Youth and Popular Culture in northern Nigeria

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

Paper delivered at the Hausa der Kulturen der Welt/House of World Cultures, Berlin Germany, on Thursday 6th September, 2015.

Background and Context of Northern Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is made up of 36 States, plus a central Federal Capital Territory that acts as the capital of the nation. Out of these 36 states, 19 are seen as 'northern Nigeria'

While to most outsiders northern Nigeria might appear a single entity, from the inside it is a conglomeration of diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. The reason for its seeming monolithic social structure is the binding force of Islam, as well as Hausa language, the common lingua franca. Nigeria has more than 51% Muslim population, and most of this population is located in the north. Despite this dominance of Islam, however, out of the 19 Northern states, at least five have a majority Christian population: Plateau, Adamawa, Nassarawa, Taraba and Benue. At least six more have at least 40% Christian population. These states include Niger, Gombe, Kaduna, Kogi, Kwara and Borno. This then leaves Bauchi, Kano, Kebbi, Katsina, Jigawa, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara as having Muslim populations above 80-95%.

Despite the dominance of Islam in these areas, however, they had retained their distinct African identities in terms of food, clothing and social behaviors. This is because they do not equate Islam with Arabism. Islam came to the north of Nigeria in 13th century, and the path of conversion of the Hausa to Islam was not through Arabs, but through contact with other Africans, especially the Wangara from the empire of Mali.

Two features of Islam are essential to understanding its place in Nigerian society. They are the degree to which Islam permeates other institutions in the society, and its contribution to Nigerian pluralism. As an institution in emirate society of northern Nigeria ruled by Emirs, Islam includes daily and annual ritual obligations; the pilgrimage to Mecca; sharia, or religious law; and an establishment view of politics, family life, communal order, and appropriate modes of personal conduct in most situations. Thus Islam pervaded daily life. Public meetings began and ended with Muslim prayer, and everyone knew at least the minimum Arabic prayers and the five pillars of the religion required for full participation. Public adjudication (by local leaders with the help of religious experts, or Alkali courts) provided widespread knowledge of the basic tenets of sharia law-- the Sunni school of law according to Malik ibn Anas, the jurist from Medina, was that primarily followed. Sunni (from Sunna), or orthodox Islam, is the dominant sect in Nigeria and most of the Muslim world. The other sect is Shia Islam, which holds that the caliphs or successors to the Prophet should have been his relatives rather than elected individuals.

Every settlement had at least one place set aside for communal prayers. In the larger settlements, mosques were well attended, especially on Fridays when the local administrative and chiefly elites

led the way, and the populace prayed with its leaders in a demonstration of communal and religious solidarity. Gaining increased knowledge of the religion, one or more pilgrimages to Mecca for oneself or one's wife, and a reputation as a devout and honorable Muslim all provided prestige. Those able to suffuse their everyday lives with the beliefs and practices of Islam were deeply respected.

The nineteenth-century jihad that founded the Sokoto Caliphate was a regenerative and proselytizing movement within the community of the faithful. In major centers in 1990, the Sufi brotherhoods supported their own candidates for both religious and traditional emirate offices. These differences were generally not disruptive. Islamic activist preachers and student leaders who spread ideas about a return to extreme orthodoxy also existed. In addition, a fringe Islamic cult, known as the Maitatsine, started in the late 1970s and operated throughout the 1980s, springing up in Kano around a mystical leader (since deceased) from Cameroon who claimed to have had divine revelations superseding those of the Prophet. The cult had its own mosques and preached a doctrine antagonistic to established Islamic and societal leadership. Its main appeal was to marginal and poverty-stricken urban in-migrants, whose rejection by the more established urban groups fostered this religious opposition. These disaffected adherents ultimately lashed out at the more traditional mosques and congregations, resulting in violent outbreaks in several cities of the north.

Although there are many ethnic and linguistic groups, the two largest ethnic groups in northern Nigeria are the Hausa and the Fulani. The Hausa came to this region about 1,000 years ago, establishing villages that later grew into important trading centers and, eventually, kingdoms. During the 1200s, the Fulani, who migrated from further West Africa, also began to settle in northern Nigeria. Both the Hausa and the Fulani are predominantly Muslim

Over time, people from both ethnic groups married and created a connected culture. As a result, some people refer to the two groups as the Hausa-Fulani. However, there are distinct differences between these two ethnic groups, including language. About a third of Nigerians speak the Hausa language, whereas traditional Fulani speak Fulfulde, a less common language.

The two ethnic groups also differ in where they live. The Hausa people tend to be more **urban**. In contrast, most of the Fulani people still live in **rural** areas, traveling with their cattle herds during the dry season to search for grazing land. During the rainy season, the Fulani live in villages and plant crops.

Fig. 1. Nigeria and Northern Nigeria

Youth and Popular Culture in northern Nigeria

The first visible foray of youth in popular culture in northern Nigeria was in 1980 when Hausa language novellas were published. The first novella was written by a woman, Hafsat AbdulWaheed, who wrote *So Aljannar Duniya* (Love, the Spirit of the World). The novel provided a catalytic factor in the development of Hausa prose fiction, in that it did away with the Fulani *pulaaku* (traditional Fulani mindset) and introduces a brash, assertive, loud and anti-establishment heroine, Boɗaɗo, who armed with a degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences, came back to her village to set up a drug store and introduce her fiancé—all un-lady like behaviors in the Fulani mindset. Thus she discarded munyal (self-control), semteende (modesty) and hakkillo (wisdom)—central components of pulaaku—and declared, openly, her love for an "alien" (non-Fulani suitor).

The success of *So Aljannar Duniya* seemed to have sent a message to potential literati to pick up their pens and set to work—thus spawning a genre which the organizers of the competition that produced the novel did not envisage, or desire.

Further, the combined effects of harsh economic realities of 1980s (the decade of coups and counter-coups in Nigeria) ensured reduced parental responsibility in the martial affairs of their children. Therefore, fantasy, media parenting from especially Bollywood Hindi films, anti-authority and a loud persistent message from bursting testosterones in a conservative society that sees strict gender separation, combined to present Hausa youth with *soyayya* (romance) as the central template for creative fiction. It was a safety valve to repressed sexuality. In particular Hindi cinema played a strong role in providing inspiration for first Hausa novelists, and later Hausa video dramatists. With no one to assess and publish their manuscripts, the young Hausa prose writers in northern Nigeria had no alternative than to privately publish their books themselves.

The themes — voicing out a choice of whom to marry, engaging in wily blackmail to obtain what they want, and aggressive pursuit of contemporary education — are all counter-reality to Muslim Hausa socio-cultural pattern which insists on getting a girl married off as soon as she becomes "biologically" mature, and to her parent's choice.

Kano State, with its huge and well-established commercial networks, coupled with its enhanced urban culture, became the main center for the production of the new literature. It is indeed for this reason that the new Hausa novels were contemptuously referred by critics as *Adabin Kasuwar Kano* (Kano Market Literature) — alluding to their market-driven nature, rather than structural flair and intellectual panache.

This was probably the first 'feminist' Hausa novel in the sense that the main protagonist against an established tradition in choosing the person she wants to marry instead of being bundled off to an arranged marriage. This opened the floodgates to other novellas that emerged that eventually came to be termed Kano Market Literature due to their market driven nature. By 2000 there were more than 1,300 Hausa language youth-based novels circulating in northern Nigeria.

Film and Youth Popular Culture

When video technology became easily affordable in late 1980s, many of the Hausa language novelists crossed over to the video film medium, converting their novels into drama scripts, although the early Hausa video films were produced by drama clubs who were motivated by the popularity of films shown on TV and started staging their own productions. The first Hausa video film produced was *Turmin Danya* in 1990. It hailed the beginning of a massive revolution in Hausa popular culture. Hitherto films had been the staple fare of TV stations showing soap operas sponsored predominantly by companies that produce and market essentially domestic products (food items, clothing, bedding etc.). Subsequently because of this domestic focus of Hausa TV operas, they tend to appeal predominantly to house-bound women. By 2003 the TV stations in Kano had shown 1,176 Hindi films.

Further, this availability of the Hindi cinema releases shown on television merely consolidated the gains of the popularity Hindi cinema in Kano from mid 1970s to late 1980s where the cinema going culture had been well-established since 1950s. The new audience for this home-based

entertainment were youth aged 12-25, and urbanite housewives of all ages who avidly followed the Hindi films, especially the songs. This mirror's the actual Hindi film audience.

The idea of forced marriage in Hausa social life was so shared with Hindi films that it became easy for Hausa audiences, especially women who are most affected, to identify with the travails of women in forced marriage situations in Hindi films. They were already familiar with this concept in the Hausa language novels they had been reading.

By August 1999 a term, 'Kanywood' had been created to label the Hausa video film industry. It was only in 2001 that an article in *The New York Times* (16th September) created a label for the Nigerian film industry, calling it 'Nollywood'. Thus both as an industry and a tag, Hausa video films precede Nigerian films; for the first historically acknowledged kick-starter for the Nigerian Nollywood film industry was *Living in Bondage* (dir. Chris Obi Rapu) released in 1992 – two years after *Turmin Danya* was released in Kano.

In 1999 Sarauniya Films Kano released the catalytic video film that literally shaped the direction of the industry. It was *Sangaya* (dir. Aminu Mohammed Sabo). It was, like most Hausa youth literature, mainly a love story. It was not the story that was significant about the film, however, but soundtrack of the video and its song and dance routine backed by a synthesized sound samples of traditional Hausa instruments such as *kalangu* (talking drum), *bandiri* (frame drum) and *sarewa* (flute). The effect was electric on a youth audience seeking alternative and globalized—essentially modern—means of being entertained than the traditional music genre which seemed aimed at either rural audience or older urbanites. It became an instant hit. Indeed, the success Sangaya was as momentous in the history of the Hausa video film industry as *Living in Bondage* was for the southern Nigerian video films.

By 2007 Hausa video films came to be based virtually directly on Hindi film templates, while in many cases, the films were direct remakes or appropriations of famous Hindi films. Hindi films became a more acceptable template for Hausa video films more than American or European films because of three reasons.

The first motif in Hausa home video film is *auren dole*, or forced marriage. In these scenarios a girl (or in a few of the films, a boy) is forced to marry a partner other than their choice.

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 the diaspora, often leading to honor killings if family members suspect a daughter (rarely a son) has violated the family honor by co-habiting (no matter how defined) 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. Since it is a strong social message, Hindi filmmakers had to embellish their messaging with a strong dose of song and dance routines to create a bigger impact on the audience.

The second characteristic of Hausa video films is the love triangle—with or without the forced marriage motif. In this format, a narrative conflict indicating rivalry between two suitors (whether two boys after the same girl, or two girls after the same boy) is created in which the antagonists

are 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. The fierce rivalry is best expressed through long song and dance routines, which indeed often tell the story more completely than the character dialogues of the drama. This closely echoes Hindi films where this is a strong creative theme. Young Hausa film makers thus use the video media to express their rebellion at the tyranny of the Hausa traditional system that denies them choices of partners, and at worst, favors arranged marriages.

The third characteristic of the Hausa home video is the 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". Indeed, in many of the videos, the songs themselves became sub-plots of the main story in which poetic barbs are thrown at each other by the antagonists. Indeed the strongest selling point for a new release of Hausa home video is hinged on a trailer that captures the most captivating song and dance scenes, not the strength of the storyline (which remains the same love triangle in various formations). 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. It is the raw sexuality expressed by especially actresses during these song and dance routines that draw the ire of the Islamicate public. In Islam the female herself is a private sphere, since there are strict rules governing her dressing—which has a range depending on the cultural climate of the community.

Enter the Shari'a (Islamic Law)

The return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999 after years of military dictatorship brought with it new forms of corporate freedoms that saw individual states in the north of Nigeria reviving their suppressed Islamic traditions of governance. These Islamic traditions were previously subsumed under the general political culture of Military dictatorship. Most politicians in the north of Nigeria, on the verge of elections in 1999 used the Shari'a as their main selling point in getting Muslim electorates to vote for them. On winning the elections, Shari'a was firmly established in nine States of the north (Zamfara, Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kebbi, and Yobe). This created a massive political furor, including riots in States where there is a significant Christian population (Kaduna, Niger and Gombe) and perhaps unwittingly planted the seeds to the subsequent insurgency in especially the north of Nigeria.

The introduction of Shari'a penal law in a country that had not done so throughout its independence from British colonial rule since 1960 raises questions about the role of Islamic "fundamentalism," anti-Western attitudes, and stability not only in Nigeria but in West Africa as a whole.

Within Nigeria, there were mixed reactions: the decision to adopt Shari'a penal law appeared tremendously popular among Muslims in those states, who responded to both deeply held religious views and popular frustration with growing crime and other aspects of social and economic decline. On the other hand, Nigerian Christians living in those states were alarmed, fearing their rights would be restricted and that they would even be driven out of the area.

The clash between popular culture, mediated by youth, and Islamic authorities was the establishment of two agencies, especially in Kano, the nerve center of popular cultural production in northern Nigeria.

The first agency was the Hisbah Board. Hisbah, which is an Arabic word meaning an act performed for the good of the society, is an Islamic religious concept that calls for "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong on every Muslim." This was enforced by the Hisbah Corps who patrol the city to ensure the enforcement of morally accepted behaviors by Muslims.

The first and main points of clash between the Islamic Hisbah and public was with regards to popular culture where the Hisbah perceived popular culture practitioners as being anti-Islamic in behavior and dressing. This was actually caused by the more transnational orientations of particularly Hausa video films, where actors and particularly actresses appear in simply Western dresses, dancing and singing in such ways that would seem to titillate particularly young people. The Hisbah took it upon themselves to ban any mixed gender gathering of young people. Consequently, film shows and concerts were banned; and in cases where practitioners insist on holding such, the Hisbah took steps to disrupt such events. The fundamental reason for doing so was the assumption that once mixed genders meet, immorality is likely to take place. Since the Hisbah was established a s moral police, it is thought best to prevent such events happening, rather than to wait until they happen and immorality takes place.

To support the Hisbah moral activities, the Kano State government established a Kano State Censorship Board which was charged with the responsibilities of censoring creative works – music, films, literature, performance, cinema exhibitions – to ensure that cultural production was done in line with Islamic tenets.

At the beginning of the Shari'a many practitioners conformed to the Hisbah and Censorship Board moral mandates. This was principally because they do not want to be seen as being un-Islamic, especially as the predominant arguments by the authorities was that these restrictions were placed in order to strengthen Islam in the society. This forced many of the popular culture practitioners to leave Kano.

Those who remained behind created a new style of Hausa poplar music which was more Islamic. This was Hausa Islamic Sufi music, centered around songs in the praise of the Prophet Muhammad and the veneration of the Sheikhs of the two main Sufi movements in Kano—the Qadiriyya and the Tijjaniyya. These musicians remained untouched by the Censorship Board due to the religious nature of their lyrics—which the Islamicate governance and publics finds acceptable. The most prominent of these Islamic devotional singers included Rabi'u Usman Baba (*Babu Tantama*), Bashir Ɗan Musa (*Salli Ala*), Bashir Ɗandago (*Sannu Uwar Sharifai*), Kabiru Ɗandogarai (*Ɗandogarai*), Kabiru Maulana (*Kabiru Maulana*), Sharif Saleh Jos (*Sheikh Ibrahim Inyass*) and Naubatul Qadiriyya (*Sheikh Mustapha Nasir Kabara*).

Thus using the same studios and musicians as used by the video film industry, Islamic poets took over the gap in visual entertainment by recording and releasing (after censoring) Islamic poetic songs, complete with male and female singers—and dancing. However, everyone was properly

dressed, including the girls, with long hijab (Islamic face covering), and gentle swaying to the chorus, rather than to the music; precisely what the Censorship Board in all its incarnations had always insisted. Two of the biggest Sufi VCDs in Kano were *Rayuwa* (This Life) and *Ba Kame Muka Zo Ba* (We're not here to arrest you, dir. Salisu S. Bas, 2009). The latter was unusual in the sense of being sung by a sergeant in the Nigeria Police, complete with police uniform and backing vocals sung by two hijab-clad young girls. The lead vocalist, Tijjani Mohammed Milla, calls himself "Dan Sandan Ma'aiki" (The Prophet's Policeman) and uses his skills to sing the praises of the Prophet Muhammad.

Urban Musics and the Public Sphere in Kano

The indigenization of modern African popular music can be linked to the geographical diffusion of Western ideas. Since the term 'Hausa music' is not exactly what is assumed, it is necessary to understand it. It is therefore important to understand the radical transformation of Hausa music which suddenly makes it attractive to Hausa youth. The urban beats common in the radiosphere in northern Nigerian cities are not generated by the more traditional acoustic Hausa musical instruments, but by sounds generated by Yamaha PSR series of keyboards which are interfaced with PC music software predominantly Sonar series from Cakewalk by Roland, and fairly cheap mixing consoles to record and edit the final composition.

These portable keyboards have the perfect convenience of a large stored sample of genre music beats and sound effects with are then sequenced to produce the melodies sessions musicians wanted. That is not their point, though. They were designed to be used with other instruments to create more symphonic sounds from multiple sources, rather than the stored samples. However, lacking the ability to play other instruments due to the visible absence of accepted social musical culture, Hausa session musicians focus their energies on mastering the sequencing of these samples to create their melodies.

The ease with which the melodies are generated led to a massive boon in music industry such that hundreds of recording studios were established from 2007 to 2010 in Kano, manned by session instrumentalists who mastered the keyboards. The singers usually come to the studio and voice out their songs, and the session musician then finds appropriate beat (which almost always was based on the vocal harmony of the song). When the session musicians realized that international genre music forms could be created from the stored samples, they started producing what they call R'n'B music forms. In this way, Hausa singers can overlay their lyrics on soul, jazz, funk or rap beats, producing what is really Technopop (or Synthpop), rather than creative efforts are re-creating the antecedent genre music forms, since they rely almost exclusively on the samples to generate the beats, without introducing any additional instruments, whether electronic or acoustic. In fact, for the most part, the compositions are based on synthesized doodling on the synthesizer which creates a melodic template on which the session 'musician' then overlays the vocal tracks to create the song.

The sequencing of the music genre samples in the Yamaha PSR keyboard adopted by Hausa musicians and singers give them what they feel is 'modern' music form, even if retaining the

traditional song structure of Hausa vocalists. Eventually, almost without any exception, the Hausa session musicians also transform into singers.

Based on the availability of music generating technologies, three forms of Hausa urban musics emerged. The first, and earliest is 'Nanaye'. This evolved from the film industry (and which saw the emergence of playback singers like Misbahu Ahmad, Rabi Mustapha, Mudassir Kassim, Sani Yusuf Ayagi, Sammani Sani, Yakubu Mohammed), and followed the pattern of Hindi-film music, with romantic themes delivered through male and female vocal performances. It the presence of female voices, often enhanced to create a high-pitched soprano effect, coupled with rhyming chorus that gives this category of songs a 'girlish' feel—because it follows the pattern of songs used by traditional Hausa girls on community playgrounds. After the film industry went into a comatose stage in 2007, new, independent singers emerged, although using the same melodic pattern as the Nanaye video film playback singers (indeed, some of them also provide lyrics and music for Hausa video films). These new independent Nanaye singers included Binta Labaran (aka Fati Nijar), Abubakar Sani, AbdulRashid I. Aliyu, Umar M Sharif, Sunusi Anu, Mahmud Nagudu, Nazifi Asnanic and Nazeer Misbahu Ahmed.

The second structure of Hausa urban musics is 'Technopop' containing lesser amount of female accompaniment, and mainly focused on social issues, but with a strong dosage of romance. These include lyricists such as Kabiru Sharif 'Shaba', Abubakar Usman (Sadiq Zazzaɓi), Aminuddeen Ladan Abubakar, aka ALA or 'Alan Waƙa', and hosts of others. Both the Nanaye and Technopop singers often also sing for politicians and other 'big' people in the society for payment. The two categories are sufficiently self-sufficient enough to release their own 'albums' (as CDs are referred to in Nigeria). Quite a few Technopop Musicians, especially those without female vocal accompaniment and whose subject matter is mainly social issues or romantic, often see themselves as R'n'B artists, especially those who do not mix their vocal performances with female voices and follow more international structures in their musical composition. Examples include Billy-O, Funkiest Mallam and Soultan Abdul.

Both Technopop and Nanaye Hausa singers usually adopt the verse-chorus-form structure of musical composition and performance. In a typical verse-chorus-form structure, the chorus often sharply contrasts the verse melodically, rhythmically, and harmonically, and assumes a higher level of dynamics and activity, often with added instrumentation. In Hausa music, the higher dynamics is reflected in the chorus which often gathers all the voices in the composition (or employs additional voices) to create a contrast with the verses. This therefore approximates call-and-response, rather than verse-chorus-form structure.

The third is Rap which is more recent and is predominantly based on American hardcore rap structure, and contains only male voices singing about mainly social issues. Examples include K-Boys, Kano Riders, K-Arrowz, Freezy Boy, IQ (the only one who sings exclusively in English), Lil' T, etc.

Islamic Insurgency, Public Sphere and Popular Culture

Since 2009 northern Nigeria had been under the strong grip of horrific violent insurgent groups seeking to entrench Islamic State not only in the region, but the whole of Nigeria. While the

insurgency was initially localized to Borno State from 2009, it rapidly spread to other parts of the neighboring States. The insurgents created a devastating climate of fear and intimidation through assassinations, suicide bombings (often using young girls as carriers of the suicide vests) and brutal killings, often involving slaughtering people as if they were animals.

While the insurgents had a broad vision of entrenching an Islamic State in Nigeria through the reinforcement of Shari'a, the violent means through which they carried out their activities made it difficult to align their violent ideology with the enforcement of moral codes by State authorities such as the Hisbah and the Censorship Board. Further, the insurgents were against almost everything that is different from them – living true to type of extremist groups anywhere in the world.

The activities of the insurgents had a drastic effect on public performances and gatherings – especially as the insurgents attacked clubs and pubs in the early stages of the insurgency. Curiously enough, for a group with an albeit vague, moral agenda, the insurgents did not seem to have focused their violent attention on cultural production. Thus while they were attacks against newspapers that were deemed to have slighted Islam in one way or other (e.g. ThisDay newspaper) as well as threats to radio stations, there were no recorded terrorist activities against musicians, filmmakers, writers or other purveyors of cultural production.

International terror personalities, particularly Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein became adopted in northern Nigeria as heroes, principally because they seemed to challenge the might of the amorphous 'West'. These two figures featured prominently in visual popular culture through

posters that adorned walls of many merchants and stickers that found their way on public transport vehicles. Children were also named after Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussain. The international media coverage of these two figures thus helped to propel them into superstar status in northern Nigeria.

The Nigerian insurgents, however, did not evict the same kind of adoration among the general populace, much in the same way ISIS inspires fear due to their absolute brutality. The dread with which the insurgents were held in Nigeria reached such as a level that their media-created name, Boko Haram, became almost a taboo in the regions under their control.

The only reference to the insurgents in popular culture in Nigeria were oblique music collectives often far away from the insurgency targets. For instance, in June 2015 Cameroonian musicians organized simultaneous concerts nationwide to re-echo their support to the military in their fight against Boko Haram.