

From Oral Literature to Video The Case of Hausa

edited by

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Eastward Ho! Cultural Proximity and Eastern Focus in Hausa Fiction and Videos

Abdalla Uba Adamu

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. 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: the 'global' can only be understood as the ways in which different 'local' sites are coordinated; yet there can be no understanding of the 'local' without understanding the 'global' of which it is a part.

Our existing forms of knowledge production and expertise are not exempt from these processes; it is increasingly impossible for us to understand contemporary changes without appreciating the perspectives which underlie them. The challenge is how, with ever greater cultural sensitivity, we can create forms of understanding that can grapple both with the situatedness of local knowledge and with its more global implications.

This challenge is often seen by the conservative establishment in all societies in terms of 'de-culturalization', implying 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' investment in a timeworn heritage. This situation is particularly acute in traditional Islamic societies where the distinction between private and public spheres is so rigidly enforced that creativity and the creative arts are seen as a threat.

In this paper I trace the Eastern motif in Hausa popular culture, addressing myself to evolutionary trends in Hausa literature, particularly prose fiction, and its younger brother, the Hausa video film. Among Hausa youth, neither of these categories of popular culture derives its direct inspiration from Western global media flows—as might be expected—but from Eastern media flows, i.e. from the Middle East and Asia. How media facilitate this passage of culture is the focus of the present analysis.

With the Colonials to the Near East: Early Hausa Literature in Roman Script

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 thousands of Muslim scholars.¹ Since it was clear that it would be against the grain for British colonial rule to encourage Islamic scholarship, a way had to be devised to slow down the progress of Islamic education. That way was the introduction of the Roman alphabet into a newly created education system in 1909. However, the new alphabet took a back seat until 1929 when the Translation Bureau was created. The objectives of the Bureau were:

1. To translate books and materials from Arabic and English into Hausa
2. To write books in Hausa
3. To produce Hausa textbooks for schools
4. To encourage indigenous authors (see Yahaya 1988:94)

The first Director of the Bureau was Mr. Whiting. It was under his tenure that local histories in Arabic were first published in a Hausanized Roman script. The best known such text is *Tarikh*

Arbab Hadha al-balad al-Musamma Kano, the oft quoted *Kano Chronicles*, translated by H.R. Palmer as *Hausawa Da Ma-ƙwabtansu* (1908) and republished in his *Sudanese Memoirs* (Palmer 1928:92-132).

The main focus of the Translation Bureau was the translation of foreign language texts into Hausa using the newly created Hausa Roman script. Prior to this, the main mode of literary expression among the Muslim Hausa had been the Arabic alphabet.

It was only when Dr. Rupert East took over in 1932 that the Translation Bureau acquired the character of what Nikolay A. Dobronravín (2003) refers to as *Istanci* (= the Hausa of Rupert East) and became devoted to the wholesale translation of works into Hausa. The intention was to generate reading material, perhaps aimed more at enabling colonial officers to polish their knowledge and practice of Hausa language, than to empower the “natives”. As Yahaya (1989:80) apologetically argued,

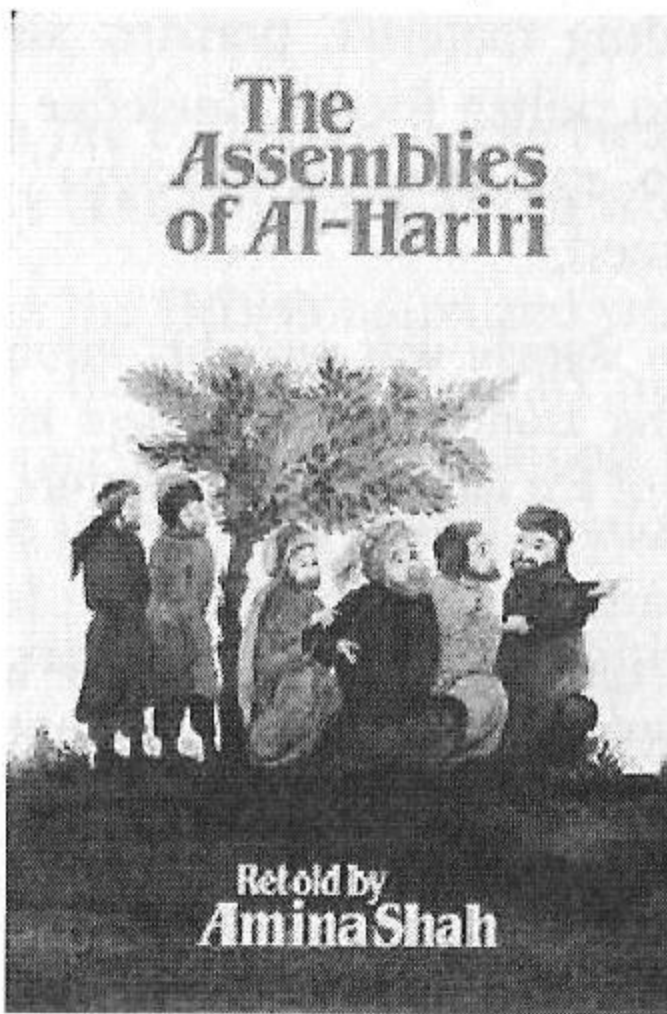
The decision to set up a Translation Bureau was probably informed by the general belief that translating from other languages into a given language enriches the lexicon of the language, its literature and culture.

In order to encourage indigenous writing in Hausa Roman 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 in 1935. These were *Ruwan Bagaja* (The Healing Waters) by Abubakar Imam, *Shaihu Umar* (Shaihu Umar) by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, *Gandoki* (Mr. Inquisitive) by Muhammad Bello Kagara and *Idon Matambayi* (The Eye of the Enquirer) by Muhammadu Gwarzo. Later, Dr. East collaborated with John Tafida Umaru to write the novel *Jiki Magayi* (Feeling the Heat).

The most outstanding of the five Hausa novels, according to Rupert East, was Abubakar Imam’s *Ruwan Bagaja*. 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 clear-

ly identifiable Hausa settings. Abubakar Imam, in an interview with Nicholas Pwedden (1995), stated that he was “inspired” to write *Ruwan Bagaja* after reading the Arabic stories in the *Maqamat* by Abu Muhammad al-Qasim Hariri (1054-1121) of Basra and widely available to Muslim scholars and intellectuals of northern Nigeria. It was this “inspiration” that was to become the first of the ‘rip-off’ phenomena of foreign media by the Hausa, and was heavily promoted by the British.

The *Maqamat Al-Hariri* was translated into English by various authors as *The Assemblies of Al-Hariri: Fifty Encounters with the Shaykh Abu Zayd of Seruj Maqamat*. 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*

As can be seen above even the cover artwork was designed to imitate the original—indicating the direction of future Hausa literary adaptation. However, other sources used in writing *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*.

Then, as now, Northern Nigeria and the Middle East shared remarkably similar 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 that of Rupert East. He observed, for instance, that the Muslim environment created a serious minded scholar not inclined to the 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 modern educational port of call in colonial education policy, the "Malamai" had to be the ones to be recruited to write any such novels. Subsequently, the thematic focus of 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).

Abubakar Imam's transmutative genius² is further shown in his interpretation of the poem *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. The Hausa version appeared in *Labarin Sarkin Busa* (The Story of the Piper),

one of the stories in *Magana Jari Ce* (Vol. 3, 1937). In the original German story from the Brothers Grimm (their 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.



Illustration from
Robert Browning (1888),
*The Pied Piper of Hamelin:
A Child's Story*



Illustration from
Magana Jari Ce (Vol 3),
Labarin Sarkin Busa

Original Poem

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.

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

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"!).

In effect, Abubakar Imam and the British had planted a Trojan Horse within the entertainment mindset of the Hausa.

The increasing exposure to entertainment media in various forms, from novels and tales written in Arabic, and subsequently radio and television programs with a heavy dosage of foreign content (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 Hausa society, and media in all their forms—from the written word to visual formats—were used for political, social and educational purposes.

Between 1950 and 1984 Hausa literature almost stagnated³. Most efforts were either sponsored by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Culture in the form of literary competitions or were published by North Regional Literature Agency (NRLA, or more commonly, NORLA from 1953-1959) which variously transformed into Gaskiya Corporation (1960) and Northern Nigerian Publishing Corporation (1966), as part of a set of reading materials for Hausa language and literature studies at Ordinary Level examinations. If novel writing was seen as too "literary" for use in school, nevertheless the literary content of the novels and plays listed below avoided the Eastern focus, remaining true to the Hausa social—and often political—mindset: *Tura Ta Kai Bango* (1983, Enough is Enough) by S.I. Katsina, *Duniya Tumbin Giwa* (1973, The World is a Big Place) by I.Y. Muhammad, *Kitsen Rogo* (1979, Illusion) by A. Dangambo, *Tsaka Mai Wuya* (1983, A Hard Time) by Kamaruddin Imam, among others.

The availability of cheap printing presses in Nigeria—made possible by the start of a new political era in 1979 which liberalized poster production for politicians—opened possibilities for self-printing, and led to the emergence of new forms. There are no specific records to show which urban cluster in the north started the private publishing phenomenon, 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 between 1984 and 1988. Table 1 lists the pioneer Hausa novelists from the north of Nigeria.

Table 1: A Selection of Pioneer Hausa Prose Fiction Writers⁴

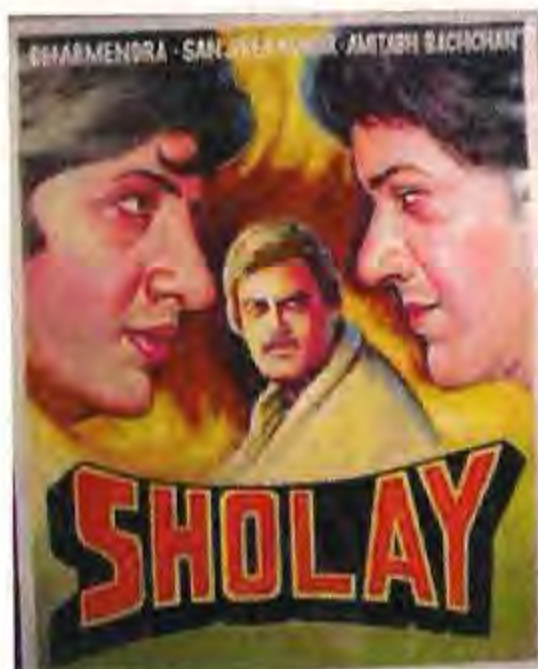
S/N	Title	Author	Year
1.	So Aljannar Duniya	Hafsat AbdulWaheed	1981
2.	Wasiyar Baba Kere I	Ibrahim Saleh Gumel	1983
3.	Inda Rai Da Rabo	Idris S. Imam	1984
4.	Rabin Raina I	*Talatu Wada Ahmad	1984
5.	Soyayya Gamon Jini	Ibrahim H Abdullahi Bichi	1986
6.	Budurwar Zuciya	*Balaraba Ramat Yakubu	1986
7.	Rabin 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: Hindi Cinema and Hausa Videos

Once the process was started, there followed a virtual avalanche of young male and female writers who approached the publishing and writing phenomena with greater gusto than those predecessors who had had the backing of the State machinery in publishing their novels. The new novelists 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.

Although the first cinema in Kano, the Rex, was opened in 1937, it was only after Nigerian independence from Britain in 1960 that Hindi commercial films—brought to northern Nigeria by Lebanese distributors⁵—started to feature in Northern Nigerian cinemas and then spread to other urban clusters such as Kaduna and Jos. From the 1960s to the 1990s—and before the advent of home videos—Hindi cinema was the main cinematic interest of the Hausa youths⁶. Examples of the posters, which were simply adored in major northern Nigerian cities, are shown in Plate 2:



Sholay



Rani Rupmati



Yaadon Ki Baaraat

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

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, from 2nd October 1977 when the first Hindi film (*Aan Bann*) was shown until 6 June 2003, the NTA TV station in Kano alone showed 1,176 Hindi films on its television network.⁷ When the first such film appeared on Hausa television screens, children aged from 4-6, and their youngish mothers (who were in their 20s) became avid viewers. By 2000 the children had grown up, become film makers and their Indian cinema conditioning had become their defining template as artists in visual media cultural interpretation. The video production values of the new video moguls—predominantly Hausanized ethnic non-Hausa but with a few Hausa among them—were not informed by household dramas, rustic settings, or moralizing sermons; and the films were not made to appease the traditionalist establishment. Their main creative mechanism was the appropriation of Hindi Masala films, revamped 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 appeared combining several genres in one video and attempting to copy as many Hindi films as they could. I coined the term *Bollywoodanci* (Bollywood adaptation) to reflect the main mechanism of this cluster of young, and essentially urban, film makers.

The over-riding desire of these Young Turks of the Hausa video film industry to be commercially successful evolved against the background of an economy that denied proper jobs to young men who had emerged from an educational system, incapable of offering them any further education, with only an NFA (No Future Ambition, a self-coined term of the group) to their name. Towards the end of the 1990s, the 1970s toddlers and teenage cultural rebels had grown to acquire capitalistic values—and a VHS camera. They were the products of media parenting officially sanctioned by radio and television houses that broadcast a continuous diet

of Hindi (plus a sprinkling of American and Chinese) cinema and African-American musical influences. They were indeed the products of an economy that encouraged them to survive by any means necessary—legal or illegal—since copyright issues did not concern them. Table 2 shows some of the more notable Hausa video films that were “inspired” by Hindi films.⁸

Table 2: Hausa Video Film Hindi Film Inspirations/Appropriations

S/N	Hausa Video Rip-off	Hindi Film Original ⁹	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

Furthermore young emergent Hausa video film stars started using the names of their perceived Bollywood 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 Ruk Khan), Tahir Fage (Sunny Deol), Danladi Shehu (Akshay Kumar), Rabi Landiyo (Sridevi). One Hausa actress, Farida Abubakar, went so far as to change her name officially to Farida Jalal—explicitly copying the name of a Hindi film star.

In the absence of locally-flavored cinema, young Hausa men saw these Hindi films as closely approximating their own social space. House-bound young housewives who had no opportunity to go to the cinema and who therefore relied solely on television programs were even more strongly affected. The elaborate song and dance routines characteristic of commercial Hindi cinema available in northern Nigeria captivated the urbanized Hausa so deeply that many of them could recite the Hindi language songs word for word.

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

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, when a Hausa author, Nazeer Abdullahi Magoga, published *Fassarar Indiyanchi a Saukake*—*Hindi Language Made Easy*. The book covers are shown in Plate 3.



Plate 3: Hindi Primer in Hausa

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

After expressing my gratitude to Allah, the main objective of publishing this book...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. (Magoga 1997:1; my translation)

This book was all the more significant in that it was the first book in Hausa that was the result of media parenting. It is thus through this book that the Hausa know the actual translation of the titles of 47 popular Hindi films¹⁰; it also contains the complete transliteration of Hindi lyrics and the translation into Hausa, from popular films such as *Maine Pyar Kiya* and *Kabhi-Khabie*.

In 1996, he started working on the first volume, *Fassarar Indiyanchi*, published in 1997, so that, when the Hausa video film boom started in 2000, the book was already available. A second volume of the book (Magoga 1997b) takes language acquisition to the next level and includes information on the culture and customs of India—more precisely, on Hindu¹¹. Yet despite easier access to Hindi, Hausa video film producers were more interested in using motifs and thematic structures of Hindi films than in learning what the Hindi words meant. Thus Magoga's work had little effect on 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* (chant) groups using the tambourine (*bandiri*) as their main musical instrument, constituted themselves

into the *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 Indian society is “just” like Hausa society, at least in its approach to marriage—the main obsession of the young Hausa video film producers. Thus Hausa video film makers who seek their inspiration in Hindi commercial films focus on the similarities between Hausa culture and what they perceive as Hindi culture, as seen in the films, rather than on their differences. As Brian Larkin (1997b) 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 *dogon* [sic] *riga*, over which they wear long waistcoats, much like the Hausa *palmaran*. 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. [Emphasis added]

The perceived similarities between Hausa and Hindi film cultures is illustrated not just by the story lines, but by the poster art work which Hausa video film producers created, imitating Hindi films as closely as possible. This is illustrated by e.g. the poster for the Hausa video film *Sharadi* from the Hindi *Khabi Khushi* (Plate 4):

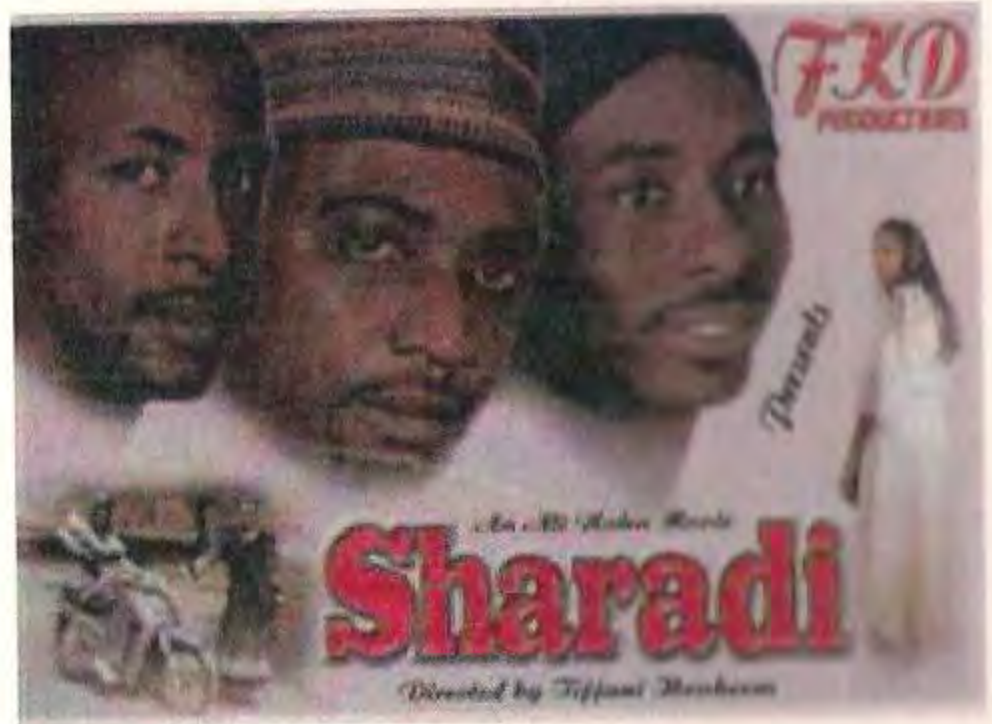
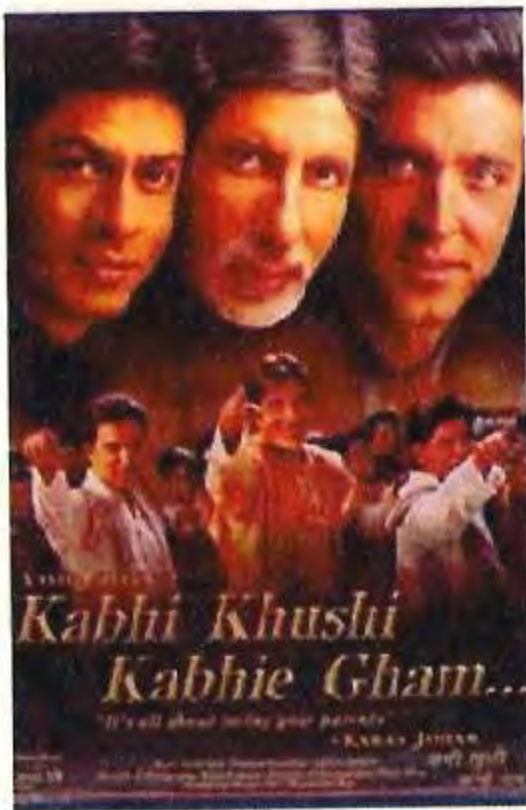
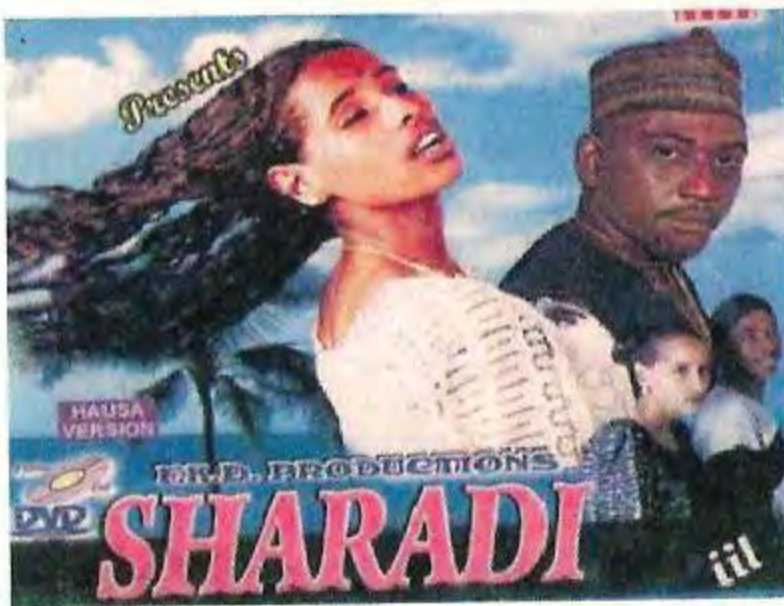


Plate 4: Hindi-to-Hausa Video Film

In some cases female artistes with a faint resemblance to Indian actresses are preferred in Hausa home videos, as shown in Plate 5:



Sharadi



Titanic: Masoyiyata

Plate 5: Curryng For Favor: “Indian” Look-alikes in Hausa Home Video

The argument for this kind of rip-off was that, even if young Nigerian video moguls were to create a story, it would probably have a Hindi cinema plot; so it was easier to copy a popular Hindi film directly into Hausa. It was at this point that Indian cinema influence came to the fore in full force and the new crop of Hausa video film producers, intent on repeating the success of *Sangaya*, started using Hindi cinema storylines.

Passage to India and Beyond: Developments in the Contemporary Hausa Novel

To compete with the Hausa video film industry, young Hausa novelists soon began to “domesticate” the themes of the Hindi cinema they watched, and what emerged was Hausa romantic fiction—generally, and again, contemptuously (see Sheriff 1991) labelled *soyayya* (love) stories. What followed then was an unconscious process of translating the Hindi cinematic focus on love triangles and forced marriage into Hausa novels.

For most of the 1990s, the new novels elicited a barrage of attention from critics, but the criticism tapered off in the mid 2000s. After the turbulent years of the 1990s (see Adamu 2000, 2006 and Malumfashi 2005), the 2000s brought a newer Eastern focus to Hausa literature in two ways.

Firstly, the Hausa video film—which enjoyed its greatest commercial success from 1995 to 2005—became increasingly reliant on using the Hindi film motifs in order to sell. Subsequently, some Hausa novelists, who had hitherto used only a general matrix of Hindi films, began to appropriate specific storylines from Hindi films (among others) as the basis for their novels. Table 3 shows some of these novels and their sources:

Table 3: Hausa Novels Appropriated From Mainly Asian Sources

S/N	Novel (author)	Media (type)
Hindi Films		
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
Southern Nigerian Films		
11.	Biyu Babu (Abdullahi H. Yerima)	The Child
12.	Kallabi (Maje El-Hajeej)	Samodara
American Film		
13.	Mazan Fama (Shehu U. Muhammad)	Clash of the Titans
James Hadley Chase (Novels)		
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.	A Ci Duniya Da Tsinke (Zuwaira Isa)	Death is Women
Sidney Sheldon (Novel)		
19.	Wayyo Duniya (Hafsat C. Sodangi)	If Tomorrow Comes

Source: Magazine *Inuwar Marubuta* (Kano, Nigeria) No 2, Feb. 2005

Secondly, book covers—some of which provoked religious condemnation (see Danjuma-Katsina 1993)—which had, in the early years of Hausa novels (1985 to 1995), a more or less idealized drawing of young Hausa women, started to show photos of either Hindi female film stars or Chinese female models. This was actually stimulated by the practice of appropriating Hindi films by the Hausa video film industry—a process which Hausa novelists felt they could replicate at least on their book covers, if only to draw attention to the novels. Typical examples of book covers reflecting this newer Eastern focus are shown in Plate 6.



Furuci
(Utterances)

Alkawarin Allah
(God's Promise)

Abin Da Ka Shuka
(What You Sow)

Plate 6: The 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, kept its place in the development of Hausa literature from 1980 onwards, when new Hausa writers emerged. Given 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.

The storylines in the novels that emerged from 1980 to 2000 provoked a number of protests, mainly from school teachers who complained that the novels were preventing school girls from concentrating on their studies (but see Malumfashi 1992a, 1992b; Abubakar 1999). However, civil society, the religious establishment and the state machinery tended to ignore the writers. It was only printers of the books and the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), Kano Branch, who actually took any steps towards curbing what were seen either as sexual excesses, e.g. the banning by the ANA of *Matsayin Lover* (Lover's Stand), a lesbian themed novel by Alkhamees Bature Makwarari, or as cultural misplacement, e.g. the explicit ban from 2005 on any European or Eastern

pictures of males or females on Hausa book covers. Plate 7 shows the poster made by book printers/publishers in Kano, warning authors to stop using foreign images on their covers.



Wannan Kungiya Mai Suna a sama ta yi dokar
hana bugawa da yada litattafai masu bangon
indiya ko kuma na turawa da sunan yada adabin
Hausa da al'adunsu. Daga ranar 1/1/2006.
Da fatan za'a bi doka da oda.

Sannarwa daga P. R. O.
Abdullahi Mukhtar Y. Mallam

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 7: A Warning to Globalizing Hausa Authors, Kano, 2006

Abubakar Imam is Dead—Long Live Abubakar Imam!

The new Eastern focus in Hausa novels did not stop at book covers and appropriated stories from Hindi (and occasionally Chinese) cinema. From the mid-1990s, a new form of Imamism has emerged among a few writers in the contemporary Hausa novel scene. This was the translation of Middle Eastern folkloric epics, with an emphasis on Persian novels, into Hausa. 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* [Malikussaif son of Ziyazanun]), Nasiru G. Ahmad 'Yan'Awaki (*Ra'asul Guuli* [Guuli's

head]), Alhaji Muhammadu Aliyu Jega (*Tanimuddari*—name of the book's central character]) popularized the epic tale of sword and sorcery.

By 2003, the American “War on Terror”, ignited by the events of September 11, 2001, had taken its revenge with its onslaught first on Afghanistan and then on Iraq. For some unexplained reason, young Muslim Hausa seemed to be more attracted to Iraq and its predominantly Shiite society than had hitherto been the case in the formerly Sunnite Hausa Muslim population. One area of this attention was Iraqi literature. Hausa authors with some skills in either understanding Farsi or the Arabic translation of Iranian literature started the process of translating Persian novels into Hausa. Leading the group was Aliyu Abubakar Sharfadi, whose Hausa translations of Persian and Arabic novels such as *Aja'ibi* [Surprises], *Ainul-Haya* [Eyeing Life], *Bahalawana*, *Saisabana*, *Fairuza* and *Fairuzasshaha* (the latter simply named after the books' central characters) were full of Middle-Eastern heroic epics of bravery, damsels in distress, lost kingdoms, sword and sorcery, and epic battles between humans and non-humans (specifically *aljannu*, i.e. spirits, and other weird beings). Compared to *Ruwan Bagaja*—Abubakar Imam's mild humorous take on *Maqamat Al-Hariri*, Sharfadi's treatment was a full-tilt dosage, depositing Middle Eastern global literature right on the Hausa doorstep.

Sharfadi was not the only author reviving Abubakar Imam's legacy. Following in similar footsteps was the late Abdullahi Mukhtar, aka Yaron Mallam, who declared his wish to succeed Abubakar Imam¹², particularly regarding his technique of taking various books from different sources and amalgamating them into a synthesized Hausa narrative. Novels such as *Shahada* (The Martyrdom), *Tsuburin Bamuda* (The Island Bermuda), *Akwatin Sidda-baru* (Box of Tricks), and *Gumu* (Gumu) are a further affirmation of the male macho, Conan-the-Barbarian type, Middle Eastern epic translated into Hausa. Merely looking at the covers of the novels seems to reveal a studied desire to produce a narrative discourse that runs counter to the soft image of the predominantly

romantic novels of other Hausa writers. Plate 8 shows the cover artwork of some of the translations.



Babban Goro
(Big Reward)



Yahudu Bad da Musulmi
(Jews, Leading Muslims
Astray)



Jarmai Sha Yaki

Plate 8: Macho, Long Hair and Bravery in Hausa Translations
of Eastern Epics

Other novelists striking out on the Eastern path include Abdul-Aziz Sani Madaki Gini (*Rinjaye* [Majority], *Babban Goro* [A Large Gift], *Ruguntsumi* [Confrontation]), Umar Lawan Abdul (*Jarmai Sha Yaki* [The Warrior Jarmai]) and Abubakar T. Iliyasu (*Bauta!!* [Enslavement!!]). All these appeared between 2003 and 2005. And as if to prove that the sword and sorcery epic had been explored earlier with a Hausa motif, Babangida Abdu S. Kayyu re-released his 1995 fantasy novel, *Gugan Karfe* (The Bucket of Steel), in 2006 to cash in on the back of the sudden popularity of what I call “battle novels”.

It is significant that the new surge in translating Eastern folklore into Hausa tends 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 differs radically from the pastel-colored image of either the idealized female Hausa beauty or of a Hindi film star on the cover.

Conclusion

In concluding this essay, my main focus is on those regional—Middle Eastern and Asian—influences of media flows which, resulting from perceived cultural proximity between the giver and the taker, have led to the appropriation of visual popular culture. Other studies of regional media influences have suggested that a cultural resonance often develops in media consumption between countries that share 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.

What starts as “cultural affinity” soon translates into “cultural proximity”, 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 culture and value systems which are common to both the Koreans and the 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”.

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

to be culturally closer to Taiwan. This proximity allows Taiwanese audiences to relate to Japanese dramas more easily.

South America is another regional cluster with considerable progress in television drama production and export. However, even where cultural and linguistic types are very close, it is sometimes the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country which determines the interregional exchange of programs. 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 enjoying cultural proximity find it easier to offer “oppositional resistance” to media programming from more distant sources. As Joseph D. Straubhaar (1991) suggests, such resistance is further facilitated, by the occurrence of linguistic commonalities 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, in African “francophone” countries where, as Mytton, Teer-Tomaselli & 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 US \$60, these services are essentially limited to elites—or those with enough interest to break out of traditional home-based media fare. Furthermore, the African content of the stations in these services, especially drama series, had no appeal to northern Nigerian Muslim audiences.

This may help to explain why southern Nigerian programs—both TV dramas and video films, which are characterized by a Christian ethos and by the ethnic idiosyncrasies of the producers—are less palatable to northern Nigerian Muslim audiences. The persistent inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts between northern and southern Nigeria (see Agi 1998 for a comprehensive treatment of this) are a clear testimony to the cultural hostilities that make cross-regional media acceptability difficult in Nigeria, unless, as has been done, it is enforced by federal legislation. For, despite the fact that National Television Authority networks carry a selection of programs from all the regions, the north increasingly favors ArabSat' (despite its many American programs) and ignores the Nigerian regional programs.

It seems that Hindi films from across the world are more acceptable despite religious and linguistic distance. Quite simply, these films carry enough cultural motifs approximating the cultural spaces of Muslim northern Nigerians, such as the love triangles and issues arising from forced marriage—in essence, sharing simi-

lar cultural mindsets¹³. As indicated by Shamim (2001) in an editorial in *The Hindu*:

Bollywood's distributors explain that the growing acceptability as also [sic] 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.

Thus "cultural resonance" explains why young Hausa novelists and filmmakers, spoon-fed on Hindi film fare openly embrace the Hindi film motif, even when they are fully aware that the cultural and religious realities of their society are very different from those 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 and Middle Eastern societies create a cultural proximity despite geographical distance.

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.

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- ³ Within the period of 1954 to 1986, less than 45 books are listed in the anthology of Hausa novels and plays (see Yahaya 1988).
- 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 such. Before independence, films shown in northern Nigerian cinemas were American cowboy, war and feature films.
- ⁶ 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 youth.
- ⁷ Figures obtained from the daily program listings of NTA Kano library, June 2003.
- ⁸ This is a sample from a pool of 140 Hausa video films.
- ⁹ 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.
- ¹⁰ Examples are *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]).
- ¹¹ In an unpublished personal interview with the present author [19th March, 2004, Kano, Nigeria], Nazeer Abdullahi Magoga told how his interest in learning Hindi developed after watching thousands of Hindi films and led to his conceiving of the idea of writing a series of phrase books on Hindi.
- ¹² Interview with the author on 1st October 2006.

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- ¹³ Southern Nigeria, on the other hand, while geographically close to northern Nigeria, is seen as culturally distant because of differences in religious cultures.

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