

Bosho War: 9/11, Global Media and Local Remediation in Muslim Northern Nigerian Video Films

Abdalla Uba Adamu
Department of Mass Communication
Bayero University, Kano, NIGERIA

Paper presented for “Remedializations of Global Events” workshop/conference, the University of Cologne, Germany, November 19-21, 2009,

Introduction

The media coverage of the Gulf War and the incidents of 9/11 has reterritorialized the event from a specific geographic location to an amorphous transnational arena where it is reworked and retranscribed for domestic consumption on sites far away from its origin, but brought closer by the media. The central figures in the two incidents, former Iraqi president, Saddam Hussain and Osama bin Laden of the Al-Qaeda network, were seen as heroes among the Muslims of particularly northern Nigeria. Posters, stickers and in the case Bin Laden, T-shirts were produced to celebrate the two central figures. Many newly born male babies were named Saddam and Osama in the period following the escalation of the incidents. This created further visibilities to the two figures and accentuates the role of media in mediating their acceptance as folk heroes in a political context different from their natural environments.

However, the most textual interpretation of the events – sourced from CNN and Middle Eastern satellite TV broadcasts, especially Al-Jazeera news channel – was the reenactment of the incident into two Hausa comedy video films. The first was *Ibro Usama* (dir. Auwalu Dare, 2002) while the second was *Ibro Saddam* (dir. Kabee Umar, 2003). Both the films are parodies which while giving a serious subject matter a light treatment, nevertheless communicate to the audience, principally the massive fan base of the actors Rabilu Musa Dan Ibro and Kulu the actors’ understanding of these global events.

This paper intertextually analyzes the intermedial shift of messaging from the satellite broadcasts of the event and its reworking into local African video dramas. In particular it looks at how the events leading to 9/11 – the Gulf War – as well as the incident were reenacted based on the transnational satellite imagery, and the re-interpretation of the textual messages of Osama bin Laden’s broadcasts – which yields an insight into how a global event is reworked for a domestic audience.

Wars in the Persian Gulf

Due to Iraqi support for various Arab and Palestinian militant groups such as Abu Nidal, the United States included Iraq in its list of state sponsors of international terrorism on 29 December 1979. The US remained officially neutral after the invasion of Iran by Iraqi forces and which became the Iran–Iraq War. In March 1982, however, Iran began a successful counteroffensive - Operation Undeniable Victory, and the United States increased its support for Iraq to prevent Iran from forcing a surrender. After the Iran-Iraq war ended in August 1988, Iraq however subsequently imitated a war with Kuwait on 2nd August 1990.

Ignoring a United Nation's Security Council deadline to leave Kuwait in 1991, Saddam Hussain faced a U.S.-led coalition Gulf War which launched round-the-clock missile and aerial attacks on Iraq, beginning January 1991 eventually ejecting Iraqi army from Kuwait in February 1991 and occupied the southern portion of Iraq, as well as sustaining economic sanctions on Iraq imposed when Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait.

Subsequently, U.S. officials continued to accuse Iraq of violating the terms of the Gulf War's cease fire, by developing weapons of mass destruction which included anthrax, nerve gas, nuclear weapons, and other banned weaponry. The Iraqi government repeatedly denied possessing these weapons. Isolated military strikes by U.S. and British forces continued on Iraq sporadically, the largest being Operation Desert Fox in 1998. Western charges of Iraqi resistance to UN access to suspected weapons were the pretext for crises between 1997 and 1998, culminating in intensive U.S. and British missile strikes on Iraq, 16-19 December 1998. The election of George W. Bush as US President in 2000 saw a more aggressive policy toward Iraq, and after two years of intermittent activity, U.S. and British warplanes struck harder at sites near Baghdad in February 2001.

While the events of the Gulf War were still bubbling in the news rooms, another incident loomed in the horizon. On the morning of 11th September 2001, 19 al-Qaeda operatives hijacked four commercial passenger jet airliners. The hijackers deliberately crashed two of the airliners into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. Another team of hijackers crashed a third airliner into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. The fourth plane crashed into a field near Shanksville in rural Pennsylvania, after some of its passengers and flight crew attempted to retake control of the plane, which the hijackers had redirected toward Washington, D.C. There were no survivors from any of the flights. Led by Osama Bin Laden, a radical Islamist trained by the US during the 1980s to conduct guerilla attacks against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda formed a large base of operations in Afghanistan, which had been ruled by the Islamist extremist regime of the Taliban since 1996.

Osama Bin Laden initially denied, but later admitted, involvement in the incidents through various podcasts. For instance, on September 16, 2001, bin Laden denied any involvement with the attacks by reading a statement which was broadcast by Qatar's Al Jazeera satellite channel: "I stress that I have not carried out this act, which appears to have been carried out by individuals with their own motivation." (Griffin, 2009, p. 28).

This denial was broadcast on U.S. news networks and worldwide. On December 27, 2001, in another podcast, Bin Laden states, "Terrorism against America deserves to be praised because it was a response to injustice, aimed at forcing America to stop its support for Israel, which kills our people" (Bergen, 2006, p. 370), but he stopped short of admitting responsibility for the attacks.

The United States responded to the attacks by launching a "War on Terror", invading Afghanistan to depose the Taliban, who had harbored al-Qaeda movement. The invasion began on 7th October, 2001. The stated aim was to locate Osama bin Laden and other high-ranking Al-Qaeda members and put them on trial, to destroy the whole

organizational structure of Al-Qaeda, and to remove the Taliban regime which supported and gave safe harbor to Al-Qaeda.

However, subsequent refusal of Iraq to disarm its alleged weapons of mass destruction as well as its support for terrorism as exemplified by the 9/11 incident served as triggers for another full scale US-led allied invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

War News and Medial Reproduction

The Persian Gulf Wars were heavily televised wars. For the first time people all over the world were able to watch live pictures of missiles hitting their targets and fighters taking off from aircraft carriers. Allied forces were keen to demonstrate the accuracy of their weapons.

In the United States, the “big three” networks of ABC, CBS and NBC led the network news coverage of the wars. Still, it was CNN which gained the most popularity for their coverage, and indeed its wartime coverage can be seen as one of the landmark events in the development of the network. Newspapers all over the world also covered the war and Time magazine published a special issue dated 28th January 1991, with the headline “War in the Gulf” emblazoned on the cover over a picture of Baghdad taken as the war began. At the same time, the coverage of the war was new in its instantaneousness. About halfway through the war, Iraq’s government decided to allow live satellite transmissions from the country by Western news organizations.

According to Jeanne Colleran (2003), re-echoing Paul Patton’s “Introduction” to Jean Baudrillard’s, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, the 1991 Gulf War was the first war in which images of the war were relayed live from the battlefield. The war became a “mediatized” (Colleran, 2003, p. 616) process through which public events were transformed through the media into commodities. Indeed as Darren G. Lilleker further argues, mediatization as a theory explains how the media shapes and frames the processes and discourses of political communication, as well as the society in which that communication takes place (Lilleker, 2008). Thus ‘from the moment the United States began military action against Iraq, television journalists and news anchors converted the war into a nightly (or in the case of CNN, constant) miniseries.’ (Colleran, 2003, p. 618).

As Colleran further argues, the spectacularity of the war coverage seems to provide stuffiest and comprehensive insight that need no further critical analysis. The nature of the coverage therefore becomes an endorsement. Indeed one could argue that the attackers used geopolitical strategies to further their cause in launching themselves from a low density media coverage market to one where the views and demands could be heard on a much larger scale. By providing the massive coverage of the events, it would appear that the US media has unwittingly given the perpetrators of the attacks a stage they needed. Further, one way in which the US may have aided in support of terrorists motives with media was the broadcasting and thus general publicity given to the messages sent by Bin Laden, obtained by whatever means necessary. By constantly relaying what he said, more spectacularity is given to the theater of events by the media. Consequently, by launching attacks against the US at the heart of media focus the attackers have found a weapon in one of the instruments of free society. Thus Jean Baudrillard (2002, p. 409) argued, the attackers, ‘also appropriated for themselves the very weapons of other dominant power – money, stock market

speculation, computer and aeronautics technologies, the specular dimensions and media networks. They have assimilated all of these from modernity and globalization without deviating from their goal, which is to destroy them.’

The media coverage of these events, with images on magazine covers and satellite TV news reels echoed around the world and gave Iraq the image of an underdog facing a massive onslaught from much more superior forces. In northern Nigeria, the traditional and transnational Hausa radio stations of BBC World Service, Voice of America (VOA), Radio France International (rfi), and Radio Iran (Hausa Section) provided ample translation of the events from agency reports. In particular, Radio Iran provided a more slanted interpretation of the events according to the ideological fault-lines of Sunni-Shiite divide in the Muslim world.

Thus the media coverage of the incidents of the Gulf War and War on Terror has re-mediatized and ‘co-territorialized’—through spontaneity of the messaging— the event from a specific geographic location to an amorphous transnational arena where it is reworked and restranscribed for domestic consumption on sites far away from its origin, but brought closer by the media; in essence, the events were “remedialized” at the local level.

Turning Away from Suffering: Film Production and 9/11

The reaction of the international film community, from both Hollywood and Bollywood, towards reenactment of the incidents preceding and including 9/11 were more muted – perhaps out of respect for the sheer catastrophic nature of the events for which they might be accused on cashing in. As Wheeler Winston Dixon (2004, p.3) noted,

In the days and weeks after 9/11, Hollywood momentarily abandoned the hyper violent spectacles that dominated mainstream late 1990s cinema. Films were temporarily shelved, sequences featuring the World Trade Center were recut, and “family” films were rushed into release or production, to offer the public escape from the horrors of 9/11.

Thus, as Quay and Damico (2010) further pointed out, Hollywood initially responded to the events of 9/11 by changing a number of its filmic productions out of concern that audiences would not be receptive to certain imagery soon after the attacks. At least 45 films were cancelled, altered, or delayed. Of particular concern were images of the Twin Towers, which were commonly included in films set in New York City; “after the attacks, the Twin Towers were quickly edited out of comedies.” (p. 174).

Thus for many years there were no major Hollywood features reflecting on the 9/11 incident. Most of the early spate of Hollywood films dealing with the theme were either TV documentaries, for instance, *9/11: The Twin Towers* (dir. Richard Dale, 2006) or acerbic docu-dramas such as *Fahrenheit 9/11* (dir. Michael Moore, 2004). The only major feature film were *World Trade Center* (dir. Oliver Stone, 2006) and *United 93* (dir. Paul Greengrass, 2006).

In India, the Indian film industry produced the first “conflict-commerce” (Mathias Krings, 2009, p, 31) film in the form of *Yun Hota To Kya Hota (What If....)*, (dir. Naseeruddin Shah, 2008). The story revolves around a group of people who were not connected to each other in anyway other than by ill fate. These were people from different parts of India who had travelled to the US and now were boarding the ill-fated flights which crashed into the Twin Towers and Pentagon on 9/11. The story tells

reenacts the horror of the hijack and some of the incidents that occurred on board during those horrific minutes. Some of the characters in the film died in the accident while some survived – thus reworking the original live script of the incident in which there were no survivors in the aircrafts.

Years later, in 2013, Kamal Hassan directed *Viswaroop* (Omnipresent) a Tamil spy thriller which shows a Muslim RAW agent plotting against a jihadi that wants to detonate a nuclear device in the heart of New York. Although others were produced in between, there was a studied effort on the parts of the major film industries to respect the events of 9/11 and avoided the theme altogether.

Nigerian Responses to the Media Screenplay

Whereas in the US and other parts of the world there were commemorations of the 9/11 incident, in parts of Nigeria there were *celebrations* of the event. In the process of the celebrations almost all variety of media were used – presenting perhaps the most focused intermedial interpretation of the event – and became part of the cultural industries targeted at youth. While avoiding the “Islam versus Western Civilization” debate, nevertheless it is necessary to provide a brief backdrop to why 9/11 was celebratory in Nigeria.

On 27 January 2000 Zamfara State re-enacted the first Shari’a Penal Code in Northern Nigeria. Shari’a courts had already been established earlier but were eclipsed by the increasingly secular nature of the Nigerian nation. The return to democracy gave Zamfara the courage to revisit the issue on the basis that it is the ‘wish of the people’ or more accurately, the campaign promise of the politicians to whip up Muslim sentiments and get massively elected.

The example of Zamfara was followed by other Nigerian States and included Niger (May 2000), Sokoto (May 2000), Kano (June 2000) Katsina (August 2000) Jigawa (August 2000), Yobe (October 2000), Kebbi (December 2000), Bauchi (March 2001), Borno (June 2001), Kaduna (November 2001). In December 2001 Gombe announced its intention to launch the Shari’a, but civil protests from Christian groups made it impossible. Similarly, Kwara State made the attempt to introduce Shari’a in November 2001 when some Muslims in the State forwarded a bill to the State House of Assembly, calling for the introduction of Shari’a. With the re-establishment of the Shari’a as well as the necessary instruments of enforcing the Shari’a, such as the Hisbah Corps in Kano (a group of over 9,000 volunteer Shari’a enforcers), it became clear that Islam has become further entrenched in the northern Nigerian public space.

In Nigeria, the first local interpretation of the 9/11 event was in the form of protests against US government led by the Kano State branch of the Nigerian Council of Ulama [Council of Islamic Scholars]. On 3rd October 2001 the Kano State Chairman of the Council, Sheikh Umar Ibrahim Kabo, announced at a press conference:

“Nigerian Muslims are not cowards, nor will they be intimidated to forsake a fellow Muslim brother in his hour of tribulation...all Muslims are bin Laden’s associates because they are against the double standards of the Americans in the Middle-East and developing countries generally.” (Kazaure 2001, online).

Muslim youth in both and southern parts of the country also protested. For instance, on 11th October 2001 a group of Muslim women marched through the streets of Kano

in northern Nigeria, protesting the US attack on Afghanistan. The following day, 12th October 2001 Kano erupted into a violent protest against the war when thousands of youth led a protest march after Friday prayers. In southern Nigeria, the National Council of Muslim Youths (NACOMYO) which was based in Ibadan, mobilized its members to protest the US action against Afghanistan on 6th November 2001.

By 19th October 2001 Osama bin Laden had become a folk hero in Kano, and his posters, downloaded from the Internet and culled from international news magazines became hot commodities. According to a news report:

One of the sellers of the portraits who simply called himself Abdulmumini told *Weekly Trust* that on a daily basis he sells between 150 and 200 copies of the portraits and that because of the excessive demand for the portraits, he had increased the price of the portraits from N50 to N100. He said in spite of the increase in price, there is still a mad rush for the portraits (Kazaure, 2001, online).

In Kano another dimension of the support for Osama bin Laden was reflected in the spate of naming babies after both Saddam and bin Laden. For instance, according to a BBC news report,

In Kano, one hospital worker said there was currently “a season of Osama babies.” “Osama Bin Laden is my hero,” said 36-year-old Sadiq Ahmed, father of a baby Osama. “My wife gave birth to our third child on 15 September and I named him Osama in honour of Osama Bin Laden who has proved to the world that only Allah is invincible, by exposing America to shame despite its claim of being the strongest nation on earth.” (BBC News, 2002).

The posters and later T-shirts became the first transmedial ports of the domestication of the events; although more emphasis was placed by the cultural production industries on the Afghan War and its dramatis personae. Subsequently, T-shirts (apparently produced outside Nigeria due to their high quality) with full face pictures of Osama bin Laden appeared in the second-hand clothing markets (“gwanjo”) in early 2002 and became in high demand particularly by migrant Islamic school pupils (almajirai). The posters of Osama bin Laden were later made into stickers and these adorned commercial motorcycles as well as the backs of commercial buses throughout northern Nigeria. Significantly, these “war poster industries” were subscribed predominantly by less-Western, but highly Islamic educated youth who see Osama bin Laden as an Islamic hero.

Reynolds and Barnett (2003) argued in this sense that CNN’s verbal and visual framing of 9/11 created higher visibility and subsequently made it possible for audiences away from the theater to adopt its iconography; for “to viewers the events of September 11 comprised an act of war so horrific that immediate military retaliation was not only justified but necessary.” (p. 86).

In all the posters, bin Laden was portrayed as romantic warrior, with his facial image having the same cult power as Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s face that became for millions of youth across the world from the 1960s when Alberto Korda’s photograph of him received wide distribution and modification, appearing on T-shirts, protest banners and in many other formats. The most romantic and photogenic of all Latin American revolutionaries Ernesto “Che” Guevara has, “ever since his death, been associated primarily with this single image” (Shaw and Dennison 2005, p. 193). As Karantonis

(2005, p. 29) noted, “in Latin America Che Guevara is a folk-hero, symbolizing revolution against forms of oppression and the landed elite, as well as championing attitudes against U.S. intervention in Latin American affairs.”

In a similar way Osama bin Laden became an icon of Islamist revolution in northern Nigeria in a “War against America”, giving him the same revolutionary cult status as Che Guevara. A comparison is shown in Plate 1.

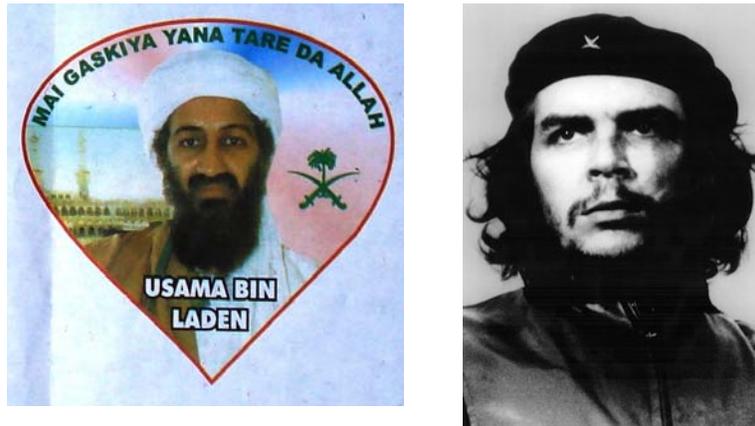


Plate 1 – Cult Revolutionaries: ‘Osama bin Guevara’

The poster of Osama bin Laden, downloaded from the Internet was over-layered on the background of the Grand Mosque in Makkah, and the Saudi Arabian symbol of crossed swords next a palm date tree. The slogan in the Bin Laden picture, “Mai Gaskiya Yana Tare da Allah” (He who holds on to the truth is surely with Allah) is intended to portray the almost prophetic qualities of bin Laden.

The imagery of Osama bin Laden and Che Guevara shared similar fates in the different communities they existed. Bin Laden, like Che Guevara was a political figure, but also the focus of a pop culture following among Muslim northern Nigerians, just like Che was an icon for 1960s youth in North America and Western Europe.

While posters, stickers and T-shirts of the 9/11 incident became the immediate first ports of call for intermedial shift of the imageries of the incident – shifting locations from newsreels to physical cultural production media – visual reenactment of the incident was slower, as at the international level. The Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, vied with Kano-based Hausa film industry, Kanywood, to produce the first film of the event.¹ The first film, however, was from Nollywood in 2002 and was *Osama bin La* (dir. Mac-Collins Chidebe, 2002). It was in Igbo language and created furor in Kano over its portrayal of Osama bin Laden as a crook and fraudster. Plate 2 shows the video’s poster.

¹ The two industries as religiously and ethnically divided as the Nigerian nation itself. Nollywood is based on Christian English-language films mainly produced and directed by the Igbo. The themes of such film is usually pan-African dealing with crime, ritual magic, corruption and urban sphere. Kanywood is based in Kano, in the North and deals with romantic themes of love and relationships. The more commercial and successful Kanywood draws its cinematic inspiration—appropriation really—from direct Hindi films or are inspired by Hindi films.



Plate 2: Osama Bin Igbo...Nigerian Igbo version (2002)

Kano Government security agencies were concerned 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 Laden 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.²

This constant barrage of news items on 9/11 or ‘visual framing’ provided the Kanywood Hausa film industry in northern Nigeria with opportunities of reworking the events in two films—*Ibro Usama* (dir. Auwalu Dare, 2002) followed almost immediately by *Ibro Saddam* (dir. Kabeer Munir, 2003). Both were comedies also as was Igbo *Osama bin La*. Hausa filmmakers therefore focused attention on the historical narrative of the events, tracing the roots of the incidence. I will analyze the films framing my analysis within the context of intertextual felicity of the news coverage of the events and the plot of the films. The posters of the two films are shown in Plate 3.

² Based in fieldwork and interviews with Alhaji Abdulkadir A. Kurawa, then Executive Secretary of the Kano State Censorship Board, 23 April, 2002.

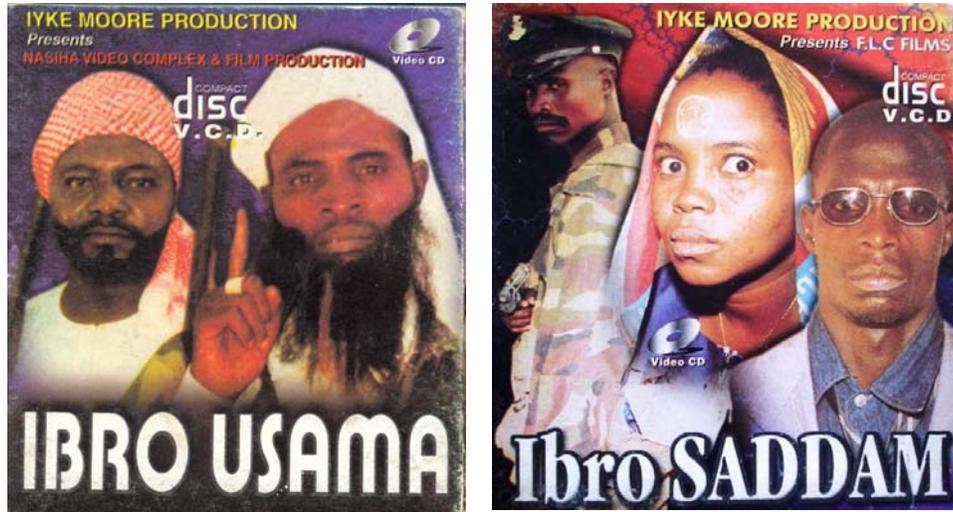


Plate 3: Prepping up for War on Insolence – 9/11 in Hausa Video Films

***Ibro Usama* and “War on Insolence” (“Yaki da Fitsara”)**

Both *Ibro Usama* and *Osama Bin La* were released within few months of each other in 2002. And since the pattern of production of the Ibro series of films – called chamama genre – is based on cheap productions, I would suggest that *Ibro Usama* was a counterpoint to Christian *Osama Bin La*. For while the latter would seem to ridicule Osama Bin Laden, the latter remained faithful to Bin Laden’s podcasts on the Internet – thus giving a more accurate script of Bin Laden’s motives and philosophies.

The two Hausa 9/11 films followed a reserved order in reenacting the Gulf Wars. For instance, *Ibro Usama* was supposed to cover the invasion of Afghanistan by US troops, an event that happened in October 2001. The film was released in early 2002. *Ibro Saddam*, on the other hand covered the incidents of the first Gulf war in 2003. While the two films were independently made, they do complement each other in providing a historical reconstruction of the Gulf War and the War on Terror.

Ibro Usama (retaining the Hausanized version of Osama’s name) details the American war against Afghanistan and the comedic antics both sides went through to execute the war. The theme of the film was a declaration of “War on Insolence” (Yaki da Fitsara) declared by George “Bosho”. Even George Bush’s name was altered to refer to “Bosho” a Hausa word that means “to hoodwink”. The filmmakers’ metaphorical use of the Bush’s onomatopoeic Bosho conveys George Bush—and the whole War on Terror—as hoodwinking or deception. The opening montage of the film shows buildings being blown up – a clear simulation of the Twin Towers being destroyed.

The War on Insolence was declared on enemies the United States previously perceived as friends – consequently the attack on the US was seen as insolence of the attackers on their former mentors. As declared by George Bosho when addressing his war cabinet on the justification for the “War on Fitsara” at the opening of the film:

“We are the best nation in peaceful co-existence, natural resources and politics. Today, this morning, we are faced with a threat from a group of people who were our slaves. This is terrorism, or more clearly, insolence! I am ready to investigate and punish those responsible for

this...Because I was democratically elected, it became imperative to seek your counsel before taking any decision on this. By a show of hands, I want to know who are behind me on this War on Insolence (Yaki da Fitsara)?" (My translation of the Hausa voice-script).

Bin Laden himself was depicted as bumbling revolutionary with little game plan but constantly relying on prayers to Allah to help him fight his enemies. When asked by a journalist about his level of preparedness to meet the onslaught of allied forces, the Hausa version of Osama Bin Laden replied:

"Excellent! Excellent. Are you listening?!? Since we have fully exercised, we are ready for war. No Retreat, no surrender! One martyr is equal to 1000 men of Boshu's troops! (Allahu Akbar! Allah is Great!) When you engage the enemy don't be alone – be in pairs or in threes. (Allahu Akbar! Allah is Great)"

The Hausa War on Insolence in the film is heavily influenced by media images from newsreels including buildings being blown up and helicopter gunship attacks (all culled from the Internet and pirated DVDs of conventional films). Although the script for this comedic reference to the real War on Terror was poorly written, yet Hausa *Ibro Usama* shows how the filmmakers perceive the war and conveyed it to their publics. In a shuttle diplomacy initiative, the Secretary of State, unusually accompanied by a bumbling British "prime minister" had the task of convincing allied nations to join the US in the War on Insolence. In almost every diplomatic initiative, the US was depicted to resorting to either blackmail, arm-twisting or outright corruption to convince the allies join it in War on Terror. Although the allies are eventually convinced to join the war efforts, they always insist on a valid proof that indeed there was a justification for the war. The film's central message was that the War on Terror was declared without sufficient proof that it was initiated by the countries allegedly behind the initial terror attacks.

These points were lost on northern Nigerian Muslim scholar establishment who seized every opportunity to condemn the film and its makers for taking a light-hearted look at a serious, and to them, Islamic, subject matter; consequently, the film was perceived as 'playing with Islam' and not showing enough respect to Osama bin Laden's jihadist motives. 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. Public reaction was also acerbic. A typical example is this letter to the editor of a Hausa popular culture magazine, *Fim* (sic), in Kaduna, northern Nigeria:

What is deluding Rabilu Musa (Dan Ibro) such that in his jesterings he is now including Islam. Does he think he can insult Saints of Allah and get away? Those who have amassed stupendous wealth, have declared total submission to Allah, his Prophet and his religion – and yet they are the subject of jokes in Hausa films? If you don't understand, I am referring to the film *Ibro Usama*. I swear by Allah if (Rabilu Musa Dan Ibro) continues to play with Islam, we will pray to Allah to destroy him at once. (Abubakar Aminu, Letter to Editor, Film Magazine, Kaduna, Nigeria, August 2002, 3; my translation of the Hausa original).

The producers of the film were, however, trenchant in their stand concerning their portrayal of Osama Bin Laden; for they see in their interpretation a more accurate

reading of his motives than that of the public sphere, represented by the letter writer, expected. As the producer of the film stated:³

“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 him 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, 22, my translation of the Hausa original).

While this statement is apparently made in the spirit of Islamic patriotism—and to be interpreted within the context of Shari’a in northern Nigeria—nevertheless it could also be interpreted as a loaded messaging encouraging the actions of the real Osama 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 video film industry.

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, the town of Wudil in Kano (where the cast and crew of *Ibro Usama* were based) and the State of Kaduna. The principal character in the film, Rabilu Musa Danlasan, who played the role of Osama bin Laden, 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, 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.

***Ibro Saddam* and “Non-Clear” Weapons Inspection**

The second Hausa video film, *Ibro Saddam* was released in early 2003, and since it was too early for the film to capture the invasion of Iraq in the same year, it provided a sort of prequel to *Ibro Usama*, by going back to the initial Gulf War and providing a historical tapestry on which to weave its plot, as well as enable an understanding of the events in *Ibro Usama*.

The film starts with the Saddam character, Ibro Saddam, engaging on a series of humanitarian activities that establish his personality and acceptance among his people. The first of such montages was where he rescues a homeless person from the bush (and bush is a significant metaphor for George Bush, the American president),

³ In the Hausa video film industry, the producer has more powers of creative interpretation of the script than the director, who has to do the film the way the producer envisages it, or drop out of the project.

who is a Christian, and brings him to his home and teaches him basic tenets of decent living. However, one of Ibro Saddam's sheikhs counsels him on helping "Jews and Christians" as "masu hikima" (those who are crafty) saying Muslims should avoid association with Jews and Christians. The Saddam character insists on doing his to help those who are downtrodden or less fortunate enough to be within the fold of Islam. Thus right away the Saddam character interprets a life-mission of Islam as a more humane way of living..

This homeless Christian emigrates to the United States and subsequently becomes "George Kulu Bush", the US President—the name 'bush' being given to him because he was rescued from a bush by Saddam. The first thing Bush does is to declare war on Ibro Saddam, his former savior. Thus the subsequent war on Iraq, according to this montage, is brought about by *Ibro Saddam* because of his befriending "Jews and Christians." This montage subsequently explores the political relationship between US and Iraq in which US considers Iraq an ally before things soured.

The second montage shows the Saddam character entering a household where a widower is comforting her children who are crying because of hunger. The Saddam character chides her for not reporting her poor status to an agency created to assist women in her situation, and proceeds to give her money to purchase food items. Next he is shown severely punishing a villager who was mistreating his goat, as another show of his compassion to all in his domain – both human and animal. In the end, the villager thanks Ibro Saddam for his compassion even to animals.

However, within Ibro Saddam's inner cabinet are those who believe that the best way any society would progress is through corruption and spying on each other – and they argue that although Ibro Saddam is almost saint-like in his endeavors to uplift the living standards of his people, it is because he is naïve and has not tasted corruption.

The film uses a series of outside shots lifted directly from news reels of the city of Baghdad to create the illusion of being shot in Baghdad, even though the main characters themselves are always seen in typical "urban villages" – villages that metamorphosed into prosperous peri-urban centers – of northern Nigeria. The actual settings for all "Ibro" series of films is Wudil, a peri-urban town about 47 km from the city of Kano.

On the other side of the world, the poster of "George Kulu Bush" who is shown as a supporter of Ibro Saddam now wants to get rid of him, appears on walls. This is the same George Kulu Bush that Ibro Saddam rescues from life of penury and religious ignorance (by giving him wealth). In short George Kulu Bush becomes the president of the United States on the basis of his hatred of Ibro Saddam. There were scenes shown of how the members of the public sphere hate the new president on the basis of his aggression towards Ibro Saddam, and fears that the reprisals would have far reaching consequences.

After being elected as the President of the United States, George Kulu Bush has two carefully chosen convicted criminals brought to him for briefing. The first is a rapist, while the second admits to violently killing a woman and her children. Their crimes impresses Kulu Bush so much that he appoints the rapist as director of intelligence services and mandates him to go to Arab countries and spy on their mineral resources,

particularly oil “wanda su ka fi mu” (which they have more than us). He appoints the convicted murder as his the head of his personal security mandating him to destroy anyone who even approaches him – thus creating the image of a paranoid president who appoints only criminals to positions of power and responsibility.

After two years during which the Americans had bombed Afghanistan, the director of intelligence reports that after Afghanistan the US should look for a country that would be swatted like a fly so that the US can take what it wants, particularly mineral resources like oil. President Kulu welcomes this idea and suggests swatting Ibro Saddam (although the actor slipped his lines in the dialogue as says “Saddam Hussain”). The first step is to send an inspection team to uncover any weapons that Ibro Saddam might have stockpiled which will give the US army enough justification to attack Iraq and arrest Ibro Saddam or preferably kill him by any means. Two strategies are suggested – first to use the media to turn the world against Ibro Saddam; and second to bombard Iraq. The ultimate aim, though, is to weaken Iraq as a nation, get rid of Ibro Saddam and acquire the oil fields of Iraq for Americans, and appoint a stooge president who will kowtow to American will and wishes. This is revealed as part of a larger world domination strategy; for after obliterating Iraq, the next target is Syria. The task of this investigation is given to the United Nations because “it is ours, and when it investigates, it will only tell us the truth”.

Subsequently, the United Nations is sent to Ibro Saddam. The UN represented by a female actress – itself symbolic because the Hausa translation of United Nations, or “majalisar dinkin duniya” (the assembly of uniting the world) is feminine – who accuses Ibro Saddam of forming “majalisar barke duniya” (the assembly of splitting the world”). In fact this gender dimension is brought out in a heated argument between Ibro Saddam and United Nations where he says he understands the UN insistence on inspections of his country for weapons of mass destruction but does not have to agree; whereupon UN insists he has to accept the decisions of the body. Ibro Saddam then points out that he is only being merciful to her because she is a woman – otherwise he would have destroyed her. However, in the end, Ibro Saddam agrees to the inspection because he has nothing to hide.

In this acquiescence, coupled with the earlier scenes of Kulu Bush ordering the UN to carry out weapons inspection because the United States “owns the United Nations” *Ibro Saddam* reflects a masculine understanding of the ineffectiveness of UN, and further affirms that the UN is merely carrying out a US agenda in Ibro Saddam’s territory.

Subsequently a bumbling team of inspectors is sent from UN to Ibro Saddam’s territory who go about fumbling, stumbling and generally mumbling about search for weapons and getting increasingly frustrated as they did not find any – principally because they are not even sure what to look for, or what it would be when they actually see it, even though they have the full co-operation of the locals. For instance, at one site, the chief inspector declares to the site’s owners that they are here to search for “non-clear weapons.” (and uttered in English, rather than Hausa). This play on “nuclear” to “non-clear” further reflects an understanding of how ineffective the inspections were in finding the evidence Kulu Bush wants in order to invade Iraq. They also declare they are looking for “ant-rest”, another play on “anthrax”; and “Uranium” becomes “re-union”. At another inspection site, the team leader insists on

“investigating” a woman (who is clothed in full hijab, the Muslim female dressing) in a private room – to the protestations of both the woman and his own troop commander. It would appear this is introduced as a further reflection of the defilement of the sacred territory that is pure (even the hijab worn by the woman is pure white) – all in efforts to give a dog a bad name. In the end, they found nothing worth reporting, and the film flounders to the end.

Conclusion

In this essay I have looked at the “mediatization” of a series of political communication broadcasts in the form of newsreels and looked at how these were reworked by the Muslim Hausa of northern Nigeria as local versions of the events. Although there are other forms of cultural production, I focus only on video films. It is significant that the Nigerian film industry would appear to be the first to produce feature films on 9/11 – releasing two films in 2002 (Osama Bin La, *Ibro Usama*) and one in 2003 (*Ibro Saddam*) – although the latter is a prequel. Mainstream film industries, particularly Hollywood and Bollywood seemed to have waited for what might be understood as a “decent time interval” of at least five years before producing full feature films on the incident – and even then, there very few.

The two Hausa 9/11 films were entirely assembled from CNN, Al-Jazeera and BBC World free-to-air satellite stations available in northern Nigeria, coupled with Hausa translations of world news from Hausa services of BBC World Service, Voice of America, Radio France International (rfi), Deutsche Welle and Radio Tehran. The events portrayed in the films reflect not only an understanding of the chronology of the gulf wars and their subsequent consequences, but also a somewhat neutral take on the wars themselves. The two films did not set out to either condemn or praise, but to visualize a script read by news commentators across the world—creating a remedial reworking of a very tragic sequence of events.

References

- Baudrillard, J. (2002). L' esprit du terrorisme. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*. 101(2): 403-415.
- BBC News (2002). Osama baby craze hits Nigeria. Thursday, 3 January, 2002. Online edition.
- Bergen, P. L. (2006). *The Osama bin Laden I know: An oral history of al-Qaeda's leader*. New York: Free Press.
- Colleran, J. (2003). Disposable wars, disappearing acts: Theatrical responses to the 1991 Gulf War. *Theatre Journal*, 55 (2003): 613–632.
- Dixon, W. W. (2004). Introduction. “Something Lost - Film after 9/11.” In W. W. Dixon (Ed.). *Film and Television after 9/11*. (pp. 1-24). Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. 1-24
- Griffin, D. R. (2009). *Osama bin Laden: Dead or alive?*. Northampton, Mass: Olive Branch Press.
- Karantonis, A. (2005). *Perspectives of an iconoclast: Writings in Latin American studies & international relations*. Victoria, B.C: Trafford
- Kazaure, M. U. (2001). Kano ulama declare support for Bin Laden. *Weekly Trust*, 5th October 2001, AllAfrica.com online edition.
- Kazaure, M.U. (2001). Price of Bin Laden's portraits hikes. *Weekly Trust*, 19th October 2001, AllAfrica.com online edition.
- Krings, M. (2009). Marke „Osama“ Über kommunikation und kommerz mit Bin-Laden-Bildern in Nigeria. *Peripherie* Nr. 113, 29. Jg. 2009, Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot, Münster, S. 31-55.
- Lilleker, D. G. (2008). *Key concepts in political communications*. London: SAGE.
- Reynolds, A., & Barnett, B. (2003). America under attack: CNN's verbal and visual framing of September 11. In S. M. Chermak, F. Y. Bailey, & M. Brown (Eds.), *Media representations of September 11*. (pp. 85-101). Westport, Conn: Praeger.

Shaw, L., & Dennison, S. (2005). *Pop culture Latin America!: Media, arts, and lifestyle*. Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO.

Filmography

- Dale, Richard. 2006. *9/11: The Twin Towers*. United States: Dangerous Films.
- Dare, Auwalu. 2002. *Ibro Osama*. Gashuwa, Nigeria: Nasiha Video Complex Film Production.
- Greengrass, Paul. 2006. *United 93*. United States: Universal Pictures.
- More, Michael. 2004. *Fahrenheit 9/11*. United States: Fellowship Adventure Group.
- Munir, Kabeer. 2003. *Ibro Saddam*. Kano, Nigeria: FLL Films
- Chidebe, Mac-Collins. 2002. *Osama Bin La*. Nigeria: Jesus Team Productions
- Shah, Naseeruddin. 2006. *Yun Hota To Kya Hota*. 2006. India: C.A.T. Productions
- Stone, Oliver. 2006. *World Trade Center*. United States: Paramount Pictures.