporate with a common seal, and the power to sue and be sued in its corporate name.

Part II: Establishment And Functions of the Board, Section 3 (1) and Section 3 (2). Kano, Kano State Censorship Board Law, 2001.

The Board is to be controlled by an Executive Director (later the position became that of Executive Secretary), usually a politician appointed by the current Governor, who will see to its administrative machinery; but there will be a part-time Chairman and the following members:

- A representative of the Ministry of Information
- A representative of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare
- A representative of the Ministry of Justice
- A representative of the Emirate Council
- Six other members to be appointed by the Governor and at least two of which must be Islamic Scholars of high repute
- One representative each from Film Producers, and Marketers Association⁵⁰
- The Managing Director of the State Television Authority
- The Executive Director of the Board.

This Board, according to the law, shall have power to:

- a. screen, censure any film, obscene books and literature before releasing to the general public for exhibition
- b. register the State Film Industry operators and other related persons;
- c. issue license, permit or provisional license or permit;
- d. charge and collect fees for applications and for other incidental services;
- e. to impose guideline, regulations or conditions applicable to persons or bodies in the business of producing, sale, distributing of any film, pornography books or publications in the State;

Other powers of the Board include the fact that:

- The board may approve with or without conditions any application, refuse approval for the production, distribution, sale or exhibition of any film, pornographic books or publications in the State.
- The Board may, by order, suspend or prohibit the productions, distributions, sales or exhibitions of any film, pornographic books or publications in the State, where in the opinion of the Board it is offensive to public morality and decency.

The visual entertainment industry in Kano—and by extension other parts of Muslim northern Nigeria, is exclusively based on home videos. Yet the term “video” was

⁵⁰ Alhaji Ibrahim Muhammad Mandawari, former Chairman of Kano State Filmmakers Association, and Alhaji Sani Lamma, represented Filmmakers and Cassette marketers on the Board respectively up to 2003.

completely absent from the Law; instead the document kept referring to “film” which it defines as:

film means a film designed for use with a cinematography (not being a film of eight millimeter or less in width) and includes film containing celluloid or other materials of an inflammable or dangerous nature and includes pornography, books and publications and may be prescribed by regulations under this law.

Confusingly, “pornography books and publications” seem to be lumped in the same physical category as “films”. This would seem to acknowledge the earlier *Books and Films Production Control Agency* established in 1996. There seemed to be an attempt to incorporate the ethos of the Agency, but it was not clear how this could be done—the outcome thus was rather inelegant.

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. Interestingly the main item on its agenda were various memoranda from the Ministry of Information on new guidelines for film production, marketing and exhibition in the State, the directive from the Kano State Executive Council to the Ministry of Information. The Board was reminded of its main function, which was to:

to articulate modalities for censorship of films in accordance with social, cultural and religious interest of the State with a view to making all interested stakeholders as well as members of the public to Shari’a compliant. (Inaugural Minutes of the Kano State Censorship Board, 1st March, 2001, p. 2).

The Board also discussed the suspension of cinema, film production and viewing center licenses which was announced on 13th December 2000 by the Commissioner of Information.

The pedigree of the law was indeed revealed by the Executive Secretary of the Board who informed the Board the new law in Kano was based on the National Censorship law (apparently referring to the NFVCB Law). There was still a need for Regulations to interpret the law, and these regulations were provided to members. The regulations were based on the submission from the Ministry of Information. This submission was actually the entire *Cinematograph (Licensing) Regulation, 1963*, and is reflected in the following excerpts from the 1963 (Federal) and 2001 (Kano) Regulations:

The Cinematography (Licensing) Regulation, 1963, Arrangement of Regulations:

51 (4) A license for a cinematograph shall be as an in Form K in the schedule and shall be valid for one year from the issue or for such shorter period as the Minister may determine and a fee of *three pounds* shall be payable in respect thereof to the Minister.

In a first draft of the Regulations given to the members of the Board, it was similarly stated:

Kano State Censorship Film Board Law, 2001: Cinematography (Licensing)(Censorship) Regulations 2001, Mark I

52 (1) A license for the theater other an occasional theater shall be as in Form H in the Second Schedule and shall be valid for one year from the date of issue or for such shorter period as the Board may determine and a fee of *twelve pounds* shall be payable in respect thereof to the Board.

When the attention of the Board was drawn to the *twelve pounds* anomaly during its subsequent meetings by one of the members—requesting for payment in a British currency to a Government that has been independent from Britain for 41 years—the Regulations were re-drafted and the affected section amended to state:

State Censorship Film Board Law, 2001: Cinematography (Licensing)(Censorship) Regulations 2001, Mark II

52 (1) A license for the theatre other than occasional theatre shall be as in Form H in the Second Schedule and shall be valid for one year from the date of issue or for such shorter period as the Board may determine and *prescribed fees* shall be payable in respect thereof to the Board.

This would seem to indicate in a desire to get the Law enacted and approved as quickly as possible, such attention to these details were missing. The fact that the Kano State Law retained even the title of the repealed Law revealed the weakness in the Kano State Law about the increasing role of video films in dramatic productions. As argued earlier, since the home video film phenomena started in 1990, no one in Kano has produced a single *film* to which the provisions of the 2001 *cinematography* Law could be applied. The provisions for *films* were however retained in the National law since the film industry at the national level was more structured and focused than in Hausa home video industry, and does incorporate filming. It would seem therefore irrelevant for Kano to create a law for a situation that does not currently exist.

Indeed during the inaugural meeting of the Board, a member representing the Ministry of Justice did point out that “though the censorship law said films censorship as a heading, in the main body video and other exhibitions are covered by the law under the regulation section” (Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Kano State Censorship Board, Kano, 2001, p. 3). The Executive Secretary was then asked to obtain the 1993 law to compare and make recommendations where necessary.

In the light of this, it is therefore surprising that the Regulations seemed to have been made by a separate agency from the Board, and the Board seemed to lack clear focus on what it is supposed to censor.

In the subsequent re-drafting of the Regulations (what I call Mark II), the term “video works” appeared only once in “Part XVII -Miscellaneous Provisions”, where it was stated:

99 (1) A person shall not carry on the business of distributing or exhibiting a film, video-work, as a vendor or publisher or any business within the scope of the jurisdiction of the Board to issue license in the State.⁵¹

And unlike in the NFVCB law where a detailed guideline is given (see p. 25 of the NFVCB enabling law) on what might prohibit the classification (in essence, denied permission to be shown to public), the Kano State Regulations do not carry any specific guidelines for video-works. The Kano State Regulations therefore 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.

⁵¹ The wordings of this section is unclear, but this is exactly how it was written in the Regulations.

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.

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.

Further, only in one section of the Regulations was reference made to books and literary materials:

- (95) (1) Any person who produces a book, literary or dramatic work in the State and intends to publish such literary material such person shall apply for censorship license from the Board.
- (2) Every application for censorship license in sub-regulation (1) of this Regulation shall be accompanied with a copy of such book or literary material to be published and a prescribed fee by the Board.

Yet the law persistently kept referring to itself as State Censorship *Film* Board Law, 2001, and even the Hausa title for the Board, *Hukumar Tace Fina-finai* (agency for

censoring films) would seem to indicate its concern with *visual* media, rather than written works. Other aspects of creativity, such as music and non-representational art of the Hausa were conspicuously missing from the Law. It would seem therefore that the Law is not sure exactly what to restrict.

Finally, while the Kano State Censorship Law draws its exclusive inspiration and pattern from the National Censorship Board Law, yet it significantly lacks the vital component of classification, which would have given the Hausa video filmmakers considerable leeway in categorizing their work to specific audiences—thus escaping the charges of communicating wrong messages to wrong audience. This is more significant when it is realized that almost all the criticisms against Hausa video films were against its potential for corrupting children and youth. A classification system would share the burden of responsible parenting on what to allow children to watch, and at the same time enable filmmakers to address different audiences. That this was not done reveals another weakness in the rationale for creating the censorship law in Kano.

During the second meeting of the Board, held on 8th March 2003, it was agreed that there was need to come up with modalities for film censorship, as well as set up the various working committees of the Board. Further, the imposition of the suspension of licenses of film makers announced on 13th December 2000 would continue. However, it was only at the 4th meeting of the Board, held on 29th March, 2001 that its Film Exhibition and Guidelines Committee came up with specific guidelines concerning exhibitions of films in the State. These were as follows:

1. Only films cleared by the Board should be exhibited in all cinema houses.
2. Under aged persons below the age of 18 years should not be admitted into cinemas
3. All cinemas must provide additional security in and around their premises.
4. Time of cinema operation to be from 8:30p.m -11:30.pm
5. Female admission to cinema house prohibited.
6. Sales, advertisement or consumption of alcohol or narcotics in whatever form are prohibited in and around cinema houses.
7. Exhibition of films by cinema house should be 40% Local content in the state.
8. All films must be previewed by proprietors to make sure they conform to moral standard of Islam and professional ethics by the film industry. In this regards, films should not
 - a) Show sex, nudity, obscene behavior/conduct
 - b) Show excessive violence, theft, drinking, murder or 419 etc.
 - c) Debase human dignity, show cultural degradation, disregard to religion and its followers deficits elements of disunity or incite conflicts.
9. All cinemas must install security lights so that its premises are well lit especially during operation to ward off unwanted elements and behaviors. Loitering around the premises is prohibited, likewise gathering of small groups.
10. Proprietors must control petty trading in their premises with a view of checking the type of wares sold;
11. Cinemas must make efforts to enlighten the public through Radio, Television and Public Address (PA) van, banning children/women in their premises and any other prohibition by the Censorship Board;
12. Having considered all the above, the Cinema proprietors must ensure compliance with all the conditions required by National Film and Video Censorship Board;
13. The proprietors must ensure the implementation of any other guideline which the Censorship Board will continue to provide from time to time;
14. Proprietors must ensure that no person enter(s) into a cinema with offensive weapons e.g. guns, knives, cutlass, bow and arrows, razors, sticks etc. Carriage, usage or display of such items in and around Cinema is also prohibited.

Kano State Censorship Board Minutes of Board Meeting No 4, held on 29th March 2001, pp 2-3. Part of these regulations were also translated and published in *Mumtaz*, April 2001, p. 11.

It is significant that these guidelines, as in the Cinematograph Act/Regulations, focused attention only on *film makers*, not video dramatists, even though the cinemas actually show videos, not films.

With this, producers and other film industry practitioners were requested to register with the Board, acquire new licenses and continue production according to the new guidelines. Thus the government had not actually un-banned filmmaking in the State, but has restricted it only to those who “register” with the Censorship Board. Subsequently, especially in mid 2004, a running legal battle ensued between the Board and filmmakers in the State who did not have “any registration license”, even though the same Board has been censoring their films for three years!

Film producers and video store owners not conforming to the new moral laws faced the wrath of the law, as this typical press release from the Kano State Censorship Board revealed:

In it's drive (sic) to rid the society of illicit and pornographic video works and films, the Kano Sate Censorship Board Mobile Court presided over by Chief Magistrate Abdullahi Mahamoud Bayero has confiscated a number of films, video works and posters from some cassette sellers, Danjay Video Center in Farm Center, Video Mars in Beirut Road and Mustapha Trading Company on Bello Road all in the municipality.

Apart from the confiscation, the Court also sentenced them to various sentences of fines and imprisonment. The confiscated materials contain obscenities, which are inimical to the society and contravene the tenets of Shari'a. Delivering the judgments, Chief Magistrate Abdullahi Mahamoud Bayero called on all cassette sellers in the State to desist hencewith, the display and sell of illicit materials as they are dangerous and inimical to the shaping of the behaviour of the people, especially young ones.

The Court was set up by the State Government in order to rid the society of all kinds of bad and dangerous literary works that are seeing (sic) to be bad and inimical to the people.

Chief Magistrate Abdullahi Mahamoud Bayero also said that his Court will continue to go around and bring justice (sic), any cassette seller or exhibitor that peddle illicit literary work in the State.

Kano State Censorship Board Press Release, 15 February 2002.

Subsequently all *Hausa* medium videos films produced (and sold) in Kano State undergo two censorship hurdles. The first was at the national level by the National Film and Censorship Board which will then grant a license for the video to be commercially distributed anywhere in Nigeria.⁵² According to the law establishing the NFVCB, Abuja, any cassette dealer who markets a video without the clearance certificate from NFVCB will be committing a crime. In Kano quite a few of large cassette dealers were of Nigeriène, Malian or non-Kano, origin and were thus

⁵² The southern Nigerian film makers capitalize on this to distribute their films in Kano—thus they are saved from Kano State censorship mechanisms because they consider their films as “Nigerian”, thus secular and more universal, unlike those in Hausa that have to conform to a specific linguistic and religious code of values. The films are considered “Nigerian” because most were produced in the Nigerian official language, English.

understandably apprehensive of contravening any law, and it is through their cartel that a strict compliance with this national law was observed.

Once the video has been cleared by the NFVCB, then it has to be taken to the Kano State Censorship Film Board, KSCB, which will also view it and decide on whether to allow it be publicly shown if it conforms with its laws. If it does not, the producer is given a list of places to edit, resubmit the video for a second viewing, after which a certificate will be issued. If the producer did not effect the corrections, then the license to show in Kano is not granted, and subsequently the video will not be sold in Kano because the dealers, in an agreement with Censorship Board, have agreed to refuse to sell any tape without the clearance certificate from the Board. And since Kano is the largest market for Hausa video tapes, no producer would afford not to have permission to sell their tapes in Kano.

Above the Law: Bring on the Dancing Girls

The second current that led to, but essentially strengthens censorship laws in Kano was the increasing westernization of the song and dance (*rawa da waka*) routines in Hausa video films. When it became clear that singing and dancing sell more than weepy bucolic storylines about Hausa society and tradition, urban Hausa acculturated film makers, using Shah Ruh Khan and other Hindi film stars as their main creative templates, embraced the song and dance ethos in their video films with greater gusto.

The strongest proponents of the song and dance routines in Hausa home video films were acculturated non-ethnic Hausanized film makers. The commercial success of *Sangaya* (2000) lured Hausanized non-ethnic Hausa with a different mindset from the mainstream Hausa into the Hausa home video film industry. What made their entry easier was the fact of Hausa being a lingua franca in the vast tracts of northern Nigeria, even in communities that do not have Hausa settlers. It is clear, of course, that any Hausa medium entertainment must cater for both Muslim Hausa and non-Muslim Hausa speaking clients. It is this desire to reach wider audience that brings the song and dance routines to the fore, at the expense of any storyline that would necessitate the audience to download Hausa core cultural values.⁵³

This increasing participation by non-ethnic Hausa into the Hausa video production process was the trigger that fired off censorship, not because of their non-Hausa ethnicity, but because they approached the whole home video film industry with a different mindset from the Hausa. For while the mainstream ethnic Hausa are bound by traditions of *kunya*, *kawaici* (bashfulness), the newer elements were more focused on pure entertainment rather than cultural messaging in the film media.

These acculturated Hausanized Muslim and non-Muslim non-ethnic Hausa were originally Yoruba, Igbirra, Beni, Nigeriène, Babur, Tuareg, Yemeni, Kanuri, and members of other “minor” northern Nigerian tribes whose parents settled in large urban Hausa centers.⁵⁴ They were born among the Hausa and most can speak the

⁵³ Further, the persistent ethno-religious clashes between the Muslim Hausa and other nationalities in northern Nigeria has created a zone of mutual suspicion and further resentment about the overwhelming importance of the Hausa language as a lingua franca in the region.

⁵⁴ The Fulani, are of course excluded from any discussion of “non-Hausa” due to the media fusion of Hausa and Fulani ethnic nationalities into “Hausa-Fulani”. However, most of the “Hausa” artistes are

language fluently with only a little trace of accent. They also attended all their schools among the Hausa and perhaps except for linguistic and often dress codes, would not be distinguished from the Hausa. These non-ethnic Hausa elements strive very hard to mask their actual ethnic identities⁵⁵ and invariably accept roles of modernized Hausa urban youth in the home videos, rather than appearing in traditional Hausa or religious character portrayals. Even their dialogs were restricted to urban Hausa lexicon, devoid of any references to classical Hausa vocabulary typical of rural dwellers that might cause problems in pronunciation.

According to Hausa home video industry insiders, these elements constituted as much as 60% of the Hausa home video industry. As an investigation by *Mumtaz* magazine, Kano, reveals:

Whenever you mention Hausa home video it is assumed these are videos made by true ethnic Hausa. Surprisingly and annoyingly, in an investigation, we discovered this was not true, only few of those involved in production of Hausa home video are true ethnic Hausa. The ethnic tribes that overrun the Hausa home video industry include Kanuri, Igbos and most significant of all, the Yoruba. In a table we drew, about 42% of the Hausa home video producers and artistes were of Yoruba extraction, 10% were Kanuri, 8% were Igbos. Thus only about 40% are true ethnic Hausa, and yet these videos are called *Hausa* videos.” (“Hausawa sun yi k’aranci a shirin fim. (There is a dearth of true ethnic Hausa in Hausa video films), *Mumtaz*, April 2001, p. 12).

Indeed it was argued by many of the insiders that most of the “experimental” and bold home videos (especially the dance routines) had to be necessarily made by non-ethnic Hausa because they are not restricted by the Hausa conservative cultural and religious mindset that often frowns at such displays of exuberance, particularly in alien format. Thus their preference for song and dance routines, which their cartel of about four production studios control in Kano was a way of avoiding too much dialogue in Hausa language

The videos produced by these mindset of values—pure Hindi cinema, with strong focus on song and dance routines—became best sellers, catapulting young Hausa artistes into the “megastar” status. This pattern was cloned by mainstream Hausa such that it became difficult to distinguish between the two production values. It was extremely challenging to enforce any law that will curtail this lure for the lucre in a depressed economy.

Thus the biggest problem of the Board was that when it became clear to the film makers that the Board was more concerned with prosecuting shop keepers than focusing on the content of the films, the producers started to ignore the corrections given. During my fieldwork in Kano from 2001 to 2004, I learnt that often a producer would release the *original* film he submitted, rather than carry out any corrections given to him (or her, since there were many women producers in the industry) by the Board.

actually genetic Fulani, although only few of them could actually *speak* Fulfulde (according to my sources, only about three — and all female).

⁵⁵ In various interviews with *Fim* magazine, they often claim one of their parents being non-Hausa, in order to prove to audience that despite not being “pure” Hausa, they can still be considered Hausa.

The reason for non-compliance were simple: song and dance (*rawa da waka*). A typical Hausa home 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 sleeper of 2004: by its incorporation of a new starlet singing and dancing in a catchy Fulani costume.

In the spirit of Shari'a, the Board would insist on the producers removing some dance scenes that in their view violated principles of Islamic discourse and interaction. This was not acceptable to the producers who expected the banned (and often naughty bits) to generate high revenue. Thus a running battle between the Board and the filmmakers became a constant feature in Kano.

Indeed, from the perspective of the Hausa home video industry, it would be preferable to ban the industry completely than to ban or regulate song and dance routines, because the latter is the central core of the attraction of Hausa video films to both the producers and the consumers.

Videos such as *Sangaya* and *Kansakali* became massively successful because of their song and dance routines. Eventually, indeed some video makers started focusing less on the storyline and paid more attention to costumes, and intricate song and dance routines. Fairly typical examples include *Jinsee*, *Gidauniya*, *Harshashi*, *Kansakali* and *Zabari*.

Clearly getting more irritated with the increasing focus on song and dance, 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. Government stand was that the girls—most 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.

The Board, however, was not all prohibitions. There was a rare case in which it supported the Hausa filmmakers in Kano against censorship demands of the Muslim scholar establishment. Interestingly, the source of this support was Osama bin Laden.

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 ensured. 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.⁵⁶

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.



⁵⁶ 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.

From Working with the System....

The production studios took three broad strategies to counter the objections of the religious establishment and the Shari’a. First, in an innovative experiment, Iyan-Tama Multimedia often premiers its new videos to a select group of Islamic scholars, listen to their feedback and make necessary amendments before releasing the video.⁵⁷ When it became clear that producers were not willing to mellow their scripts to Islamic palate, the battle between the Islamic religious establishment and the producers continued.

Secondly, whereas in the halcyon days of the industry video film titles were straightforward and often revealed the main theme of the video (often based on a Hausa proverb), by the time the industry started attracting religious and cultural criticism there was a subtle change in the titling to give the videos a linguistic elegance — and create closeness to Indo-Persian lexicon, and to appeal to Hausa diaspora in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.

Thus videos with titles like *Na’am* (acceptable), *Mushaqqa* (suffering), *Taqidi* (intent), *Dhalal* (lost soul), *Khusufi* (eclipse), *Huznee* (envy), *Yaqini* (certainty), *Kiyasi* (estimate), *Mishkila* (problem) *Tijara* (commerce, but in the video it was used to mean betrayal), *Alhini* (deep sorrow), *Izaya* (extreme suffering), *Mizani* (scale), *Artabu* (fierce battle), *Ruhi* (spirit), *Maqabuli*, (accepted), *Noor* (night), *Zaituna* (olive) and *Ibtala’i* (testing period), *Mukarram* (honored), *Khusu’i* (God-fearing) — all sounding like a religious chant or poetry — became common. However, the

⁵⁷ This practice was, however, stopped when the studio quoted the statement of one of the Islamic scholars on the back cover of a premiered video release. Understandably, his followers felt as if he had been “bought” by the studio enough to make such product “endorsement”. He subsequently issued a public statement saying he had been deceived by the studio. In a backlash, the studio decided to stop premiering its videos to any group. I asked if the scholars comments were based on tape-recorded statements he made after the video premier, and I was told he made the statement in a discussion after the premier.

Islamic-sounding vocabulary was more really to appease the religious establishment, than anything else; the assumption being that words with strong Islamic roots would make a better video title and lessen the criticism. Yet the poster artwork did not change to reflect the naming! This is illustrated, for instance by two videos, *Taqidi* and *Mishkila*, in Plate 6.

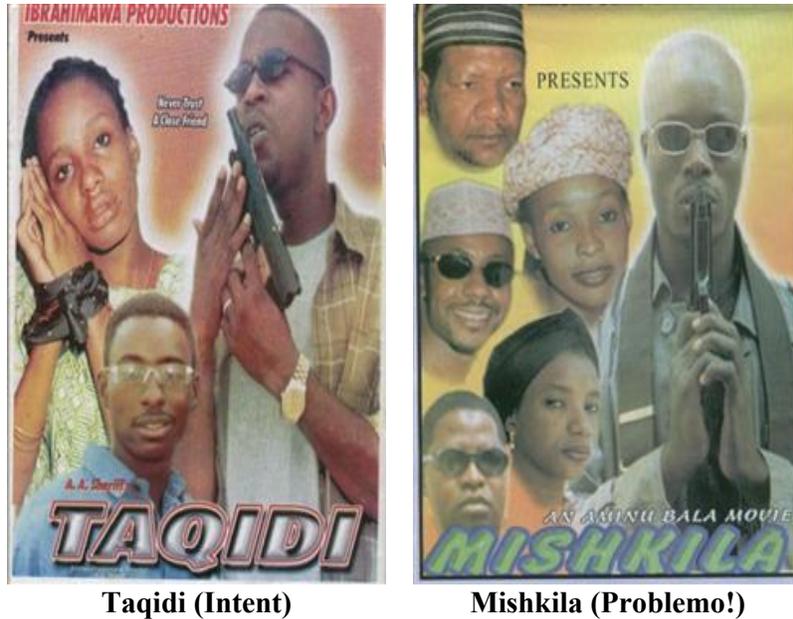


Plate 6: John Wooing Islam: Right Names, Wrong Faces!

Each — almost so similar to be each others’ clones including graphic and wording placements — video poster shows a “cool” Chow Yeung Fat⁵⁸ killer-type with dark glasses —with icons of conflict neatly arranged all around him.

This strategy of appeasing the religious establishment – and creating a more compassionate censorship – by using Arabic titles did not sustain itself. The main reason was the issue of culture and identity. Non-Hausa non-Muslim clients of these videos were most likely to be alienated by the titles which convey an Islamic focus (even if not necessarily so) and creates a barrier to accepting such films. The film makers were also anxious to avoid giving the impression of creating indoctrinaire videos, such as the ones produced by the Shiites. Subsequently, the titling of the films assumed a more mundane lexicon, with titles such as *Auduga* (cotton), *Tsari* (arrangement), *Lullubi* (covering), *Qugiya* (hook), *Kankara* (ice), *Kumfa* (foam), *Ciwon Ido* (eye ache), *Jarida* (newspaper), *Katanga* (fence), *Zare* (thread), *Saisaye* (trimming), *Malfa* (straw cowboy-style hat) etc. None of these video films reflect the themes of the title; the titles having been given at random by the filmmakers to make the video more easily identifiable, and less intimidating to non-pure Hausa.

Third, immediately after the Shari’a announcement, a series of studios released plans for video films which focus on Muslim-pagan relationships, in which Islam always triumphs and the storyline shows how a pagan person or a group of persons became converted to Islam. It is significant that the films with this theme, and which appeared

⁵⁸ The Chinese violent action film star popularized in Hollywood by director John Woo in *Hard Boiled*.

in 2003, were careful to emphasize relationship between Muslims and pagans⁵⁹, rather than Christians. Examples included *Ruhi*, *Farar Aniya*, *Judah!*, *Qarni*, *Tulawa*, *Ma'auni*, *Sako*, *Ragayar Dutse* and *Mace Saliha*.⁶⁰

The pagans in most of these films were portrayed to the typical Muslim Hausa stereotype of a non-believer. Thus they are always wild-eyed, uncouth, slovenly, dirty, ragged and often painted savages constantly engaged in apparently meaningless rituals that consist of quaffing *burkutu* (a variety of local tequila) and babbling indecipherable incantations. Examples from two stereotype video films are shown in Plate 7.



Wild Thing – Kabiru Maikaba as a pagan chief glorifying “Kundaru Kundar” in *Judah!*



Wild Thing, Two – Hussiani Sule Koki and priest in *Qarni*

Plate 7: Pagan stereotypes in Hausa home videos – in *Judah!* and *Qarni*

The Muslims, on the other hand, are neat, suave, clever, intelligent, compassionate and logical, and use their superior epistemology to convince the babbling pagans to abandon their heathen ways and embrace Islam.

Hausa film makers essentially used the Muslim-pagan interface to create a greater acceptability for their films in the light of cultural and religious criticism trailing Hausa home videos, as well as create alternative markets that move away from the predominantly romantic themes of their storylines. As stated by the principal character of the film *Judah!*,

“This film will contribute towards enhancing the status of Shari’a, especially now that Shari’a legal code has been re-introduced in Kano. The films (evangelical) will help the government and civil society to fully understand Shari’a and how it should be implemented.” Kabiru Maikaba, chief pagan, *Judah!*, in an interview with *Bidiyo*, September 2003, p. 40.

The evangelical theme in the Hausa home video films, however, did not also catch on, and even before the end of the same year, 2003, Hausa home video reverted to its thematic structure of ripping-off Hindi films with strong emphasis on love stories and song and dance routines. In any event, only about seven or so filmmakers actually

⁵⁹ In Hausa social life a pagan is *arne* (pl. *arna*) – a term used to refer to anyone without any recognized monotheistic religion. In the Hausa evangelical home videos, the *arna* are always *Maguzawa*, the indigenous non-Muslim Hausa populations.

⁶⁰ A film with similar title, *Mace Saliha: Tsiran Al’umma* (2002) was made by “Muslim Brothers”, aka the Shiite in Nigeria.

experimented with the evangelical themes, and when it flopped, they reverted back to type. An example was director Hafizu Bello who was the first with *Ruhi*, and which he even entered for the 2003 Festival Panafricain du Cinéma de Ouagadougou (FESPACO) competition in Burkina Faso, and signaled his intention to move to more serious drama. However, by 2003 he had gone back to ripping-off Hindi films in, for instance, *Bakace* (from Hindi film, *Tere Naam*).

The reason for the failure of the religious themes to catch on were two. First, the stories were not commercially viable, focusing as they did, on serious subject matter. As the film makers themselves keep insisting, Hausa home video is not about messaging, but about entertainment. As Ali Nuhu, an extremely successful commercial filmmaker producing films in Hausa language stated in an interview,

“I am a film maker because I want to entertain. You often hear viewers claiming they want a video that shows (Hausa) culture, and yet when you do such video they just leave you with it (and don’t buy it). This year a video was released that showed pure Hausa culture, but it was not commercially successful. In fact a viewer had the cheek to write to a magazine to complain about the video; would that be an encouragement for the producer?” Ni Don Nishadantarwa Na Ke Yi (“I am in it for entertainment only), Interview with Ali Nuhu, *Annashuwa*, December 2002, p. 31.

Thus Hafizu Bello’s pagan drama *Ruhi* was strongly opposed by the commercial spectrum of industry insiders, especially the coterie of musicians who make a lot of money out of composing film soundtracks, simply because it does not contain any song and dance routines. There was the trepidation that if it succeeded it might create a situation where films can be made and sell without song and dance and that might cause tremors in the industry. The less than average success of *Ruhi* was therefore a welcome development that confirms that for a Hausa video film to succeed commercially, it must be thematically based on song and dance.⁶¹

Further, although the predominant target of the Hausa home video film clients were Hausa, not many Hausa speakers were necessarily Muslim. Evangelical films had the uncomfortable effect of reminding northern Nigerians of the religious divide that separates them and which often leads to virtually annual flashes of ethno-religious conflicts in the region, pitting Muslims against non-Muslims. Thus when non-Muslim, non-Hausa but Hausa speakers view Hausa home videos films, they have little interest in being reminded of either their “pagan” (*arna*) status, or the fact that the Hausa have suppressed their own individual identities (at least linguistically), and as such films with these themes were commercial risks.

The second reason for the failure of the Hausa evangelical films to sustain themselves was simply because although the Muslim-pagan films glorify Islam, nevertheless they were packaged in a way that belie the seriousness of their subject matter. For instance, only *Ruhi* and *Farar Aniya* contain straightforward narratives. All the others included the obligatory song and dance routines that were out of place in a serious drama about faith conversions. Scenes from the pagan “boogies” are shown in Plate 8.

⁶¹ By 2004, however, Iyan-Tama Studios have abandoned the song and dance and produced hugely successful video films that do not have song and dance. These included *Marar Gaskiya*, *Farhan*, *Wata Rana* and *Kishiya*.



“Pagans” doing the bop to deity “Kundaru Kundar” in *Judah!*



Hussiani Sule Koki and “pagans” dancing to their deity “Mardu” in *Qarni*

Plate 8: Pagan Boogie – Evangelism, Islam and Rawa da Waka

The evangelical messages of these films therefore are lost on the “pagans” who do not associate Islam with music and dancing, and as such treat any evangelical film as ineffective sermonizing packaged as entertainment. The mainstream Muslim Hausa dismiss them as just marketing gimmicks, which as it turned out, were not effective. The final blow was from the Shari’a governments in the north who refused to even acknowledge efforts were made by film makers to spread the Shari’a message through evangelical visual media. As I pointed out earlier, both government and religious establishments pay attention to the Hausa home video only when the sacred, particularly Muslim scholars, have been profaned.

...To Commercial Defiance

By 2004 a new spirit of rebellion seemed to have been injected into the Hausa home video film productions. 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 film makers 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). Due to this alleged corruption in the Board, producers with a certificate of censorship submit the certificate and the *original* 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 film makers 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 11 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 (film makers). 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.

Further, it was clear that the censoring mechanism was not effective, as analyzed by *Madubi* magazine (July/August edition, 2004, p. 13) which focused attention on five films to illustrate the inefficiency of the censoring mechanism and its lack of Shari’a compliancy, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Hausa video plots and Shari'a Departure

Video Film	Point of Shari'a Departure
<i>Kumbo</i>	male and female principal characters shown putting their clothes back on clearly after having "slept" with each other
<i>Gidauniya</i>	attempted rape in a scene
<i>Bakar Inuwa</i>	too many adulterous scenes where the characters seemed to relish their roles
<i>Guguwa</i>	a principal female character shown smoking
<i>Kamala</i>	scenes of childbirth
<i>Madadi</i>	adulterous scenes
<i>Zhabi</i>	A principal character asking for a towel from her boyfriend while in a bathroom
<i>Sutura</i>	a principal character demanding sexual gratification from a female lead
<i>Nasaba</i>	repeated scenes of two male and female leads entering a hut for sex
<i>Masakin Kauna</i>	a female lead demanding sex from a principal character

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 home videos 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 a more provocative scenes than before Shari'a law and the Board were established. Some of the scenes from the best selling Hausa video films are shown in Plate 9.



Zabari (Zabari)



So Jiki da Kamshi (Jigo)



Oyoyo (Makamashi)



Yaraye Aye Soyayya (Yari)



Shang Koko (Lugga)



Mbol Boi (Kumbo)



Qugiya (Qugiya)



Kancankala (Makamashi)

Plate 9: Rawa da Waka in Hausa home videos – post Shari'a law

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

When the criticisms against the song and dance routines started getting too loud, some film producers started getting experimentally bolder in their storylines, despite the Shari’a mood. This was indicated by the appearance of a poster in early 2004 announcing the arrival of a new video, *Dabdala*. The video became significant in Hausa video film history because it was the first Hausa home video which allegedly focused on lesbian love theme.⁶² Indeed the word *dabdala*, originally the name of a long tethering rope tied to the neck of a colt, is a Hausa street slang for lesbian love. The poster of the video is shown in Plate 10.

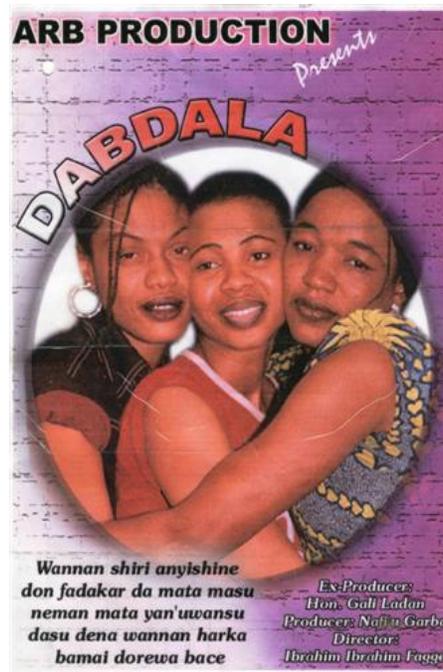


Plate 10: Exploring lesbian “harka-business” in Hausa home video

⁶² 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.

The tagline of the video on the poster states: “this video is intended as an enlightenment to lesbians to stop this business⁶³; it is not sustainable”.

Within few days of the poster being pasted on walls in Kano, *Mudubi* magazine devoted half a page on the video which was yet to be released and revealed its alleged lesbian focus.

The film has already started drawing the attention and complaints from government officials that a film of this type is not appropriate at the moment. Film producers, on the other hand, feel that the increasing immorality (as a result of this act) warrants treatment in a film format in order to draw attention to this bad behavior and serve as a warning to the women who do this. (*Mudubi*, March/April, 2004 p. 2)

It is significant the editorial comment stated that “a film of this type is not appropriate at the *moment*”, giving the impression, despite the Shari’a law in the State, this might be a recurrent, and perhaps welcome, theme at later times.

The editorial comments 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 in the industry.⁶⁴ The poster was anonymously taken to the Kano State Censorship Board, which moved in swiftly to request the producer to appear before its Magistrate Mobile Court—on the charges of indecency in a print medium (since the video film was not even taken to the Board for censoring) since the poster was considered too sexually proactive. 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 *Awarwaro* (which, with a sense of cheeky irony, means “bangles”!)—indicating their intention to eventually release it.⁶⁵

This seeming prosecuting of the producers of *Dabdala* was not taken kindly by producers in Kano who alleged state dictatorship in creative pursuits. They argued that first of all the film was not released. To them this was a further evidence that the Shari’a in Kano was created to stifle economic activities of youth.⁶⁶

⁶³ The street code to gay activities in Kano is “harka” (business); thus “dan harka” (doing the business).

⁶⁴ This underscores the earlier made point that the Hausa film industry is controlled not by specific professional standards, but by the capital one has to make a film.

⁶⁵ 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 Censorship 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, from whom the government took a cue and formed the Censorship Board. *Dabdala* would most likely end up as an underground tape, and may kick start the Hausa video soft porn sub-market.

⁶⁶ In a discussion with a senior producer in Kano (July 2004) and who claimed he was a consultant on *Dabdala*. He also insists that the producers of *Dabdala* simply used the poster and the tagline to attract attention to their film, since the industry seemed to have exhausted the *rawa da waka* teasers as attraction to their films. Ironically, the Censorship Board ordered the arrest of the producer not on the basis of the film, but on the artwork of the poster—showing three women in an embrace—which was deemed indecent and thus “pornographic”.

Conclusions

In my conclusions to this essay, I would like to draw my conceptual framework from the “public” and “private” sociological terms to explain the reason for video film censorship in northern Nigeria. I chose this conceptual framework because of my thesis that censorship was triggered by the film textual transition from “private” to “public” in Muslim northern Nigeria which sees the profanity (public) of the sacred (private).

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.

This concept was originally explained by the German sociologist Jurgen Habermas who suggests that the divide between public and private is a feature of modernity. He argues that the word *privat*, derived from the Latin, can only be found in Germany from the late sixteenth century, and that it initially referred to someone who was not an officer of the state. Thus institutionally, “a public sphere in the sense of a separate realm distinguished from the private sphere cannot be shown to have existed in the feudal society of the High Middle Ages.” Within this context, the power of the kings and aristocrats was “public,” not in the sense of a sphere of society but in that of a status position. The arena in which power was represented to a wide audience was public, but was not characterized by public participation—it was public the way a stage play is, for a passive audience. The church was likewise “public” in this sense of open display of ritual and authority until proponents of the Enlightenment increasingly coded it as private from the eighteenth century forward (Habermas, 1993: 7, 11).

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.

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. But more important, media are themselves complex social fields and activities (Anderson 2003).

Contributing to the debate, Mohsen Kadivar (2003) points out that the terms “private” and “public” are not rooted in the heart of Islamic doctrine. The two terms occur

neither in the Qur'an nor in the traditions conveyed from the Prophet and the imams. Islamic jurisprudence does not recognize these terms either. Further, in Islam one should not inquire into private matters: prying into these matters should be forbidden. If someone happens to come across private information, further disclosure of that information is not permitted. Managing the affairs of the private domain is the exclusive right of the individual, who also has the right to determine his or her own fate. No one else has priority over an individual in his/her private domain.

Islamic jurisprudence, in accordance with the two criteria given here, 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 debate lies at delimiting the private domain from what is regarded as public. And it is within this context that the Muslim scholar community in northern Nigeria felt the use of media technologies to transmit filmmakers' perception of the private to the public, particularly as it reflects the gatekeepers of public morality—themselves—contradict Islamic jurisprudence, and therefore there is a need for a strict control on the use of media technology in public sphere.

What further contributes to the need for the demarcation of the public and private in Muslim northern Nigeria is the perception of the text in public affairs. For instance, Hausa tales are didactic, linear and sermonizing. Operating within the context of the Muslim Hausa mindset, it became a Herculean task to create a more “modern” concept of literary expression by the colonial administration in northern Nigeria. For instance, in requesting Muslims to write simplified indigenous language novellas for use in colonial-era primary schools in northern Nigeria in 1932, it was noted by Dr. Rupert East, the Svengali of northern Nigerian literature,

“...the first difficulty was to persuade these Mallams that the thing was worth doing. The influence of Islam produces an extremely serious-minded type of person. The art of writing moreover, being intimately connected in his mind with his religion, is not to be treated lightly. Since the religious revival at the beginning of the last (19th) century, nearly all the original work produced by Northern Nigerian authors has been either purely religious or written with a strong religious motive. Most of it was written in Arabic, which, like Latin in Medieval Europe, was considered a more worthy medium of any work of importance than the mother tongue.” (East, 1936 p. 350).

This Islamic influence retains its hold on the northern Nigeria Hausa Muslim polity such at all discourse—whether private or public—is subject to Islamic injunctions. When the home video replaced the novel as a more powerful—and subsequently more influential—mode of social interpretation, the morality of the messages became a central focus. A necessary problem faced by the home video film makers in Muslim northern Nigeria is the reconciliation of the radically different modes of storytelling they adopt for their societies. A typical film storyline carries with it elements of conflict and ways of resolving the conflict. For the message to come out clearly, “unpalatable” scenes must be created, and as the story unfolds, contradictions and conflicts are sorted out. Not so in Hausa tales where the plot development is transparent and linear. The persistent accusations that the more “adult” scenes in the pre-censorship Hausa video films (*Sauran Kiris*, *Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka*, *Alhaki*

Kwikwiyo) were that “children” would see them and thus become exposed to their “corrupting” influence. A solution to this, of course, would have been classification—thus restricting access. Yet in all the clamor for censorship in the Islamic polity classification was not considered a variable, and thus uniform judgments and restrictions are imposed on “children” and adult alike. This curtails the freedom of adults to interact with a text that talks about *their* realities. The end-product would therefore be a perpetually saccharine video film productions without any universal appeal.

Further, as I argued in this paper, the Muslim scholars who transparently influenced particularly media censorship in Kano expressed their concern only when the visual media started to depict their private universe into the public domain. Neither their utterances, nor the subsequent legal code created provided any textual analysis and refutation of the use of visual medium in messaging. Even the legal code that was created, the *Kano State Censorship Board Law, 2001*, was secular, and not based on any specific Islamic text, nor from the best practices that work in countries with effective Islamically-flavored censorship laws. It was clear, therefore that the law, as evidence by the inefficiency in its administration, was a token political gesture to appease the more trenchant Muslim clerics in an era of democracy and public commitment to implementing Islamic laws.

The censorship paradigm that sees clashes between State machinery, civil society and creative pursuits, as explored earlier in this paper, would seem to apply to any situation of creativity, except the Hausa home video. The film makers I talked to were caught between two forces. First was the increasing moral stand of the Kano State government on the role of Islam in public affairs. With the introduction of Shari’a in 2000, the new administration that took over in 2003 consolidated the Shari’a policy by strengthening Shari’a implementation mechanisms in the State. One of these was a new moral crusade introduced on 11th September 2004 termed *A Daidata Sahu* (literally, let’s align our *feet* for prayers; figuratively, let’s align our *souls*). The program was aimed to ensuring Shari’a probity in civil society, and Hausa home video producers were among the first to be invited by the program’s co-ordinators to explore ways of “sanitizing” the Hausa home video industry and making it culture and Shari’a compliant. Interestingly enough, this same program was subject to a comedic ridicule by a Hausa video film *Shirin A Dai-daita Sahu* by Ibro (of *JYFH* and *Ibro Usama*) released on 9th November 2004, and which was immediately banned by the Kano State Government the following day.

The second force faced by the Home video producers in 2004 was the capitalist lucre. The market had opened up and there was a lot of sales. This created instant wealth for any producer lucky enough to get a hit. And the sure-fire way of getting a hit is to include as many provocative *rawa da waka* as possible—with the producers outdoing each other to raise their stakes. It got to a stage where musicians and lyricists compose songs and a trailer is made based on chosen songs. It is this trailer that is used to attract investors (almost always cassette marketers) to buy the CD copyrights for a film that has not been shot!⁶⁷

⁶⁷ This often leads to problems. For instance, *Biki Budiri*, a 2004 video was heavily promoted via its trailer which contained catchy *rawa da waka*. However, the particular attractive routines were deleted by the Censorship Board. When the film was released without the attractive routine, many customers

With CD rights being purchased for up to 2003 high of N300,000 (US\$ 2,143) and production budget of slightly more than that, the industry created an instant pool of relatively (to the general economy) wealthy producers. With no regular paying jobs and no other means of occupation, weaning them away from their newfound Midas deposits of *rawa da waka* would certainly take more than a moral crusade.

Thus my argument is that censorship was not motivated by the desire to protect the civil society from the excesses of creativity, but to protect sacred members of the civil society from creative scrutiny. In all the speeches both the culturalists and the Muslim scholar communities issued about sponsorship, there was no single textual reference to any film in terms of its storyline that could be labeled a threat to public morals. Indeed it was the vulgarity of the dance routines of *Rawar Salawaitu* in *Jahilici Ya Fi Hauka* that drew attention to the fact that the sacred can be profaned, and that Muslim marabouts can be portrayed as mundane, and consequently, fallible, as anyone else. Filmmakers had to be reigned and prevented from pursuing this dangerous angle because if left unchecked, it could erode the authority of the Mallam. The Shania's process of rebirth in a new political dispensation provided the perfect opportunity for censorship.

In situations where there was distinctly religious overtone to censorship, there were often reasons given which deal with deeper core philosophical issues of religious interpretation and the visual media. For instance, in Malaysia, Jim Carrey's *Bruce Almighty* (2003) was criticized by a Minister over its theme of representing God in a human form. Yet the Malaysian censors passed the film, and insisted that it was just a comedy (*The Star* Saturday 9 August 2003). If a film about Osama bin Laden, a mere mortal, could generate *fatwas* in mosques around Kano, then one would have imagined what reaction *Bruce Almighty* would have caused. Yet the pirated CD of *Bruce Almighty* became freely available in the CD stalls in Kano within two weeks after the world-wide release of the film in 2003. No one even noticed it, least of all the Kano State Censorship Board, despite their mandate of censoring all films in Kano (whether in Hausa or not).

Thus the problem of censorship in Kano is not that a regulatory mechanism exists – even the filmmakers themselves welcome some form of control. The main issue is lack of clarity on what to censure and why it should be censored. There is no written list of prohibited actions. Excising scenes—mainly dancing girls in revealing clothes, casual physical contact between the sexes, etc—are left at the discretion of the censor, rather than following specific Islamically-inspired guidelines.

complained to the producer with “Allah Ya isa” (“Allah is the disposer of my affairs”, indicating an injustice).

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