

# **Eastward Ho! Cultural Proximity and Eastern Focus in the Hausa Literature**

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## **Introduction**

We live in a world where the local, national, and transnational are increasingly intertwined, whether it be the production of commodities, social movements, or ideas and values in Hong Kong, New York, or Moscow. Consumer products are assembled in one country from parts and raw materials from many others, and then marketed internationally; global capital and investment move through transnational corporations capable of coordinating information about new sites of production with new markets. Networks of coordinated production are now competitive alternatives to more traditional, 'vertically' organized, hierarchical corporations. At the same time, these networks are producing global classes of 'symbolic analysts' and 'information professionals' that link Bangalore to Palo Alto and Taipei. The forces behind this internationalization are increasingly outside direct state control, and yet they form the dynamic edge for changes all over the world.

The interplay between the local, national, and transnational is producing a world in which dealing with local and domestic issues requires placing them in cross-national contexts, while understanding the 'emerging global order' requires greater cultural sensitivity to such problems elsewhere. From this interplay, a paradox seems to emerge: there can be no understanding of the global without understanding it as the ways in which different 'local' sites are coordinated; yet there can be no understanding of any 'local' without understanding the global of which it is a part. Our existing forms of knowledge production and expertise are not exempt from these global processes; it is increasingly impossible for us to understand contemporary changes both here and abroad without seeing how they are intertwined with other perspectives. The challenge is how, from a given location, do we create forms of understanding that can grapple with both the situatedness of local knowledge and its more global implications.

Thus the concerns of de-culturalization expressed by the conservative establishment in all societies is the acquisition of alien mindsets and norms of behavior to the detriment of local culture. In some cases, there are fears that foreign entertainment media will kill local creativity.

And yet generally speaking, creative activity and its complex relation to society is today hardly recognized and accommodated by cultural policy. The necessity to develop art as a vital interpretative process is misunderstood or ignored by many decision-makers, who tend to favor 'safer' investments in a timeworn heritage. This is more so in Islamic societies where the distinction between private and public sphere is

so rigidly enforced that creativity and creative arts are on the threshold of creating conflicts within traditional Islamic societies.

### **Passage of Cultures in Hausa Literature and Film**

In this paper I trace the Easter motif in Hausa popular culture, by paying attention to the evolutionary trends in Hausa literature, particularly prose fiction, and its parallel partner among Hausa youth, the Hausa video film. Both these categories of popular culture among the Hausa youth derive their direct antecedent inspirations not from the Western global media flows—as is normally expected—but from Eastern media flows from the Middle East and Asia, to Africa. This is a significant paradigm shift in media influence theory in that the Hausa youth would seem to have articulated their inspirations and sources as coming from Asia and Middle East, than from Western societies. The main purpose of my analysis is to draw attention to passage of culture from one society to another, and how media facilitates this passage of culture

When the British colonized what later became northern Nigeria in 1903, they inherited a vast population of literate citizenry, with thousands of Qur'anic schools and equally thousands of Muslim intellectual scholars.<sup>1</sup> Since it was clear that it would be against the grain of British colonial rule to encourage Islamic scholarship, a way has to be devised to slow down the progress of Islamic education. That way was simply the forceful intrusion of roman alphabet into a newly created education system in 1909.

However, it took to 1929 to set up a Translation Bureau initially in Kano, but later moved to Zaria in 1931. The first Director of the Bureau was Mr. Whiting. The objectives of the Bureau were:

1. To translate books and materials from Arabic and English
2. To write books in Hausa
3. To produce textbooks for schools
4. To encourage indigenous authors

Thus Mr. Whiting's tenure saw the Hausanized (roman script) versions of local histories in Arabic texts, notably *Tarikh Arbab Hadha al-balad al-Musamma Kano*, Anon, the oft quoted *Kano Chronicles* as translated by H. R. Palmer and published in the *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol 38 (1908) pp. 59-98 and republished in his *Sudanese Memoirs* (3 volumes: London, 1928), 3: 92-132. The Hausa translation was *Hausawa Da Makwabtansu*.

The main focus of the Translation Bureau was just that – translation of works in other languages into Hausa language using the sparkling brand new Hausanized Roman script which has just been created. Prior to this, the main mode of literary expression among the Muslim Hausa was the Arabic alphabet.

It was only when Dr. Rupert East took over in 1932 that it acquired the persona of what Nikolai Dobronravine (2003) refers to as *Istanci* and became devoted to wholesale translation of works from far and near (although the further, the better because nearer literary communities, both geographically and culturally such as The Sudan and Egypt were ignored) into Hausa in order to generate reading material, more essentially to enable colonial officers to polish their practice of Hausa language for

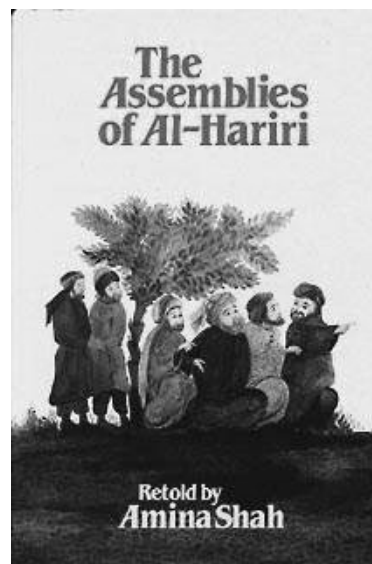
communication, than to empower the “natives” with enriched literary heritage. As Yahaya (1989:80) apologetically argued,

The decision to set up a translation Bureau was probably informed by the general belief that translating from other languages into a given language enriches the lexicon of the language, its literature and culture.

Thus to encourage indigenous writing in Romanized Hausa script, a short story competition was organized in 1933, in Katsina, among the students and staff of Katsina Training College. The best five – what I call the “famous five” – among the numerous submissions were published later in 1935. These were *Ruwan Bagaja* (Abubakar Imam), *Shaihu Umar* (Abubakar Tafawa Balewa), *Gandoki* (Muhammad Bello Kagara), *Idon Matambayi* (Muhammadu Gwarzo). Later, Dr. East collaborated with John Tafida Umaru to produce *Jiki Magayi*.

The most outstanding of the five Hausa novels, to Rupert East, was Abubakar Imam’s *Ruwan Bagaja* (The Healing Waters). However, it was clear from the plot elements and general thematic structure of the novel that it was *not* a Hausa tale, unlike others that had clearly identifiable Hausa settings. Abubakar Imam, in an interview with Nicholas Pweden stated that he was “inspired” to write *Ruwan Bagaja* after reading *Muqamat Al Hariri* (Pweden 1995). It was this “inspiration” that was to become the root of the rip-off phenomena of foreign media by the Hausa, and was heavily promoted by the British. In effect, Abubakar Imam and the British had planted a Trojan Horse within the entertainment mindset of the Hausa.

*The Maqamat*, translated in English by various authors as *The Assemblies of Al-Hariri: Fifty Encounters with the Shaykh Abu Zayd of Seruj Maqamat* was written by Abu Muhammad al-Qasim Hariri (1054-1121) and was widely available among Muslim scholars and intellectuals of northern Nigeria. Plate 1 shows the cover art work of the two tales:



*Maqamat Al-Hariri: “Ruwan Bagaja”  
– Original*



*Ruwan Bagaja – Transmuted Hausa  
Version*

Plate 1: Versions of *Maqamat Al-Hariri*

Thus even the cover artwork was designed to imitate the original—setting the pace for literary adaptation among the Hausa. However, other sources used to write *Ruwan Bagaja* included the core plot element from *The Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales* (especially *The Water of Life* from where the book derived its title) *Sinbad the Sailor*, and stories from *Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>1</sup>

Imam’s transmutative genius<sup>2</sup> is further shown, for instance, in his interpretation a poem in *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. The Hausa version appeared in “Labarin Sarkin Busa”, one of the stories in *Magana Jari Ce*, Volume 3 (1937). In the original German story from Brothers Grimm’s collection of German legends, a magic flutist charmed away the children from a village over breach of contract for a job duly done. One of the children who was left behind recounted his sadness in a poem which was also recorded in the original tale. The original poem and Imam’s transmutation, juxtaposed next to the song, are shown below.



Illus from Robert Browning, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin: A Child's Story*  
**Original Poem<sup>3</sup>**

Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,  
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,  
And everything was strange and new;  
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,  
And their dogs outran our fallow deer  
And honey-bees had lost their stings,  
And horses were born with eagles' wings;

Strictly speaking, the Hausa version was not a translation of the original stanzas. However, since the whole essence of the original poem was to convey childish joy and celebration of life, this was perfectly captured in Imam’s Hausa adaptation with a refrain of *alo alo mu ci dadi* (roughly, “hey, hey, let’s party!”, or in contemporary rap-speak, “yo, yo, let’s get down”!).

This mechanism of adaptation set the pace and although hundreds of creative works were produced in Hausa language, nevertheless they all paid a tribute to a media influence here and there.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the Muslim northern Nigerian Hausa novel has its roots in the Middle Eastern folklore. Northern Nigeria and the Middle East then, as now, shared remarkable



Illus from *Magana Jari Ce*, Vol 3, *Labarin Sarkin Busa*  
**Imam’s Adaptation**

Ku zo ga daula wa zai ki  
Alo alo mu ci dadi  
Tuwo nama sai mun koshi  
Alo alo mu ci dadi  
Zagi mari mun huta shi  
Alo alo mu ci dadi  
Siliki ran salla ba datti  
Alo alo mu ci dadi

cultural spaces in religion, word-borrowings, social mores and cultural mindsets rooted in Islam. Perhaps what informed the decision to use the Middle East as a template in providing adaptations and translations of hundreds of stories by Abubakar Imam that eventually ended up as *Magana Jari Ce*, was the perception of colonial officers, especially Rupert East. He observed, for instance, that the Muslim environment created a serious minded scholar not inclined to frivolities of novel writing. As he noted,

The first difficulty was to persuade these Malamai that the thing was worth doing. The influence of Islam, superimposed on the Hamitic strain in the blood of the Northern Nigerian, 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 (East 1936:351-352).

As the first port of modern educational call in the colonial education policy, the “Malamai” had to be the ones to be recruited to write any such novels. Subsequently, the thematic focus of Hausa the early Hausa novel, as Graham Furniss notes was:

not facing West; if they face anywhere they face East, to India, Ceylon, Egypt, the Red Sea, and the lands where famous warriors travel on elephants into battle. It is there that the popular imagination goes transported by these stories, not as allegories of nation, but as extensions of and challenges to the notion of community (Furniss 1998:100).

The increasing exposure to entertainment media in various forms, from novels and tales written in Arabic, to subsequently radio and television programs with heavy dosage of foreign contents due to the paucity of locally produced programs in the late 1950s and early 1960s provided more sources of *Imamanci* (Imam’s methodology of adaptation) for Hausa authors. The 1960s saw more media influx into the Hausa society and media in all forms—from the written word to visual formats—were used for political, social and educational purposes.

Hausa literature went into a coma between 1950 to 1984 when most of the efforts were either sponsored by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Culture in the form of literary competitions or published by Gaskiya/NNPC/Norla as part of set of reading materials for Hausa language and literature studies at Ordinary level examinations. Novel writing was still at “literary” level. Such literary focus – with emphasis on correct interpretation of Hausa social (and often political) mindset in the discourses of novelists and playwrights such as S.I. Katsina (*Tura Ta Kai Bango*, 1983), I.Y. Muhammad (*Duniya Tumbin Giwa*, 1973), A. Dangambo (*Kitsen Rogo*, 1979), Kamaruddin Imam (*Tsaka Mai Wuya*, 1983) among others. Indeed from the anthology of Hausa novels and plays within the period of 1954 to 1986, less than 45 (see Yahaya, 1988).

Availability of cheap printing presses made possible by the ushering in of new political era in 1979 in Nigeria created possibilities for self-printing, leading to emergence of new novel forms. There are no specific records to show which urban cluster in the north started the private publishing phenomena, but it would seem to have been kick-started by the appearance of Ms Talatu Wada Ahmed’s *Rabin Raina* — a series of three similarly titled, but unrelated novels, privately printed in Zaria

from 1984 to 1988. Table 1 shows the pioneer Hausa novelists from the north of Nigeria.

Table 1: A Selection of Pioneer Hausa Prose Fiction Writers<sup>4</sup>

S/N	Title	Author	Year
1.	So Aljannar Duniya	Hafsat AbdulWaheed	1981
2.	Wasiyar Baba Kere	Ibrahim Saleh Gumel	1983
3.	Inda Rai Da Rabo	Idris S. Imam	1984
4.	Rabin Raina I	*Talatu Wada Ahmad	1984
5.	Soyayya Gamon Jini	Ibrahim H Abdullahi Bichi	1986
6.	Budurwar Zuciya	*Balaraba Ramat Yakubu	1986
7.	Rabin Raina II	*Talatu Wada Ahmad	1987
8.	Wa Zai Auri Jahila?	*Balaraba Ramat Yakubu	1987
9.	Kogin Soyayya	A. M. Zahraddeen Yakasai	1988
10.	Alhaki Kwikwiyo	*Balaraba Ramat Yakubu	1988
11.	Rabin Raina III	*Talatu Wada Ahmad	1988
12.	Mata Masu Duniya	*Kulu M.B Tambuwal	1988
13.	Kaikayi	Abubakar Bala Gyadi-Gyadi	1989
14.	Kashe Makashinka	Alhaji Y. Abubakar Mohammed	1989
15.	Rabon Kwado	*Sadiya T. Umar Daneji	1989
16.	Garin Masoyi	A. M. Zahraddeen Yakasai	1989
17.	Idan So Cuta Ne	Yusuf M. Adamu	1989
18.	In Da So Da Kauna	Ado Ahmad Gidan Dabino	1990

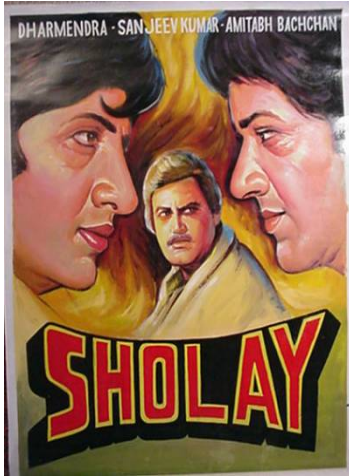
\* Women authors

### Passage to India: Media, Hindi Cinema and Hausa Visual Literature

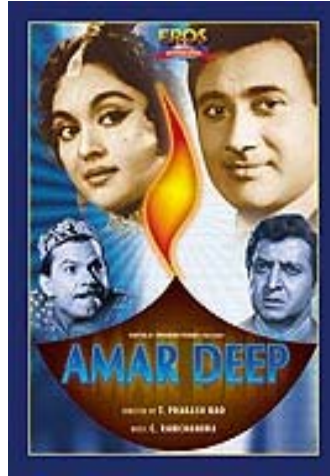
Having kick started the process, what followed was a virtual avalanche of young male and female writers who approached the publishing and writing phenomena with greater gusto than their predecessors who had the backing of the State machinery in publishing their novels. Aimed at public space, they focused on sending a youthful message to an equally youthful readership. The most readily digestible template available to the young writers of what later came to be contemptuously labeled Kano Market Literature by critics (specifically Malumfashi 1994) was the Hindi cinema – which became a motif in both creative fiction and the Hausa video film.

The main cinematic interest of the Hausa before the advent of the Home videos is the Hindi cinema which was brought to northern Nigeria by Lebanese distributors after independence from Britain in 1960.<sup>5</sup> From the 1960s all the way to the 1990s Hindi cinema enjoyed significant exposure and patronage among Hausa youth. Thus films such as *Raaste Ka Patthar* (1972), *Waqt* (1965) *Rani Rupmati* (1957), *Dost* (1974) *Nagin* (1976), *Hercules* (1964), *Jaal* (1952), *Sangeeta* (1950), *Charas* (1976), *Kranti* (1979), *Dharmatama* (1975), *Loafer* (1974), *Amar Deep* (1958) *Dharam Karam* (1975) and countless others became the staple entertainment diet of Hausa urban youth, as well as provincial cinemas. Examples of the posters as devoured in major northern Nigerian cities are shown in Plate 2.





Sholay



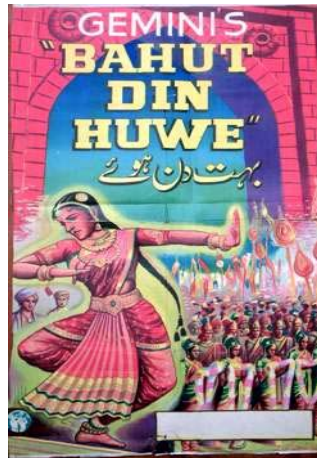
Amar Deep



Rani Rupmati



Caravan



Bahut Din Huwe



Yaadon Ki Baaraat

Plate 2: Eye-Candy — Hindi Cinema Inspirations, Kano, Northern Nigeria, 1970s

Although the first cinema in Kano, Rex, was opened in 1937, it was only after Nigerian independence in 1960 that Hindi commercial films started to feature in Northern Nigerian cinemas, and this spread to other urban clusters such as Kaduna and Jos.

However, the biggest boom for Indian cinema in Northern Nigeria was in the 1970s when state television houses were opened and became the outlet for readily available Hindi films on video tapes targeted at home viewers. For instance, the NTA TV station in Kano alone has shown 1,176 Hindi films on its television network from 2nd October 1977 when the first Hindi film was shown (*Aan Bann*) to 6 June 2003.<sup>6</sup> At the time of starting the Hindi film appearance on Hausa television houses, children aged 4-6, and their youngish mothers (who were in their 20s) became avid watchers of these films. By 2000 the children had grown up, became film makers and used their Indian cinema impressionistic conditioning as their defining template for artistic visual media in cultural interpretation.

The video production values of the new video moguls—a few of the Hausa and predominantly among Hausanized non-ethnic Hausa—were not informed by household dramas, rustic settings, or moralizing sermons to appease the traditionalist establishment. Their main creative mechanism is to appropriate Hindi masala films and remake them into Hausa copies, complete with storylines, songs and choreography. In this new age of Hausa video film, the genres of the founding fathers disappeared — and a spicy masala mixture of videos started appearing which combined several genres in one video and attempting to copy as many Hindi films as they could — thus I coined the term *Bollywoodanci* (Bollywood adaptation) to reflect the main mechanism of this cluster of young, and essentially urban, film makers.

Over-riding this entire hodgepodge is the desire to be commercially successful in an economy that denied these Young Turks of the Hausa video film industry proper jobs, supported by an educational system incapable of enabling them to proceed with further education beyond high school; and thus left listless and jobless, with an NFA (No Future Ambition, a self-coined term of the group) mindset. Towards the end of the 1990s, the 1970s toddlers and teenage cultural rebels had grown up enough to acquire capitalistic values — and a VHS camera. They were products of media parenting officially sanctioned by radio and television houses that saw a continuous diet of Hindi (plus a sprinkle of American and Chinese) cinema and African-American musical influences. And an economy that gives them a license to survive by any legal means necessary—or illegal, since copyright issues were not a concern in what story to rip-off. Thus *Bollywoodanci* became the creative norm among the vast majority of Hausa video film producers from 2000 to 2002. Table 2 shows some of the more notable Hausa video films that had been “inspired” by Hindi films.<sup>7</sup>

Table 2: Hausa video film Hindi film Inspirations/Appropriations

S/N	Hausa Video Rip-off	Hindi film Original <sup>8</sup>	Element Appropriated
1.	Huznee	Agni Shakshi (1996) and Daraar (1971)	Scenes
2.	Izaya	Agni Shakshi (1996)	Storyline
3.	Bunkasa	Anmol (1993)	Storyline
4.	Jirwaye	Azaad (1979)	Scenes
5.	Danshi	Bazigar (1993)	Storyline
6.	Almuru	Bhoot (2003)	Storyline
7.	Hubba	Chahat (1997)	Storyline
8.	Ayaah	Chandni (1989)	Storyline
9.	Furuci	Chori Chori Chupke Chupke (2001)	Storyline
10.	Dhalal	Dalaal (1993)	Title

Also young emergent Hausa video film stars started bearing names of their perceived Bollywood star equivalents – with the monikers often given by their fans. These included Fatima S. Abubakar (Karisma Kapoor), Fati Mohammed (Indiyar Hausa, Indian Hausa), Ali Nuhu (Shah Rukh Khan), Tahir Fage (Sunny Deol), Danladi Shehu (Akshay Kumar), Rabi Landiyo (Sridevi). In a bizarre name change, a Hausa actress, Farida Abubakar, changed her name to Farida Jalal—to mirror the equivalence of a Hindi film star with the same name.

Male Hausa who, in the absence of locally-flavored cinema, saw these Hindi films closely approximating their own social space. The effect was even more electrifying on house-bound young housewives who had no opportunity to go to cinema and



therefore rely solely on the television programming. The elaborate song and dance routines characteristic of commercial Hindi cinema available in northern Nigeria captivated urbanized Hausa so deeply that many of them can recite the Hindi-language songs word for word, from the beginning to the end. The outcome of these “Hindunese” cinema language is obsession with Hindi cinema motif.

Further, the flowing saris of the actresses, and the macho posturing of the actors, coupled with an obsession with love triangles—an obsession shared by the Hausa marital spaces—made Hindi films immediately acceptable, and rapidly enough, Northern Nigeria became the biggest market for Hindi films in Nigeria.

To compete with the Hausa video film industry, Hausa novelists soon enough started “domesticating” the themes of the Hindi cinema they watch – and what emerged was Hausa romantic fiction, generally – and again, contemptuously (see Sheriff 1991) – labeled “soyayya” novels. The central motifs of Hindi cinema – love triangles, forced marriage – soon found parallel convergence with Hausa social culture especially as it affects youth. What followed then was an unconscious process of translating Hindi cinematic focus on love triangles and forced marriage into Hausa novels.

The new novels elicited a barrage of attention from critics for the most of the 1990s, before the criticisms tapered off in the mid 2000s. After the turbulent years of the 1990s (see Adamu 2000, 2006 and Malumfashi 2005 for this turbulence), the 2000s brought with them newer Eastern focus to Hausa youth literature in two ways.

First, the Hausa video film which had its most commercial appeal from 1995 to 2005 became increasingly reliant on using the Hindi film motif to sell. Subsequently, some of the Hausa novelists who had hitherto used only general matrix of Hindi films rather than the films’ storylines directly, started appropriating specific Hindi films as the storylines of their novels. Table 3 shows some of the Hausa novels and their transglobal sources.

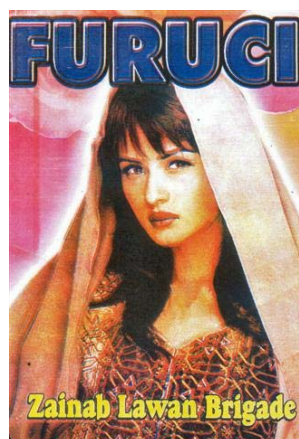
Table 3: Hausa novels Appropriated from Mainly Asian Sources

S/N	Novel (author)	Media (type)
		<b><i>Hindi Films</i></b>
1.	Soyayya Gamon Jini (Ibrahim Hamza Bichi)	Ek duje Le Leye
2.	Sarkakkiyar Soyayya (Mairo Yusuf)	Yeba da Raha
3.	Rashin Sani (Bala Anas Babinlata)	Dostana
4.	Alkawarin Allah (Bilkisu Ado Bayero)	Romance
5.	Raina Fansa (Aminu Abdu Na’inna)	Jeet
6.	Wa Ya San Gobe (Bilkisu Ahmad Funtuwa)	Silsila
7.	Anisa (Abubakar Ishaq)	Dil
8.	Labarin So (Zuwaira Isa)	Gumrah
9.	Hamida (Maryam Kabir Mashi)	Dillage Liya Ke
10.	Kawaici (Sadiya Garba Yakasai)	Dharkan
		<b><i>Southern Nigerian Films</i></b>
11.	Biyyu Babu (Abdullahi H. Yerima)	The Child
12.	Kallabi (Maje El-Hajeej)	Samodara
		<b><i>American Film</i></b>
13.	Mazan Fama (Shehu U. Muhammad)	Clash of the Titans

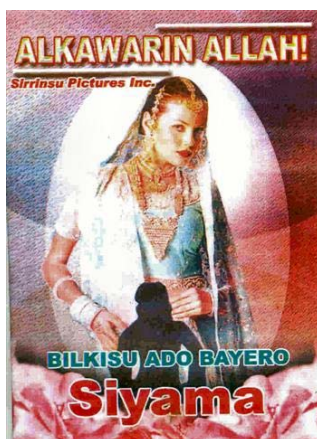
S/N	Novel (author)	Media (type)
		<i>James Hadley Chase (Novel)</i>
14.	Sharadi (Auwalu G. Danbarno)	I Hold the Four Aces
15.	Idan Rana Ta Fito (Maimunatu Yaro)	A Lotus for Miss Blandish
16.	Kai Da Jini (Nazir Adam Salih)	The Fast Buck
17.	Bakar Alaka/Mugun Aboki (A. G. Danbarno)	Come Easy, Go Easy
18.	Aci Duniya Da Tsinke (Zuwaira Isa)	Death is Women
		<i>Sidney Sheldon (Novel)</i>
19.	Wayyo Duniya (Hafsat C. Sodangi)	If Tomorrow Comes

Source: *Inuwar Marubuta* (Kano, Nigeria) No 2 February 2005, p. 13.

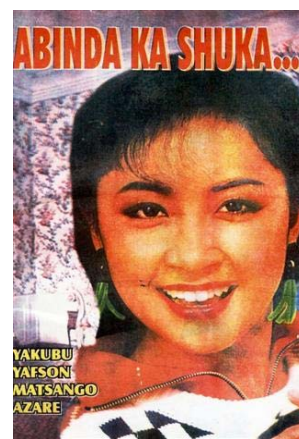
Secondly, book covers—themselves a source of religious condemnation (see Danjuma Katsina 1993)—which in the early years of Hausa novels (1985 to 1995) had more or less an idealized drawing of Hausa young women, started to show photos of either Hindi female film stars, or Chinese female models. This was actually stimulated by the open practice of appropriating Hindi films by Hausa video film industry—a process which Hausa novelists felt they could replicate on their book covers at least, if only to draw attention to the novels. Typical examples of books covers reflecting this newer Eastern focus are shown in Plate 3.



*Furuci* (Utterances)



*Alkawarin Allah* (God's Promise)



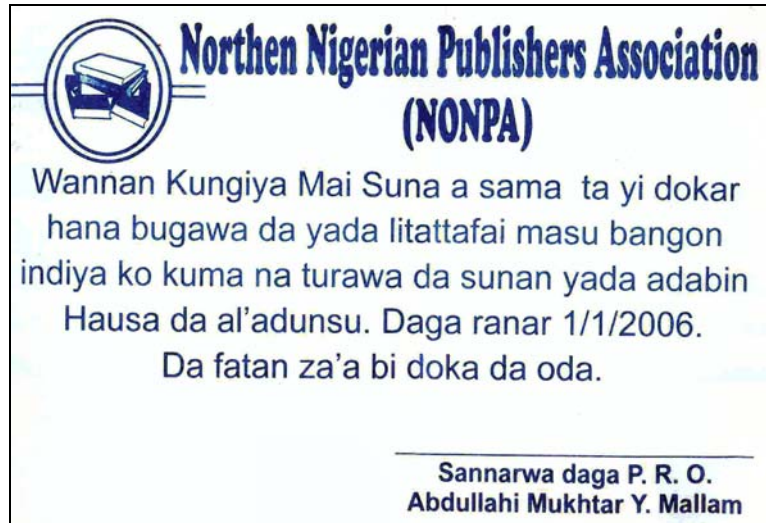
*Abin da Ka Shuka* (What You Sow)

Plate 3: Eastern focus in modern Hausa book cover art

Thus the “eastern posture” alluded to by Graham Furniss (1998) as characteristic of early Hausa novels of the 1930s and 1940s remained consistent in the subsequent development of Hausa contemporary literature from 1980 when new Hausa writers emerged. With the vibrancy of revolutionary global popular culture in the 1960s and 1970s, it was only a matter of time before the wind of transglobal media forces—especially new Hausa literature, music and film—would be felt on Hausa popular culture, effectively revolutionizing entertainment in a traditional society.

While there were protests here and there about the storylines in the novels that emerged from 1980 to 2000—and mainly from school teachers who complained that the novels were preventing school girls from concentrating on their studies (however, see Malumfashi 1992a, 1992b; Abubakar, 1999) only printers of the books and often the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Kano branch actually took censoring

steps towards curbing what were seen as either sexual excesses (e.g. the banning of *Matsayin Lover* (Lover's Stand), a lesbian themed novel by Alkhamees Bature Makwarari by ANA), or cultural misplacement (e.g. the explicit ban on any European or Eastern pictures of males or females on covers of Hausa novels from 2005). The civil society, the religious establishment and the State machinery, for the most part ignored the writers. Plate 4 shows the poster from book printers/publishers in Kano warning authors to desist from using foreign images on their covers.



*Translation*

“The above named organization has issued a directive banning the printing and distribution of books with covers containing photos of Indians or Europeans in the name of promoting Hausa literature and culture, from 1st January 2006. With the hope that this directive and order will be adhered to...”, Signed, PRO, Abdullahi Mukhtar Y. Mallam

Plate 4. Warning Globalizing Hausa authors, Kano, 2006

**The Phoenix: Abubakar Imam is Dead – Long Live Abubakar Imam!**

The new Eastern Focus in Hausa novels, however, did not stop at just book covers and appropriated stories from Hindi and Chinese cinema. From the mid-1990s, a new form of a new form of Imamism has emerged among few writers in the contemporary Hausa novel scene. This was the translation of Middle Eastern folkloric epics, with emphasis on Persian novels, into Hausa language. The Persian literature had particular appeal because of the increasing profile of the Shi'a brand of Islam in northern Nigerian public affairs (see for instance, Kane 2006). Thus writers such as Aliyu Abubakar Sharfadi (*Malikussaif Ibn Ziyazanun*), Nasiru G. Ahmad 'Yan'Awaki (*Ra'asul Guuli*), Alhaji Muhammadu Aliyu Jega (*Tanimuddari*) popularized the epic tale of sword and sorcery.

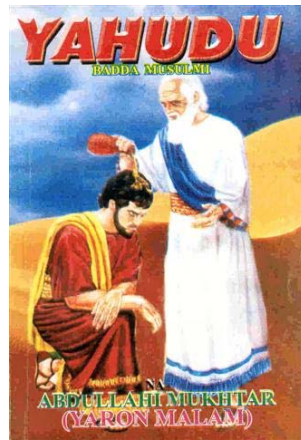
By 2003 The American “War on Terror” ignited by the events of September 11, 2001 in which al-Qaeda controlled hijacked planes plunged into specific targets in New York, Pentagon and Philadelphia, saw American revenge onslaught on Afghanistan and eventually Iraq. For some unexplained reason, this seemed to draw more attention to Iraq and its society than hitherto possible among young Muslim Hausa with a large Shiite Muslim population. One area of this attention was Iraq literature. Hausa authors

with some skills in either understanding Farsi or Arabic translation of Iranian literature started the process of translation of Persian novels into Hausa language. Leading the group was Aliyu Abubakar Sharfadi, whose Hausa translation of Persian and Arabic novels as *Bahalawana*, *Saisabana*, *Aja'ibi*, *Ainul-Haya* (with Rabi'u A. Boss), *Fairuza* and *Fairuzasshaha* were full of Eastern heroic epics of bravery, damsels in distress, lost kingdoms, sword and sorcery epic battles between humans and non-humans (specifically *aljannu* and other weird beings than imagination can drag out). Compared to the rather mild humorous take in Abubakar Imam's *Maqamat Hariri* transmuted as *Ruwan Bagaja*, Sharfadi's treatment was a full-tilt dosage of bringing Middle Eastern global literature to the Hausa doorstep.

Nor was Sharfadi the only one reviving Abubakar Imam's legacy. Following similar footsteps was Abdullahi Mukhtar, aka Yaron Mallam who declared in an interview I held with him on 1st October 2006 of his wish to succeed Abubakar Imam, particularly his technique of reading various books from different sources and amalgamating them into a synthesized Hausa narrative. Novels such as *Shahada*, *Tsuburin Bamuda*, *Akwatin Siddabaru*, and *Gumu* are a further affirmation of the male macho Conan the Barbarian type of Middle Eastern epics translated into Hausa language. Mere looking at the covers of the novels seems to reveal a studied desire to produce narrative discourse that runs counter to the soft image of predominantly romantic novels of other Hausa novelists. Plate 5 shows the cover artwork of some of the translations.



*Bahalawana*



*Yahudu Badda Musulmi*  
(Jews, Leading Muslims  
Astray)

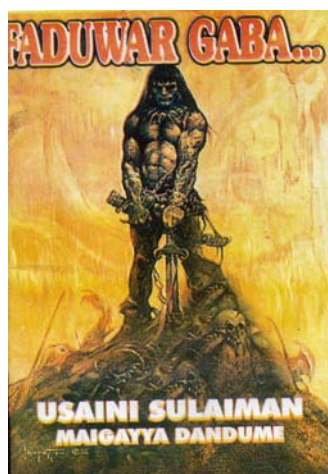


*Babban Goro (Big Reward)*

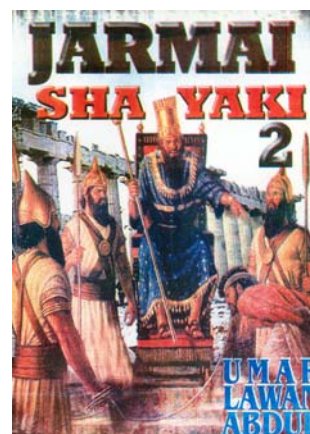




Jarmai Sha Yaki



Faduwar Gaba



Jarmai Sha Yaki

Plate 5: Macho, Long Hair and Bravery in Hausa Translations of Eastern Epics

Other novelists striking the Eastern path included AbdulAziz Sani Madaki Gini (*Rinjaye*, *Babban Goro*, *Ruguntsumi*), and Umar Lawan Abdul (*Jarmai Sha Yaki*), Abubakar T. Iliyasu (*Bauta!!*). All these appeared between 2003 and 2005. And as if to prove that the sword and sorcery epic has indeed been explored earlier with Hausa motif, Babangida Abdu S. Kayyu re-released in 1995 fantasy novel, *Gugan Karfe* in 2006 to cash on the sudden popularity of what I call Battle Novels. Indeed the reappearance of *Gugan Karfe* merely drew attention to the fact that the translation of sword and sorcery Eastern novels had enjoyed a brief period among the contemporary Hausa novelists.

It is significant that the new surge in translating Eastern folklore into Hausa tends to tilt predominantly towards the macho image of the male; and in almost all the cover art used to illustrate the novels, the bulging biceps, long hair, loin-cloth and other hardware of maleness were pointedly engaged to emphasize the testosterone-charged nature of the narratives, even if a damsel is in distress (thus revealing a soft romantic theme beneath the steel muscles). This radically differs from the soft-image of pastel colored picture of either idealized Hausa female beauties, or Hindi and film stars on the covers.

The Hausa youth obsession with Hindi films was further illustrated by the appearance in 2003 of what was possibly the first Hausa-Hindi language primer in which a Hausa author, Nazeer Abdullahi Magoga published *Fassarar Indiyanchi a Saukake—Hindi Language Made Easy*. The cover of the book is shown in Plate 6.

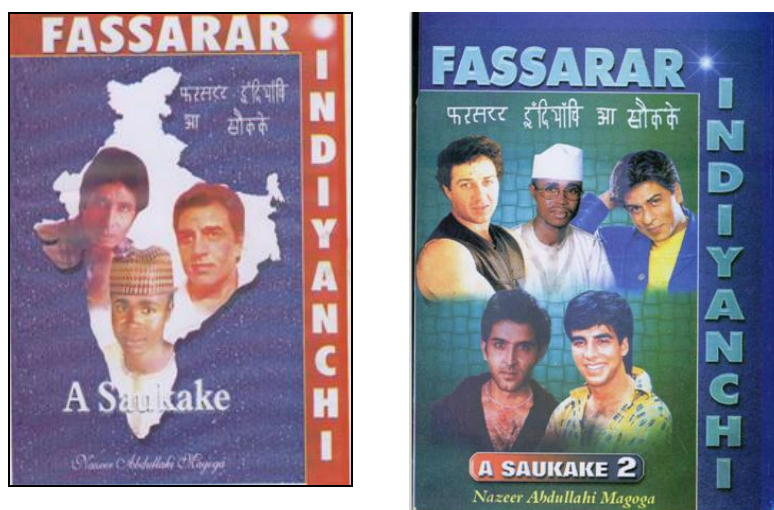


Plate 6: “How to Speak Hindi—in Hausa—Primer

The covers of the books show the picture of the author, with Hindi film stars—including Amitab Bachan and Dhramendra—all in a montage within the map of India in the background. In the preface, the author, Nazeer Abdullahi Magoga, of Kano, states his reasons for writing the phrase book:

After expressing my gratitude to Allah, the main objective of publishing this book, *Fassarar Indiyanchi A Saukake* was because of how some Muslim brothers and sisters, both old and young, voice phrases and songs in Hindu language, not knowing some of these words were blasphemy and a mistake for a Muslim to voice out...Because of this, the author tries to remind and guide fellow Muslims, through research and consultations with experts in the Hindu language, in order to understand each word written in this book, so that people would be aware of the meanings of the words they voice out in Hausa language.

This book became all the more significant in that it is the first book in Hausa language that was the result of media parenting. It is thus through the book that the Hausa know the actual translation of some of the titles of 47 popular Hindi films such as *Sholay* (*Gobara*, fire outbreak), *Kabhi-Kabhie* (*wani sa'in*, sometimes), *Agni Sakshi* (*zazzafar shaida*, strong evidence), *Darr* (*tsoro*, fear), *Yaraana* (*abota*, friendship), *Dillagi* (*zabin zuciya*, heart's choice), *Maine Pyar Kiya* (*na fada cikin soyayya*, I've fallen in love) and others. It also contains the complete transliteration of Hindi lyrics translated into Roman Hausa, from popular films such as *Maine Pyar Kiya* and *Kabhi-Khabie*.

In an interview the author narrated how he became deeply interested in learning the Hindi language from watching thousands of Hindi films, and subsequently conceived of the idea of writing a series of phrase books on Hindi language. He started working on the first volume, *Fassarar Indiyanchi* in 1996, and when the Hausa video film boom started in 2000 he published the book. He has three others planned; a second volume of the books in which takes the language acquisition to the next level—focusing on culture and customs of India (or more precisely, Hindu). The other two books, still in the making are “song books”, *Fassarar Wakokin Indiya* (Translations of Hindi Film Songs) in two volumes. Yet despite the availability of easier access to Hindu language, Hausa video film practitioners were more interested in using motifs and thematic structures from Hindi films, rather than learning what the Hindi words mean,

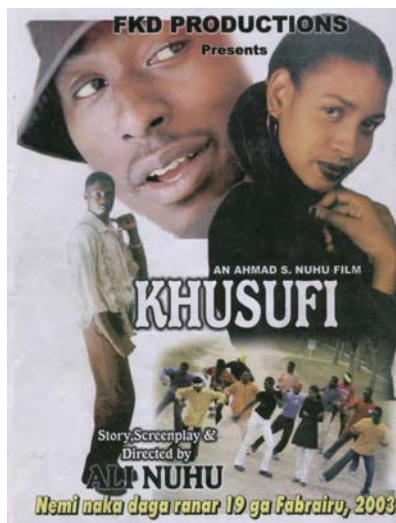
so there was little working relationship between Magoga's work and the Hausa video film industry.

However, *Bollywoodanci* in Hausa popular culture covers all aspects of media technologies, not just the film industry. Thus a group of Muslim Sufi *zikr* (chants) groups using the tambourine (*bandiri*) as their main musical instrument constitute themselves into *Kungiyar Ushaq'u Indiya* (Society for the Lovers of India) in Kano and specialized in converting themes from popular Hindi film songs into Hausa and singing songs glorifying the attributes of, and love for, the Prophet Muhammad.

Hausa video film producers argue that the Indian society is "just" like the Hausa society, at least in its approach to marriage—the main obsession of young Hausa video film producers. Thus Hausa video film makers who seek their inspiration from Hindi commercial film sources focus on the visual similarities between Hausa culture and what they perceive as Hindi culture, as shown in films, rather than their divergences. As Brian Larkin also observed:

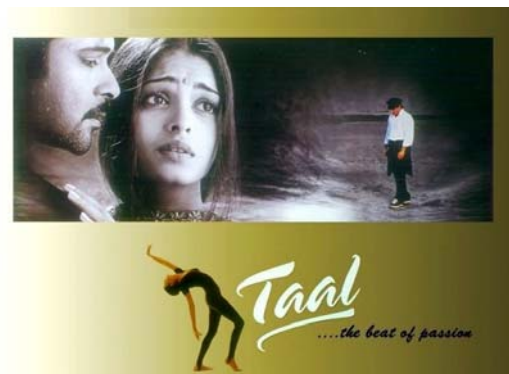
Hausa fans of Indian movies argue that Indian culture is "just like" Hausa culture. *Instead of focusing on the differences between the two societies*, when they watch Indian movies what they see are similarities, especially when compared with American or English movies. Men in Hindi films, for instance, are often dressed in long kaftans, similar to the Hausa *dogoruwar riga*, over which they wear long waistcoats, much like the Hausa *falmaran*. The wearing of turbans; the presence of animals in markets; porters carrying large bundles on their heads, chewing sugar cane; youths riding Bajaj motor scooters; wedding celebrations and so on: in these and a thousand other ways the visual subjects of Indian movies reflect back to Hausa viewers aspects of everyday life.<sup>9</sup>

The perceived similarities between Hausa and Hindi film cultures is illustrated, not by story lines, but by poster art work which Hausa video film producers create to imitate as closely to an Hindi film as possible, as illustrated by the *posters* for the Hausa video films *Khusufi* (appropriated form Hindi film, *Taal*), and Sharadi (Hindi *Khushi*) in Plate 7:



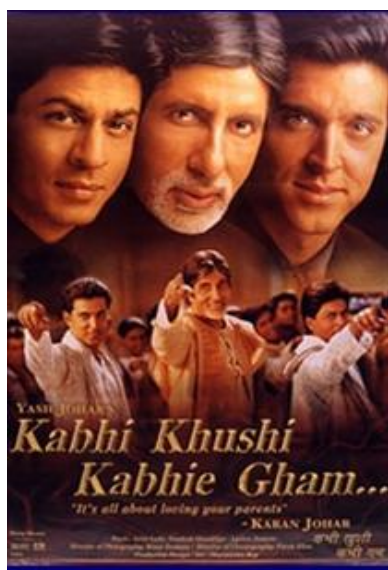
*Khusufi*

as



*Taal*





*Khabi Khushi poster*

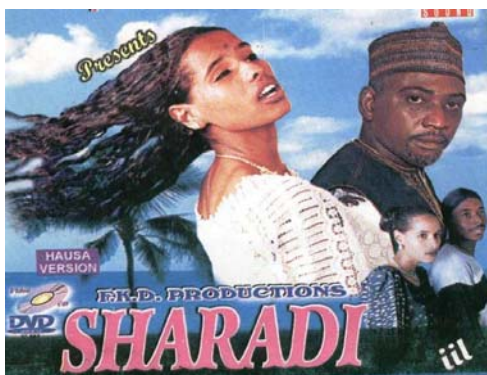
as



*Sharadi*

Plate 7: Hindi-to-Hausa video film

In some cases female artistes with faint resemble to Indian actresses, as shown in Plate 8, are preferred in Hausa home videos.



*Sharadi*



*Titanic: Masoyiyata*

Plate 8: Curryng for Favor: “Indian” look-alikes in Hausa home video

Their arguments for the rip-off was that even if they did create a story it is likely to have an Hindi cinema motif; so it is easier to simply copy a popular Hindi film directly into Hausa. It was at this point that the Indian cinema influence came to the fore in full force and the new crop of Hausa video film producers, quite intent on repeating the success of *Sangaya*, took over with Hindi film cinema storylines.

## Conclusion

In concluding this essay, I would wish to draw my theoretical framework from cases and examples of media flows in visual popular culture, before applying it to Hausa popular novel to explain the Eastern Focus in Hausa popular culture of novel and film. My main focus is on regional influences of media flows, particularly in Asia

which leads to appropriations of visual popular culture due to perceived cultural proximity between the giver and the taker. This is seen in quoted regional studies of media influences which seems to indicate that a cultural resonance is often created from a media-rich country to another country sharing *similar* norms and values. For instance, according to Jane O. Vinculado (2006:234),

The phenomenal Taiwanese soap opera hit Meteor Garden in 2003 has transformed the face of Philippine programming. It paved the way for the influx of Asian dramas from Taiwan, Korea and very soon, Japan. Dubbed in Filipino (the local language), these chinovelas (a play of words from the words Chino meaning Chinese and telenovela, derived from the soap opera format of Latin American countries) is common fare on Philippine television, with about one or two of them occupying the primetime schedules of the top networks and some appearing in non-prime time slots like daytime and weekend timeslots.

This “Asian media invasion” was welcomed by Vinculado’s respondents, for as she reported (p. 238),

In terms of cultural affinity, respondents feel that they can relate to the physical characteristics of the characters, being Asian and exposed to the physicality of the actors in their everyday lives. Since some Filipinos look like the characters, they are not alien to them compared to the Caucasian-looking characters in the Latin telenovelas. Respondents also feel a cultural connection to the settings used in the programs and not in the way we expect. Since they can strongly relate to the storylines in the Asian soaps, they can relate to the settings employed. Though they have not been to any of these places, they are familiar with the settings. The university and coffee shop may look different, but they are constantly exposed to similar settings.

However, “cultural affinity” soon translates into “cultural proximity” in explaining the inter-regional spread of Korean media products especially to China and Taiwan. Dong Hwan Kwon (2006) quotes studies that analyzed the contents of widely accepted Korean television dramas among East Asian countries for commonalities of acceptance. The analysis revealed that “Korean dramas that have been widely accepted in Asia contain the Confucian values that are close to Chinese culture” (p. 262). This was premised on common culture and value systems between Korean and Chinese.

Similar trends were noted with regards to the popularity of Japanese drama series in Taiwan. As Koichi Iwabuchi (2002:147), reported,

I asked Taiwanese audiences comparative questions about Japanese dramas, Taiwanese dramas, and American dramas. Most of my interviewees in Taipei noted that emotionally they engaged more with Japanese dramas more than they did with Western or Taiwanese dramas. Of course in so far as Japanese dramas are broadcast in Japanese with Chinese subtitles, the Taiwanese cannot help but regard them as foreign; but for all that, they do not regard such dramas in quite the same way they do the American programs. This is because Taiwanese audiences tend to remark that, racially and culturally, they have more in common with the Japanese than they do with the Americans. “Yeah, Japan is a foreign country and this (foreignness) makes Japanese programs look gorgeous and appealing. But the distance we feel to Japan is comfortable, Americans are complete strangers.” ... “The West is so far away from us, so I cannot relate to American dramas”

Further, his respondents explained that that the ways of expressing love in Japanese dramas which are delicate and elegant are much more culturally acceptable than those of American dramas, and human relations between family and lovers also look more

culturally proximate to Taiwan. This proximity allows Taiwan audiences to relate to Japanese dramas more easily.

South America is another regional cluster with considerable progress in television drama production and export. However, the GDP of a country determines the inter-regional exchange of programs, despite a strongly binding linguistic and cultural norms. For instance, in analyzing South American Television Flows in the 1990s, B. Jacqui Chmielewski Falkenheim (2000) noted that

Intraregional flows were for the most part unbalanced. Countries with lower GDPs (Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay) imported programming from within the region but did not export their own anywhere else. Wealthier countries (mainly Brazil and Argentina) imported very little regional programming and when they did their regional imports tended to be mostly from Mexico or Hispanic networks in the U.S. Venezuela and Colombia were the only pair of countries which had a reciprocal flow of programming between them. These two countries imported most of their regional programs either from Mexico or from each other. (p. 8 online edition)

Thus countries sharing common cultural proximity find it easier to provide “oppositional resistance” to media programming from non-proximity sources. This is further facilitated, as Joseph D. Straubhaar (1991) suggests, by the inclusion of linguistic commonalities even within linguistic clusters and groups. Interestingly enough, colonized countries often feel they share the same linguistic—and therefore cultural—spaces with the metropolitan countries, thus partaking in the latter’s transnational programs. This is illustrated, for instance, by African Francophone countries where, as Mytton, Teer-Tomaselli and Tudesq (2005:101) noted,

The rapid and successful development of the more popular and successful francophone transnational television stations in Africa has resulted from France’s own political and cultural approach, which among other things seeks to extend and strengthen co-operation between countries that have the French language in common. In effect francophone African countries have joined with France, Canada, Switzerland and Belgium in an international ‘community’ held together by the French language. Interestingly, bilingual Canada appears to be the most active of these countries outside France. The policy of co-operation with state-owned African television services, which France has maintained since independence was gained by its former colonies, has been implemented thanks to good relations with these African states. France has extended its policy of co-operation to include those states that were former Belgian colonies.

For Anglophone African countries, transnational television comes in the form of South Africa’s cable services of MNet, MultiChoice and its subsidiary, DSTV. But with a subscription of USD60, these services are essentially limited to elites—or those with enough interest to break out of traditional home-based media fare. In effect, it is paying for the privilege of accessing American programs—the starting point! Further, the African contents (especially series dramas) of the stations in these services had no appeal northern Nigerian Muslim audience

This may possibly help to explain why southern Nigerian programs—both TV dramas and video films, which are characterized by a central engine of Christian ethos and ethnic peculiarities of the producers, are less palatable to northern Nigerian Muslim audiences. The years of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts between northern and southern Nigeria (see Agi, 1998 for a comprehensive treatment of this) are clear testimonies to cultural hostilities that makes within-country media acceptability difficult (unless as done in Nigeria, enforced by a federal legislation—for although

National Television Authority networks carry a dosage of programs from all the regions, in the north they are predominantly ignored increasingly in favor of ArabSat scheduling that broadcast a lot of American programs). And yet Hindi films from across the world would seem to be more acceptable in that despite religious and linguistic non-proximity, yet they carry enough cultural motifs that approximate the cultural spaces of Muslim northern Nigerians in the form of love triangles and forced marriage issues—in essence, sharing similar cultural mindsets. As indicated in an editorial in *The Hindu*:

Bollywood's distributors explain that the growing acceptability as also resistance against Indian cinema emanate from the same fact: the cultural revival of Afro-Asian societies after they overthrew European imperialism. The Indian Masala film is closer to the emotional grammar of the Asians and Africans than the Hollywood box office bonanzas. Hollywood's story of American divorcees does not touch the emotional chord of Afro-Asian families. Their emotional ambience is closer to something like *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*. The interaction between the characters in a Hindi film family drama is recognisable, therefore it holds their attention. Besides, song and dance play a pivotal role in the social life of Afro-Asian societies. M. Shamim, "Bollywood films make waves around the world", *The Hindu*, Sunday, February 25, 2001.

Thus "cultural resonance" explains why young Hausa novelists and filmmakers, spoon-fed on Hindi film fare from birth openly embrace the Hindi film motif, even if aware that the cultural and religious realities of their society is totally different from that of India. This also explains not only how Hausa filmmakers, and to some extent novelists appropriate Hindi films, but also how Hausa novelists find it easier to appropriate Asian film templates (love triangles and forced marriages), as well as heroic tales from Middle Eastern folklore and domesticate them into Hausa language. The perceived shared "cultural spaces" between Hausa Muslim societies and Middle Eastern societies creates a cultural proximity separated by not only physical, but also historical distances. Southern Nigeria, close by is seen as cultural distant. Other African countries with rich media culture, e.g. Mali, Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso have not developed effective ways of distributing their media products to non-French speaking countries, despite a sizeable number of Fulbe and Hausa ethnic nationalities in these countries.

## Notes about the author

Prof. Dr. Abdalla Uba Adamu is a professor of Science and Technology Education, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria ([www.kanoonline.com/auadamu](http://www.kanoonline.com/auadamu)), and also part-time lecturer in Media and Cultural Communication, Bayero University, Kano. This paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Kano between 2002 to 2006 among writers, novelists, filmmakers, musicians, lyricists and government officials which culminated in his main book on African media and cultural communication: *Passage from India: Transglobal Media Flows and African Cinema – The Video Film in Northern Nigeria*. The book manuscript is currently being evaluated by Ohio University Press, United States. In 2006 he delivered the distinguished Mary Kingsley Zochonis Lecture for the African Studies Association of the UK on the invitation of the Royal African Society at the School of Oriental and African Studies. The lecture was subsequently published as *Transglobal Media Flows and Hausa Popular Culture*. (Kano, Nigeria: Visually Ethnographic Productions, 2007). He is currently African Collaborative Director, Volkswagen Foundation Project, Passage of Culture (2008-2010).

## Notes

1. The colonial records of 1913 show that there was an estimated 19,073 Muslim schools, with 143,312 pupils in what later became Northern Nigeria.
2. For a deeper study of Abubakar Imam's techniques, see Abraham Mohammed Abdalla, *Abubakar Imam: Nazarin Tushe da Ginuwar Ayyukansa Na Adabi*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Nigerian Languages, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria, October 1998.
3. Robert Browning *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. London: Frederick Warne and Co., Ltd., 1888.
4. A fairly comprehensive database of the fourth generation Muslim Hausa prose fiction writers is maintained online at <http://hausa.soas.ac.uk/perl/Project/index.pl?project=hausa> by Graham Furniss and Malami Buba of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
5. In Kano, the first "Indian" film screened was *Gheghis Khan*, shown in Palace cinema, Kano city in December 1960. It is interesting to note that the film was not "Indian", but seen as so. Before independence, films shown in northern Nigerian cinemas were American cowboy, war and feature films.
6. Figures obtained from the daily program listings of NTA Kano library, June 2003.
7. This is a sample from a pool of 140 Hausa video films.
8. Based on fieldwork in Kano in which a group of 10 paid research assistants compared Hausa video films and identified the Hindi film equivalents as indicated in the footnote above.
9. Brian Larkin, *Bollywood Comes To Nigeria*, (emphasis added). *Samar* 8: Winter/Spring, 1997. <http://www.samarmagazine.org/archive/article.php?id=21>

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