

## **11. Nollywood, Kannywood and a Decade of Hausa Film Censorship in Nigeria: 2001 to 2011**

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One of the most striking stories in recent global film history is the dramatic rise of the Nigerian “video film” industry, dubbed Nollywood, a prolific low budget film industry based in Africa’s most populous country. Turning out over a thousand feature films a year, the Nigerian film industry relies mostly on digital video technology and “straight to video” releases, which are sold on DVD and video cd in the informal economy of the West African market system.<sup>1</sup> A former British colony, Nigeria was cobbled together from pre-existing nations and around four hundred different ethnicities and language groups, the largest of which are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. After gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria suffered a civil war from 1967-70 and a series of military coups. Now a federation of 36 states, the country is in its third period of civilian rule, which began in 1999 with the handover of the military to a democratically elected government.

While the international media regards the Nigerian popular video industry as a novelty, state-sponsored cinema began in the colonial era and continued into the age of television. The most commercially successful features films were those that developed out of the popular Yoruba travelling theatre in the 1970s. Unlike the more internationally celebrated Francophone African cinema, often funded and promoted by France, commercial Yoruba cinema was largely

self-supporting.<sup>2</sup> When structural adjustment programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund in the mid-1980s caused the Nigerian economy to shrivel, popular theatre filmmakers and business entrepreneurs began to turn from unaffordable celluloid production to the more economical option of shooting on VHS video. By the late 1990s, most had adopted digital technology.<sup>3</sup>

Because video cameras and computer editing programmes were low-cost and user-friendly, the industry was self-sustaining and largely self-taught. Video films were shot, edited, and reproduced in Nigeria by Nigerians, made, for the most part to be seen on TVs and VCRs in homes and in small video viewing centres rather than in cinemas.<sup>4</sup> As Brian Larkin has pointed out, piracy networks developed around the distribution of Hollywood and Bollywood films facilitated the legal distribution of local videos. Former pirates became legitimate distributors called “marketers”, who had access to a gigantic Nigerian market—a population of over 167 million by 2011.<sup>5</sup> Piracy networks also made the videos available to audiences beyond the reach of local marketers. The popularity of the films and their stars grew beyond Nigerian borders into the rest of Africa and beyond. By 2001, this thriving video film industry had become known as Nollywood, seen increasingly as a counterpart to the popular American and Indian cinemas.<sup>6</sup>

The cultural and religious diversity of Nigeria—the south identifying largely with Christianity and the north with Islam—fostered distinct regional video industries. Jonathan Haynes notes that just as the name “Bollywood” conceals the diversity of the multiple language industries within India, so also does the name “Nollywood” obscure the diversity of what is being made in the country.<sup>7</sup> Within Nigeria, there are separate but thriving film industries in Hausa, Yoruba, and the official national language of English, as well as upcoming industries in smaller languages such as Bini, Efick, and Ibibio.<sup>8</sup>

The rest of this chapter will address official censorship in Nigeria and will focus on censorship of the Hausa film industry, popularly called Kannywood, from 2001-11, exploring political discourse in which Muslim identity is employed to both suppress and defend the creative arts. The information presented here is based on field research carried out in northern Nigeria from June to August 2006, and June 2008 to January 2012, using the qualitative ethnographic research methods of interviewing members of the Hausa film industry and its critics as well as participant observation in editing studios and on film sets.

### **Censorship in Nigeria and the birth of the *National Film and Video Censors Board***

For almost as long as there has been film in Nigeria, there has also been censorship. In 1912, nine years after the first newsreels were shown in Nigeria, the British colonial government put forth the “The Theatre and Public Performance Regulation Ordinance”, which regulated exhibition space of performances and films. In 1933, a formal censorship board was founded by statutory appointment to censor both propaganda films and commercial films imported by the Colonial Film Unit and business people, as well as local church productions. As Paul Ugor points out, colonial censorship policies were mainly concerned with security and protecting their interests.<sup>9</sup> Following independence, the colonial laws were revised to become the “Cinematographic Act” of 1963/4 forming the Federal Board of Film Censors (FBFC).<sup>10</sup> The new law, which applied to local and imported films, included prohibitions against “expos[ing] people of African descent to ridicule and contempt” or “encourage[ing] racial religious or ethnic discrimination” and layered onto colonial concerns that films not “undermine national security”, “encourage illegal or criminal acts” or “reinforce corruption of private and public morality”. The FBFC incorporated new members in 1971 and was reconstituted in 1977. The sixteen members

of the board represented various government bodies, as well as Christian and Muslim interest groups, and were split into four regional censors committees. In 1987, a supplemental “Communication Policy” was written, “which touched on areas relating to the educational and entertainment value of films, its capacity for promoting national unity, and its potential for enhancing national culture”.<sup>11</sup>

Ademola James observes that by the late 1980s, it had become obvious that the 1963 law, which covered only cinema, was no longer relevant in the current “video invasion”. Not only were hundreds of local films now being made on video but thousands of video clubs were renting out pirated videos of uncensored foreign films, which gave rise to fears about cultural imperialism. In 1993 the FBFC was dismantled and replaced by the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), which began to function as an agency on 15 June 1994, with James as its pioneering executive director. The 1993 law expanded the definition of “film” beyond celluloid to cover video and established a classification system for viewers.<sup>12</sup> Building on the nationalist principles of its predecessors, the national censorship act is a broad-ranging law that licenses and regulates exhibition space and distributors, and requires every film, foreign or local, to be submitted for review before release. Censorship guidelines include concerns about national unity and regulate violence, obscenity and negative cultural stereotypes, as well as the technical quality of the films.<sup>13</sup> By 2001, the NFVCB had established a zonal office in the northern city of Kano, one of the highest film producing cities in the country, to complement film registration services offered in zonal offices in south-western Lagos, south-eastern Onitsha, and the centrally located capital of Abuja.<sup>14</sup>

While federal censorship seemed largely based on developmental and nationalist concerns, the board under Rosaline Odeh, executive director of the NFVCB from 2001-5,

became more active in censoring content ostensibly to protect Nigeria's cultural and religious sensibilities. She put a rating of "18" on "films containing violence, ritual, sex crime etc", and in an attempt to remove "violence, rituals, voodooism and the like from our airwaves" banned any such film from television broadcast.<sup>15</sup> Ugor notes that critics accused Odeh of "subjecting film censorship to what they considered to be narrow Catholic Christian dogmas",<sup>16</sup> yet Odeh's strict Christian views on censorship were paralleled by Islamic censorship developed by the northern state of Kano shortly before she had taken office.<sup>17</sup>

### **Islam in Hausaland and the controversy surrounding the Hausa film industry**

The ancient walled city of Kano, now the capital of Kano state, was one of seven major Hausa city states in what is now north-western Nigeria. As an important trade centre in West Africa, Kano had been exposed to Islam since at least the fourteenth century, and following the early nineteenth-century Islamic revolution led by ethnic Fulani scholar Usman dan Fodiyo against what he saw as the corruption and oppressiveness of the ruling Hausa elite, mixed urban dwellers began to identify themselves as "Hausa-Fulanis".<sup>18</sup> When colonialism was introduced after the British conquest of Kano in 1903, Islamic scholars began to express anxieties about the foreign ideas and activities they saw as corrupting Hausa-Fulani Muslim culture. The cinema was symptomatic of these fears. First built in the 1930s by Lebanese businessmen and situated in new colonial areas where settlers from all over Nigeria lived, the cinemas, which from the 1960s screened mostly Indian films, were seen as un-Islamic spaces, havens for thugs and prostitutes.<sup>19</sup> When in the 1990s, the young Hausa video film industry, centred in Kano, began to rapidly grow alongside the southern Nigerian industry, it was branded with many of the same unsavoury associations. The first Hausa video films in the late 1980s and early 1990s grew out of drama

groups that had produced content for television before turning to making independent productions, and many of the films were based on the controversial *soyayya* (love) novels, a thriving market of Hausa language literature that deals with romance and family politics. The novels drew accusations of being overly influenced by Indian films and were often condemned in sermons from the mosque. Indeed, according to Abdalla Uba Adamu, “the Kano State Government set up a Books and Films Production Control Agency in 1996. The Agency was established principally to monitor the publishing of books and home videos and censor their contents, grade them appropriately for public consumption.” But while an edict to back the activities of the agency was drafted, it was never released by the government, and the control agency fell by the wayside.<sup>20</sup>

As the video films became more popular, they drew into the profession young people who had first learned to love the medium through watching Indian films in cinemas and on television and videos at home. Many of the same contradictions surrounding cinema culture also surrounded the Hausa film industry. As Larkin notes,

For most Hausa, cinema is not serious, detracting youths from proper *tarbiyya* (religious training), yet many attend precisely because they feel they receive moral instruction, and there is no question that this instruction (and not just escapism) is one of the pleasures of cinema.<sup>21</sup>

However, the forms of instruction the youth-found valuable were sometimes the very aspects that put them into conflict with the larger society. Adamu recounts the furore that occurred over several early Hausa films. Upon the release of *Saliha?* (1999), a film about a girl, Saliha, who constantly wore the head and neck covering, the hijab, as a sign of her virtue only to be revealed as having had sex before marriage, “a fatwa (Muslim clerical ruling) of death

sentence was issued on the director and the producer of the film by a religious group in Kaduna.” The group insisted the film be taken off “the market and the film’s makers apologize to the Muslim community for what was seen as disrespect for Islam”. After the first screening of another film, *Malam Karkata (Twisted Teacher, 1999)* “dealing with a rogue marabou who insisted on sexual gratification for dispensing spiritual consultation to emotionally distressed women”, marketers “vowed not to stock, sell or distribute the film”. Adamu points out the conflict between filmmakers who seek to reform society through exposing hypocrisy and a public which sees respect for privacy as essential to Islamic identity.<sup>22</sup> Another source of conflict was the Bollywood-style song and dance sequences between young men and women often wearing Western clothing included in most of the films. Although filmmakers often argued that the films would not sell without singing and dancing, the films drew the ire of religious leaders and the elite. They were seen as introducing “alien values” and spoiling the upbringing of Muslim children. Zulkifl Dakata, for example, states that while Hausa-language films replaced the Indian film in the market, “instead of using our culture to promote and sustain our indigenous development”, they “unfortunately went on to continue serving us with the same elements that have always threatened to degrade” it.<sup>23</sup>

Stakeholders in the Kano film industry, by 1998 known as Kannywood, took measures to address concerns about morality. Sabo Nayaya describes how distributors “established their own censoring committee” and refused to sell any videos not previewed by the committee. “[T]he objective was to do away with obscenities and other unwanted portions” they believed would “bring chaos or cause disaffection between the people”.<sup>24</sup> Alhaji Musa of Malam K’ato video shop recounts how video sellers heard negative feedback about the films from their customers. When he visited the NFVCB office in Abuja before a zonal office was established in Kano, he

realized that only one of the film reviewers understood Hausa. Though a main objective of the NFVCB was to make sure the films did not disrespect other ethnicities or religions, Alhaji Musa was concerned that they didn't understand Hausa culture or religion. Coming back to Kano, he called a meeting of the marketers' association and other film stakeholders after which they opened an office that would review films before they were released on the market.<sup>25</sup>

The marketers' review board was formed during a time of wide-spread agitation for the reimplementing of shari'a law, the Islamic judicial system in effect from the revolution of reformer Usman Dan Fodiyo until the British conquest. When civilian government was reinstated in Nigeria in 1999 after years of military rule, the newly elected governor of north-western Zamfara state interpreted the 1999 constitution as allowing northern states to implement shari'a law. The masses began to demand that this law be instituted all over the north. Although there was some amount of opposition from northern Muslims and widespread protests by Christian minorities that led to a series of violent conflicts, political rhetoric presented shari'a as a way to bring justice to the poor and right the damage done against the Islamic state by colonialism, which had, as Mamman Lawan Yusufari argued, "bequeathed a 'one-legged' Sharia" by limiting Islamic law "only to personal and business matters".<sup>26</sup> Kano Governor Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso bowed to political pressure, and on 21 June 2000, shari'a law was publically declared in Kano. Among the evils "sanitized" were prostitution, alcohol consumption, and filmmaking.<sup>27</sup>

Abdulkarim Mohammad, the first president of the Motion Picture Practitioners Association of Nigeria (MOPPAN), an association founded in 2000 to advocate for northern filmmakers with the federal government, recalled the sudden pronouncement on 14 December 2000 "from the Kano state government prohibiting the sales, the production, and the exhibition

of films in Kano state because of the introduction of shari'a". MOPPAN helped associations, including the Kano State Filmmakers Association, Kano State artist's guilds, cinema owners, and cassette sellers associations, present their cause to the government, listing the number of filmmakers involved in each association and the "average capital" brought in by each person in the industry. As Mohammad put it, although they "embraced" the government's "pronouncement wholeheartedly because it is through shari'a", they asked them to provide "an alternative means of livelihood" or allow them to continue making films. The government told the filmmakers to come up with a solution.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Birth of the Kano State Censorship Board***

The solution the filmmakers came up with was state censorship. In 1999 the second NFVCB-sponsored National Film and Video Forum had recommended that the NFVCB "be the only film and video regulatory body in the country" so that the existence of multiple boards would not stifle "the fledgling industry".<sup>29</sup> However, when Mohammad and other filmmakers studied the law, they realized that "if any state government feels that there are some provisions of the NFVCB that are not taking adequate care of the locale of the state, they are at liberty to create their own state censorship boards". MOPPAN worked with the state government to create the Kano State Censorship Board (KSCB), which would enable filmmakers to return to work, while also providing a political concession to the religious leaders who had urged the ban on the industry. Henceforth filmmakers wanting to access Kano markets would be required to pass their films through both the NFVCB and the KSCB before release.<sup>30</sup>

Much of the "State Censorship Film Board Law 2001" and regulations enacted on 1 February 2001 reproduce almost word for word, criteria from the 1993 NVCB law stipulating

that films should have educational value and should not undermine or encourage violence, criminality, obscenity, blasphemy, or religious or ethnic conflict. New regulations specific to Kano prohibit men and women from entering the same auditorium unless the cinema provided a “hijab” separating men from women, which in effect meant that women were no longer admitted into cinemas. The law also gives the board power to “register the State film Industry operators and other related persons” and to regulate film producers, publishers, and distributors.<sup>31</sup>

According to Mohammad, the film industry was given four out of 16 seats on the censorship board, which also included representatives of various government agencies and at least two “Islamic scholars of high repute”.<sup>32</sup> For the most part, the bureaucratic oversight of the law proved to be the political compromise that enabled filmmakers to continue working, although they began to self consciously present themselves as “shari’a compliant”. Actors were often listed as *masu fadakarwa* (warners) in the closing credits, and Matthias Krings writes about a proliferation of “Islamic conversion films” shortly after the beginning of shari’a dramatizing the superiority of Muslims among pagan people, though romantic singing and dancing films were still the most commercially successful.<sup>33</sup> According to Nayaya “singing and dancing between male and female” was prohibited;<sup>34</sup> however, this prohibition was rarely enforced, not even in 2003 when a new governor, Ibrahim Shekarau, was voted in after campaigning on promises that he would better implement shari’a law. As a part of his programme he instituted the *Hisbah Board* (shari’a police) and a Societal Reorientation Directorate “aimed at combating indiscipline and “restoring our cherished values”: “uprightness, good manners, patriotism, and respect for law and order” through social initiatives.<sup>35</sup>

At the KSCB in 2006, six out of the ten prohibitions listed in a flier distributed to filmmakers titled “*Ka’idojin Duba Fina-Finai/Criteria for Reviewing Films*” specify concerns

about un-Islamic behaviour, such as close dancing between men and women, or women wearing form-fitting clothing or leaving their hair uncovered.<sup>36</sup> Despite these rules, the board usually tolerated the frequently donned Western dress and controversial storylines which often included violence or sexual innuendo, but they did occasionally ban a film. One of these was the *cinéma vérité* film *Bakar Ashana* (*Black Matches*, 2004), produced by Aminu Bala, which explores the ambiguous world of prostitution. Because Bala censored the film with NFVCB but bypassed the KSCB, the board ordered him arrested and fined, as well as the ban and seizure of the film from Kano shops.<sup>37</sup>

While MOPPAN tended to be concerned with encouraging positive portrayals of Hausa society, some younger filmmakers pushed boundaries with edgy content, claiming that they were attempting to correct society by mirroring it. Aminu Bala passionately defended *Bakar Ashana* as a film that educates girls about the dangers of prostitution.<sup>38</sup> Filmmaker Abbas Sadiq had internalized unwritten censorship rules. While directing me in a special appearance in one of his films in July 2006, he stopped me from shaking a man's hand, saying that the censorship board didn't allow men and women to touch. All the same, he resented the board and the public opinion in Kano it stood for, insisting that where he had grown up in the north-central city of Jos, young people wore Western clothes and mingled freely. "They should know that Nigeria is not a uni-cultural state. Nigeria is a multi-cultural state," he said mentioning that he had received emails from people all over the country and even abroad appreciating his films. "Culture is not static," he argued. "It always changes."<sup>39</sup>

### **Sex scandal in a shari'a state and the tenure of Abubakar Rabo Abdulkarim**

In August 2007, a scandal shattered any remaining cordiality between the censorship board and the film industry. A leaked mobile phone video of a Hausa actress, Maryam Hiyana having sex with a lover, Usman Bobo spread quickly around Kano through illicit Bluetooth transfers. Although the video had been made privately and had no relation to the industry, it was called the first Hausa “blue film”. The scandal confirmed public fears about filmmaking. Vice President of MOPPAN at the time, Ahmad Sarari, claimed that clerics “used the opportunity to call for our heads” and that actors and actresses were being harassed in public.<sup>40</sup> MOPPAN called for the suspension of film production for three months and quickly expelled Hiyana and seventeen other members suspected of “unethical conducts” that might bring “the film profession to disrepute”.<sup>41</sup> The KSCB further called for a five-year ban on films in which Hiyana appeared.<sup>42</sup>

In September 2007, the governor appointed Abubakar Rabo Abdulkarim, formerly deputy commandant of the *hisbah*, as executive secretary of the KSCB. His title was soon inflated to “director general”. Rabo interpreted the censorship law rigidly. In a press release, he laid down stringent new guidelines: Production companies were required to employ people with diplomas and certificates in the field and have a “minimum of 2.5 million [naira, around \$16,000 (USD)] as working capital”. Scripts had to be submitted to the board for approval, and singing and dancing was banned. He also pushed MOPPAN’s original suspension of film activities to six months, until February 2008, required that literary works be submitted for censorship and that authors, publishers, and booksellers, must individually register with the KSCB.<sup>43</sup>

The new regulations regarding production company finances or educational requirements for practitioners indicate concerns similar to those of the NFVCB about the “professionalization” of the industry, although with only one active film school in the country at the time, such

stipulations were almost impossible to meet. They also indicate a desire to more strictly control the artists themselves, especially women in the industry. Although the law had made provision for the registration of artists, this had never been enforced, as it was considered to be the responsibility of the filmmakers associations. Additionally although MOPPAN had an unwritten practice of disallowing women to act after they were married, this is the first time that specific characteristics were required of film stakeholders by state law. On the individual registration forms, single women involved in the industry were required to “state reasons/circumstances”. All women involved in the industry were required to be under the care of a male guardian who had to sign a document agreeing that he would be “liable” if his ward broke the rules. Married women were officially banned from acting. Standards on dressing in films were also tightened with stipulations that “Female actresses are henceforth banned from appearing in any film wearing trousers, skirts and mini/night gowns that are erotic/sexually harassing” and also are “banned from having combed out hair”; “Male artistes must not play any role in a film wearing tight cloth, very short attires or passionate [sic] barbing, which does not suit our customs and cultures.”<sup>44</sup>

From 2007-11, thousands of people employed by the film and entertainment industry were arrested and fined or served prison sentences, including singers, editors, marketers, video viewing centre owners, and video gaming centre employees. Rabo seemed to judge success by the number of arrests. In an undated progress report published on the KSCB website, item 21 referred to the “menace of the TV game” which had been banned. “[M]ore than 1000 culprits were arrested and prosecuted by mobile court after disregards to calls and warning while about 1,500 TV sets and other equipments were confiscated by the court[...].”<sup>45</sup> Most of those arrested

were taken to a “mobile” court attached to the censorship board and were sentenced within a few hours, often without having a lawyer present.

Among the most famous arrests were those of Adam A. Zango, Rabilu Musa, and Hamisu Lamido Iyan-Tama. Director, actor, and singer Adam Zango was arrested shortly after Rabo assumed power. He was accused of obscenity and releasing his uncensored music video album *Bahaushiya (Hausa Girl, 2007)* during the ban. The album included a track condemning hypocrites who sexually abuse young girls, a track where Zango danced on a rubbish heap calling on youth to improve Nigeria, and several tracks where dancing girls exposed their midriffs. Zango was given a large fine and a three-month prison sentence<sup>46</sup> Rabilu Musa (Ibro), the most famous comedian in northern Nigeria, was arrested with fellow comedian Lawal K’aura. They were accused of having a production company they did not register with the board and for releasing an uncensored film *Ibro A Loko (Ibro in the Ally, 2007)*. Rabo later claimed that the charges did not refer to the film *Ibro A Loko*, which had been censored before his tenure, but to an uncensored compilation of singing and dancing sequences excerpted from various films that had the same title.<sup>47</sup> Although the comedians denied both charges, Musa and K’aura did not have a lawyer present, and K’aura claimed that they followed the advice of “court workers” to plead guilty so that the judge would “have mercy” on them.<sup>48</sup> They were sentenced to two months in prison. The popular press speculated that Ibro was arrested because one of the songs from *Ibro A Loko* had been used by fans to mock the governor.<sup>49</sup> Hamisu Lamido Iyan-Tama, one of the oldest and most respected directors in the industry as well as a former gubernatorial candidate who had run against Shekarau, had won awards from previous administrations of the KSCB for his family-friendly films. He was arrested on his return from the Zuma Film Festival in Abuja, where his film *Tsintsiya (Broom, 2008)*, featuring an inter-ethnic interreligious

romance that promoted national unity, had won “best social issue film”. Although he had made radio announcements that his film was not for sale in Kano, he was arrested because a few copies had been found in the office of a video shop raided by the censorship board. Despite having a receipt for registration, he was also accused of not registering his company with the board. He spent three months in prison. Later all charges were dropped and his record cleared.<sup>50</sup>

The harsh penalties filmmakers and marketers suffered for ostensible censorship violations, as well as requirements like having to pass a script through the censorship board before shooting or individually registering with the board, led many of them to flee the state, moving their film productions a few hours drive south to the more liberal cities of Kaduna, Jos and Abuja, which were not subject to the censorship laws in Kano state. The new centre of Hausa film production shifted to Kaduna. Although many filmmakers continued to take their works to the KSCB so as to access the powerful Kano market, others identified themselves as “Nigerian filmmakers”, using their certificate from the NFVCB to bypass the KSCB. After the arrests began, such films were generally labelled “not for sale in Kano” and if found in Kano were known as “cocaine”.<sup>51</sup>

Ironically the actions of the KSCB, taken to protect what Rabo called the “clean and respected clan” of the Hausa-Fulani ended up opening the Hausa film industry to the wider nation.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Kannywood star Ali Nuhu believed:

the ban may have been a blessing in disguise. Most of my colleagues had never thought of leaving their comfort zone up until now. And after this, they’ve come to realise that moving opens your eyes to a whole new world of ideas. Unlike the previous setting that was largely local, which restricts the kinds of activities you can engage in as an artist, there is a lot more improvement now.<sup>53</sup>

Filmmakers and musicians claimed they did not have to be defined by Kano, that they were Nigerians and could sell their art in the 35 other states of the nation. Using this reasoning, MOPPAN and various filmmaking associations engaged in a series of lawsuits against the censorship board. MOPPAN was placed in the ironic position of challenging the state assembly for passing a law MOPPAN had helped create, claiming that there were aspects of the law being implemented that contradicted the NFVCB. Representatives of MOPPAN argued that once the national board approved their film, they should be able to show it anywhere in the country.<sup>54</sup> This was backed up in writing from the NFVCB. The “Frequently Asked Questions” page of their website, confirms, “The Censors Board has a national coverage. Once a film or video work has been passed by any of its zonal committees, it can be exhibited in any part of the Federation.”<sup>55</sup>

### **The Contradictory Impulses of Censorship**

In an interview, Rabo expressed his fears of “adulteration” of Hausa-Fulani culture by outside influences. If their culture “is being poisoned, or [...] misrepresented in [...] creative arts, obviously there will come a time where Hausa-Fulani will have no place to be traced” .<sup>56</sup> This nativist desire to protect culture from alien influences is parallel to what Achille Mbembe calls an “Afro-radical” ideal. Both nativism and Afro-radicalism, Mbembe argues, operate from the same episteme of “autochthony, each spatio-racial formation” having “its own culture, its own historicity, its own way of being”, believing that the wound of the colonial encounter, “cannot heal until the ex-colonized rediscover their own being and their own past”.<sup>57</sup> While a rebellion against what Tejumola Olaniyan has called the “the seeming inevitability of” foreign “dominance in the lives of the natives” is understandable,<sup>58</sup> nativist thought at its extreme adapts

the simplified and controlling vision of the world presented by colonialism, essentializing as the only “genuine culture” that which is most useful to those in power. Although the KSCB law included many passages from the NFVCB regulating disrespectful representations of the religions and ethnicities of the nation, in practice, the KSCB under Rabo attempted to “liberate” Kano from the nation with a narrow definition of culture that does in fact discriminate against and repress diversity of culture or opinion.

Yet, as Mbembe points out, Africans have long dealt with multiplicities of cultures and assimilation of new thought. The history of Islam in Africa is one in which “the state is only one example of the possible forms of social organization legitimized by the Prophet. In other traditions, it is the political authority itself that is shrouded in suspicion. Does it not risk corrupting the religious?”<sup>59</sup>

The conflict between the KSCB and the filmmakers articulates what Olaniyan has called the difference between a “sacred” essentialist and negotiable “secular” process-oriented propositions of identity.<sup>60</sup> Both censors and filmmakers express devotion to promoting Islam and “passing a message” through film. Both sides agree with the ideals of shari’a law. However, the censorship board focuses more on protecting, guarding, and controlling the masses and their culture, while the filmmakers and their allies seek to expose hypocrisy and demonstrate the consequences of excess.

Rabo’s public use of religious rhetoric made it difficult for the “secular” NFVCB to intervene without appearing to meddle in religious freedoms. In a savvy move in June 2009, then director general of the NFVCB, Emeka Mba, appointed Ahmad Sarari, then Vice President of MOPPAN and brother of Iyan-Tama, as the NFVCB zonal coordinator of the north-western region of Nigeria, giving a Muslim member of the Kano film community authority from the

national body. Filmmakers claimed both national and Muslim identities. After Rabo made accusations about the supposed illicit sexual behaviour of the filmmakers, the *Kano State Filmmakers Association* took him before a shari'a court for slander, demonstrating that ideally Islamic law cuts both ways.<sup>61</sup> Although court cases were bogged down in bureaucracy, the artists' most powerful weapon against the government was in their creative work. Musicians working with the film industry responded to censorship with fiery songs. Their invectives were subsequently banned by KSCB but passed, as the Hiyana porn clip had, through Bluetooth on mobile phones.<sup>62</sup> One musician, imitating the comedic voice of Ibro, composed a satirical song "*Sankarau ya kama ni*" ("Meningitis seized me", 2009) playing on the rhyming words of *sankarau* (meningitis) and *Shekarau* (the governor) to metaphorically retell the story of Rabilu Musa's arrest and imprisonment. Adam Zango responded to his prison time with a song "*Oyoyo*" ("Heyheyhey", 2008) calling on God to deal with those who had imprisoned him. Musicians like Nazir Ahmad Hausawa with "*Girgiza Kai*" ("Shake your Head", 2008) and Aminuddeen Ladan Abubakar with "*Hasbunallahu*" ("Allah is Sufficient", 2009) followed this pattern, singing prayers to God to punish those who kept them from their livelihoods.

If Rabo accused filmmakers of sexual misbehaviour, the filmmakers fired back with films that exposed the sexual sins of an outwardly pious elite. In Aminu Bala's film *Jagora (Guidance, 2009)*, when a businessman is killed by his servant, an imam claims the man was pious, but a lawyer reveals that he kept a mistress and was trying to rape the servant when she stabbed him. Saeed Selbar's *Kyalli (Glitter, 2010)* reveals a politician, who campaigns on promises to send filmmakers back to "pushing wheelbarrows in the streets", to be having an affair with an actress as well as having had an extramarital affair in which he fathered two influential members of the entertainment industry. He is eventually captured on camera murdering a rival. In even more

direct jab, the film *Jidda* (2010), written and produced by Nasir Gwangwazo, presents a lecherous doctor named Rabo who extorts sex from a woman, Jidda, in return for treating her dying husband.

In telling these stories, filmmakers capture the rhetoric of the youth, who often complain about the hypocrisy of leaders who use shari'a to punish the poor while they themselves commit worse sins. Although the "Hiyana scandal" became representative of all that the critics feared about the industry, there was a strong backlash among youth against the demonization of Hiyana and the film industry. The actress became an unlikely folk hero. Stickers of her likeness were plastered on buses, taxis, and motorbikes all over the north. Adamu points to blogs that sprang up around the internet defending Hiyana as a victim and pointing back at a hypocritical society and "errant [...] Islamic scholastic establishment".<sup>63</sup> One pseudonymous female wrote "The uproar and self-righteous indignation expressed over the issue is almost laughable [...] because we are a nation that selects known adulterers as leaders."<sup>64</sup>

In an ironic twist of fate, in August 2010 during the holy fasting period of Ramadan, newspapers and radio reported that Rabo was caught by the police parked with a young girl in suspicious circumstances. Rumour had it that the police, after a Hollywood-style car chase, found the girl's underwear in the car.<sup>65</sup> Although Rabo continued to carry out the occasional raid on musicians and filmmakers, he had lost the respect of much of society. During elections a few months later, the *ANPP* party of the Shekarau government, who had given license to Rabo and the most extreme critics of the film industry, was voted out and Kwankwaso, the *PDP* party governor under whom the KSCB was first founded was voted back in, resuming office in June 2011. MOPPAN and a league of popular actors had campaigned for Kwankwaso, believing that he would bring back the original interpretation of the KSCB as a protective agency run by and

for artists. They were not disappointed. On 25 November 2011, Kwankwaso appointed Ahmed Dahiru Beli, the original head of the KSCB as the executive director once again, and members of the film industry, including Rabilu Musa, who had been imprisoned by the previous board, were given seats on the board.<sup>66</sup> The board had come full circle in the ten years between 2001 and 2011. The events had a mixed-up poetic justice that seemed to come straight out of a Hausa film. The governor who first banned film in Kano came back promising the salvation of the film industry, and the censor appointed after sex scandal to “sanitize” a film industry was disgraced by his own sex scandal. An actor imprisoned by the censors board joined the board in the next political tenure. A public discourse that idealized politicians’ promises to use Islamic law to protect culture moved towards an outrage over how those same politicians abused shari’a to hide their own corruption.

The first ten years of state censorship in Kano illustrate both the political contradictions of censorship and the increasing difficulty of formal state censorship in a digital world. Rabo’s attempts at suppressing the industry had coincided with the rise of social media, Bluetooth technology, and satellite television stations dedicated to showing Nigerian films. Driving the filmmakers out of Kano, had, in fact, made them less dependent on the ancient Kano market. As a result of attempts to “sanitize” and control the industry, many filmmakers had become more outward looking and media savvy. Once Rabo was out of office, filmmakers splintered into associations that no longer looked to MOPPAN for guidance and many film stakeholders who had supported Kwankwaso during the elections turned against his party during a January 2012 national economic crisis when the ruling *PDP* government removed fuel subsidies and doubled the cost of living. They remarked that their responsibility was not to politicians but to the masses who watched their films. It seems that the local censorship crisis, had made filmmakers both

more independent and politically confident, proving training ground for a larger national struggle.

## **ILLUSTRATIONS:**

**Caption 1: The NFVCB seals a video shop in Kaduna, Nigeria, for purported violation of regulations.**

**Caption 2: Filmmakers on a film set in August 2010 gather around to read the news of Rabo's sex scandal.**

## **NOTES AND REFERENCES**

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<sup>1</sup> According to a 2010 report by the Verification Unit of the National Film and Video Censors Board, 1,612 Nigerian films were submitted to the board in 2010. 1,114 were approved for release. See NFVCB (2010) Annual Report for 2010 from Film Verification Unit, 31 December.

<sup>2</sup> N.F. Ukadike (1994) *Black African Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

<sup>3</sup> J. Haynes (ed.) (2000) *Nigerian Video Films*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Athens, OH: Ohio University Centre for International Studies).

<sup>4</sup> Some Hausa and Yoruba films continued to screen on a circuit of individual film shows in cinemas to recoup costs before being released on video. See Haynes (2000) for a historical description of Yoruba film shows, and my interviews with Hausa filmmakers Saeed Selbar (2008) in Jos and Abbas Sadiq (2006) in Kano. Recently there has been an upsurge of larger

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budget “new Nollywood” films that run for several weeks to months in multiplex cinemas in Nigerian’s largest cities.

<sup>5</sup> B. Larkin (2008) *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham and London: Duke University Press); National Population Commission (2011) “Nigeria’s over 167 million population: Implications and Challenges”, NPC, <http://www.population.gov.ng>, date accessed 15 December 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Adamu mentions that the term “Nollywood” was first used on 16 September 2002 in *The New York Times*, whereas the Hausa film industry has been called “Kannywood” since 1998 when Kano-based *Tauraruwa/Star* magazine started the usage. See A.U. Adamu (2010a) “North of Nollywood, South of the Sahara: Cultural Dynamics in the Marketing of Hausa Video Films” in *Nollywood a National Cinema: an International Workshop*, 7-9 July 2010, Kwara Hotel, Ilorin, Nigeria, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> J. Haynes (2007) “‘Nollywood’: What’s in a name?” *Film International*, 5 (4), p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> English language films, which according to 2010 statistics make up around 12 per cent of the films produced in Nigeria, are widely exported across Africa and into the African Diaspora and are best known by the Western media. Nigerian-language film industries, the largest of which are Yoruba (at around 55 per cent) and Hausa (at around 30 per cent), cater mostly to their own language communities in Nigeria and surrounding countries. In 2005, the South African satellite company M-Net began to beam English-language Nigerian films across Africa with their station “Africa Magic” and in 2010 opened “Africa Magic Hausa” and “Africa Magic Yoruba”, which broadcast across West Africa. Because Nigerian-language films aired by M-Net are subtitled in English, they reach potentially wider audiences than they had previous to satellite broadcast. See NFVCB (2010), and the Africa Magic website at <http://beta.mnetafrika.com/AfricaMagic/>.

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<sup>9</sup> P. Ugor (2007) “Censorship and the Content of Nigerian Home Video Films”, *Postcolonial Text*, 3 (1), 1-22.

<sup>10</sup> A. James (2007) *The Making of Nigeria’s Film and Video Revolution* (Lagos: Publicomm Associates), p.1.

<sup>11</sup> Ugor (2007), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> James (2007), pp.1-6.

<sup>13</sup> NFVCB (1993) NFVCB Act. Chapter N 40.

<sup>14</sup> NFVCB (2002) *Film and Video Directory in Nigeria* (Abuja: NFVCB), pp. 57-9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Ugor (2007), p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Odeh’s successor, Emeka Mba, who took over as director general of the NFVCB in 2005, is less concerned with content. He insisted several times, during a round table on 22 July 2011 at the “Nollywood in Africa, Africa in Nollywood” conference held at Pan-African University, Lagos, that the government could not control subject matter. Instead, he has devoted his tenure to attempts at formalizing the distribution system to fight piracy.

<sup>18</sup> M.O.A. Abdul (1973) *The Historical Origin of Islam (with some reference to West Africa)* (Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau).

<sup>19</sup> Adamu writes that Lebanese distributors initially showed mostly American and British films in their cinemas, but that in November 1960 following Nigerian independence, Indian films were introduced and proved to be the most popular films in northern Nigeria. Larkin reports that by the 1990s Indian films were shown five nights a week, while Hong Kong and American films were shown the other two nights. See A.U. Adamu (2008) “The Influence of Hindi Film Music on

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Hausa Videofilm Soundtrack Music” in M. Slobin (ed.) *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan UP), pp. 156-7; and Larkin (2008), p. 157.

<sup>20</sup> A.U. Adamu (2004) “Loud Bubbles From A Silent Brook: Trends and Tendencies in Contemporary Hausa Prose Fiction” in *8<sup>th</sup> Janheinz Jahn Symposium on “African Language Literatures: Production, Mediation and Reception”*, 17-20 November 2004, Universität Mainz, Mainz, Germany, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> Larkin (2008), p. 149.

<sup>22</sup> A. U. Adamu (2007) *Transglobal Media Flows and African Popular Culture* (Kano: Visually Ethnographic Productions), p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> Z. Dakata (2004) “Alienation of Culture: A Menace Posed by the Hausa Home Video” in A.U. Adamu, Y. Adamu, and U.F. Jibril (eds) *Hausa Home Videos: Technology, Economy and Society* (Kano: Center for Hausa Cultural Studies), p.251.

<sup>24</sup> S. Nayaya (2004) “Kano State Censorship Board: Functions and Structure”, in Adamu, Adamu, and Jibril (2004), pp.233-4.

<sup>25</sup> B. Y. Malumfashi (2011) “Ni ne musabbabin k’irk’iro Hukumar Tace Fina-finai ta Jihar Kano – Alhaji Musa na Malam K’ato (1)”, *Aminiya*, 24 June, p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> M. L. Yusufari (2004) “Sharia Implementation in Kano State” in *International Conference on “the Implementation of Sharia in a Democracy: The Nigerian Experience”*, Abuja. 7 July 2004, <http://www.gamji.com/article3000/NEWS3706.htm>, date accessed 1 June 2011.

<sup>27</sup> P. Ostien (ed.) (2007) *Sharia Implementation in Northern Nigeria 1999-2006: A Sourcebook. Volume III: Sanitizing Society*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books).

<sup>28</sup> A. Mohammad (2011) Interview with author, 2 May.

<sup>29</sup> James (2007), p. 69.

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- <sup>30</sup> Mohammad (2011).
- <sup>31</sup> Kano State Censors Board (2001) “State Censorship Board Law 2001, Cinematography (Licensing) (Censorship) Regulations 2001”, KSCB, <http://kanocensorsboard.com/Index.htm>, date accessed 23 June 2011; NFVCB (1993).
- <sup>32</sup> Mohammad (2011).
- <sup>33</sup> M. Krings (2008) “Conversion on screen: a glimpse at popular Islamic imaginations in northern Nigeria”, *Africa Today*, 54 (4), 45-68.
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- <sup>35</sup> I. Shekarau (2004) “Social Re-Orientation Inaugural Address and Action Plan” (Kano: Kano State Government) cited in Ostien (2007), p. 7.
- <sup>36</sup> KSCB (2006) *Ka’idojin Duba Fina-Finai*, [flier], July 2006.
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- <sup>38</sup> A. Bala (2009) Interview with author, 7 March.
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<sup>44</sup> KSCB (n.d.) “Artiste Registration Form”; “Script writer and Others Registration Form”; “Undertaking”; “Film Censorship Guidelines”, KSCB, date accessed 23 June 2011.

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<sup>47</sup> A. R. Abdulkarim (2009) Interview with author, 27 January.

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<sup>49</sup> S. Maikatanga and I.M. Giginyu (2008) “Rabo ya binne Ibro a gidan yari” *Fim*, November, 107, pp. 10-14.

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