Itineraries of Indian Cinema: African Videos, Bollywood, and Global Media

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The tape recorder, the device that conveys love between the two main characters in the Nigerian (Hausa) video film In Da So Da K'ama (The Soul of My Heart, Ado Ahmad, 1994), is a mediating device, filtering, on several levels, the physical and symbolic boundaries among characters, societies, and technologies. Sumayya sits in her bedroom as a boy brings in a tape from her lover, Mohammed. The camera zooms in to a medium close-up as she turns on the tape recorder and hears her lover announce he will sing to her “Lambun Soyayya,” (The Garden of Love). She sits still, for a full three minutes, as the camera moves to an extreme close-up on an immovable face. There is no reaction, no expression, and the viewer is forced to contemplate the unspectacular practice of listening. In this sensual, physical scene, a visceral declaration and acceptance of love occurs and in the intimacy of a bedroom lovers share the same space but only by virtue of the mediating capacity of the tape recorder. The tape recorder allows the presence of love, but preserves the segregation of the sexes as Mohammed, the lover, is only present by prosthesis. And in doing so the tape recorder also mediates between Indian films and Nigerian Hausa videos, enabling the declaration of love through song, so central to Indian films and their popularity in Nigeria, while preserving the sexual segregation necessary to Hausa Islamic values.

The adoption of song-and-dance sequences in Hausa videos is one of the Bollywood-influenced intertextual elements that distinguish them from the Yoruba- and English-language videos, also made in Nigeria. For over forty years, Indian films, their stars and fashions, music and stories, have been a dominant part of everyday culture of northern Nigeria. The rise of Hausa videomakers who borrow plots and styles from Bombay cinema are part of a proliferation of cultural forms that have resigned the global flow of Hindi cinema within Hausa culture. Here I will use the rise of a new genre of Hausa love films as an example of how transnational flows of Indian films can spawn a range of cultural phenomena as they are reworked in local settings. I use this example to rethink the idea of global media and the ways in which global cultural politics of identity are contested.

While Indian film is a hugely successful global media form that has been strikingly successful in competing with, and sometimes dislodging, Hollywood in the global arena, the specific and diverse reasons why Indian film travels have rarely been analyzed. For some, Indian film represents tradition, a space outside of, and alter to, the cultural spread of Western modernity; for others, the cultural address of Indian film is future-oriented, modern, and cosmopolitan. To understand the varying reasons why Indian film provides amenable spaces for global cultural imagining means taking seriously a decentered media theory, one whose premises start from the specificity of why media travel and the social context of their operation.

The popularity of Indian films with Arabic, Indonesian, Senegalese, or Nigerian youth reveals the mobilization of desire and fantasy that animates global cultural flows. These moments of borrowing are the choices individuals and cultures (in the case of extended, elaborated genres of music or film) make out of the range of mass-mediated cultural goods available to them in order to make those cultural goods do symbolic work locally. Stressing this range of cultural goods is important because discussions of global media are often structured around the dichotomy of the dominance or resistance to foreign (Western) media. This dominance is clear, but in many societies Hollywood and Indian films are popular; Egyptian and Indian and Hollywood and Hong Kong films are popular (in the case of the Middle East, for instance). If we take into account that most societies live in a diversified media environment, then we must shift our critical questions. What pleasures do Indian films offer that Hollywood films do not? What cultural work do Hollywood films accomplish that is different from Hong Kong films? The presence of one media flow - such as mainstream American films - does not mean the obliteration of others, as people take diverse meanings and different pleasures from various types of media available to them.

By examining the migration of Indian film outside of India, I will begin to analyze the diverse and often long-standing reasons Indian film travels. Following a more general discussion I will analyze the import of Indian film styles into Nigerian Hausa video. I argue that Indian film offers a "third space" for Hausa audiences that mediates between the reified poles of Hausa Islamic tradition and Western modernity (a false dichotomy to be sure, but one that remains deeply meaningful to people's political consciousness). Indian film offers Hausa viewers a way of being modern that does not necessarily mean being Western. This multifacetedness is key to their success and to their popularity. For Nigerian Hausa, Indian film offers a space that is
alter to the West against which a cultural politics (but not necessarily a political one) can be waged. The story does not stop there, however, because Indian film also offers Hausa a cultural foil against other Nigerian groups, to wit, Igbo and Yoruba. The popularity of Indian film with Hausa audiences is so great that, in the north of Nigeria at least where Hausa are based, they are used by both Hausa and their others as means of defining identity and locating the temporal and political nature of that identity. When Hausa video-makers incorporate elements of Indian films into their videos they are thus engaging a complicated series of cultural hierarchies external and internal to the nation, setting our understanding of the operation of transnational media within a more complicated terrain.

The Global Flow of Indian Films

The popularity of Indian film in Nigeria reflects the extraordinary global reach of Bollywood – a cinema that has successfully marginalized Hollywood in certain world markets. Understanding this phenomenon is a means of revising the ways in which we understand what we conceive of as global media. In certain areas of the world Indian films have succeeded in establishing a cultural and aesthetic style outside the dominant genres of American media. In many cases audiences engage with Indian films as a means of establishing distance from the ideologically loaded presence of American film. This last statement needs careful contextualization so that the popularity of Indian films is not reduced to a simplistic notion of “resistance” to America, (although in many cases this is a self-conscious part of the process). Rather, this popularity is complexly grounded in history and cultural difference. Hausa videomakers, for instance, borrow from Indian films as a means of addressing an urban Hausa audience that is emphatically not Western and, just as important, not southern Nigerian, suggesting that some of the popularity of Indian film lies here in specific political and cultural relations well outside the knowledge of Indian filmmakers. If we examine this process we can see the diversity of audiences Indian films attract globally and suggest reasons for how it is that Indian films create narrative forms and modes of address and narrative that draw viewers in large numbers.

Indian film and the cultural production of diaspora

Perhaps most famously, Indian films have followed in the wake of Indian migration across the globe. In countries from England to the United States, Tanzania, Trinidad, Fiji, and elsewhere, these films play a complicated role in producing diasporic belonging, cultural knowledge, and even language training (for Fijian Indians, see Ray, 2000; for England, see Dhondy, 1985; Gillespie, 1995; Tyrell, 1998; Sadasan, 1998). For many Indians, who are often internally divided by region, caste, and class, the archive of images, memories, and narratives produced by Hindi cinema creates a common cultural nostalgia in the diaspora, a cultural lingua franca that has the possibility to transcend difference. This role of Hindi film in mediating the connection between the diaspora and the homeland revolves around the tropes of
less, nostalgia, and pastness, where for diasporic Indians, India represents a way of life once present but now gone and film the means to reconnect with it. For second-generation diasporic Indians, Indian films play a role as ethnographic and cultural texts "teaching" migrant youth cultural knowledge about India. One British Asian woman commented that being taken as a child to see Indian films taught her "just about everything I know about religion, about India and my family traditions" (Tyrell, 1998, p. 20). Manas Ray argues that for Fijian Indians, separated from India by the historical rupture of indenture under British colonialism, this process of cultural ethnography is even more stark in that for Fijian Indians, the India represented in Indian films is a wholly imagined way of life (2000). The concept of India being mobilized here is one about transport, about using the images and narratives of film as a conduit back to the idealized world of India itself.

But while the link between Bollywood and Indian diasporic identity is growing stronger, Manas Ray warns against assuming that the reasons for this intensification are stable (2000). In his study of Fijian Indian migrants to Australia he argues that the consumption of Indian films in the diaspora varies greatly according to class, caste, and national origin. Whereas for some Bollywood might be a means of reconnecting with a homeland, Ray argues that for Fijian Indians (or Tanzanian or Trinidadian Indians) India remains an imagined entity and Indian films function as an introduction to a whole way of life about which they know little and have experienced even less (2000). This points to what he terms the historical subjectivity of particular diasporic groups like Fijian Indians, for whom the mass culture of Hindi film provides a cultural repertoire of Indianess.

In recent years the style and nature of the way in which Hindi films have mediated the relation between the diaspora and the homeland have changed considerably. The introduction of liberalization in India, the rise of the diaspora abroad, the increase of middle-class incomes in India, and their ability to consume the same sorts of technological and cultural goods available to their diasporic cousins have heightened the shared cultural context between urban India and Indians overseas. This process has been mediated through satellite television, through the renewed interest in going among diasporic audiences, and through the emergence of a vibrant diasporic South Asian youth culture in the United States and especially in England. Indian films have in their turn recognized this cultural convergence in the production of a new genre of films centered on the diasporic experience and an increased awareness of the economic strength of the Indian market abroad. These changes exhibit a relation between the diaspora and India that is not based on issues of nostalgia and pastness, where India and Indian films represent the repository of enduring cultural values threatened by the modernity of Western diaspora. As Manas Ray argues, the dichotomies of past and present, inside and outside, are beginning to lose their analytical purchase. Rather, the relation is now one of cultural convergence and contemporaneity in which Indians in New York, London, Sydney, and metropolitan centers such as Mumbai and Delhi are engaged in the production of a transnational diasporic culture.

The renewed success of Indian films in the diaspora is signified by the return of diasporic audiences to cinematic exhibition and the rise of Bombay films specifically oriented toward a diasporic audience. Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (Braveheart
Will Win the Bride, dir. Aditya Chopra) was one of the first films to include a character from the diaspora at the center of the film; its huge success prompted the producer Yash Chopra to establish his own distribution company in the United States and United Kingdom. This opening up of the overseas market entailed a reorganization of the infrastructural distribution of Indian film. In an interview with *Business World India*, Chopra said that previously blockbuster Indian films had to appeal to a range of class, caste, and regional tastes (October 23, 2001). Now, the opening up of the diaspora market meant that Chopra could perfect a genre of light romantic comedy that addressed a cosmopolitan urban audience without worrying about how the film would play in the Indian hinterland. These films presume a mobile viewing subject equally at home in Mumbai, London, or New York. Chopra’s first film after the opening of this distribution company was the massive hit *Dil to Pagal Hai* (1997, dir. Yash Chopra), a film that Rachel Dwyer argues set a new cool, urban visual style for Hindi films (1999).

Indian films have always been hugely popular on video. But because video is limited to the domestic sphere, the popularity of Indian films in the diaspora has rarely impinged on the mass cineplex public. That, however, is beginning to change. As cineplex managers, particularly in Britain, realize that Indian films can outperform Hollywood at the box office, there has been a movement of Indian films out of the dilapidated “flea pits” of old and into the best facilities available. These are often new multiplexes showing a mix of American and Indian releases. Major new releases of Indian films in Britain now premier at the Odeon, Leicester Square, the most prestigious cinema in Britain and formerly the site only of American and British film premieres. In 2000, the hosts of the Film Fare Indian film awards used the Millennium Dome in Greenwich, London (Britain’s homage to fin de siècle spectacle) as the site for the first ever Indian film awards ceremony held outside of India, an event broadcast on mainstream British TV. This demonstrates how Indian film has migrated from the realm of the family, the domestic, and the marginal in British society to a much more public arena, carrying with it a palpable sense of cultural self-assertion and self-confidence.2

*Bollywood without Indians*

While diasporic Indian engagement with Bollywood is a significant and intensifying phenomenon, perhaps more striking is the long-standing popularity of Indian films with non-Indian audiences in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. It is this reach across the boundaries of nation, language, culture, and religion that makes Hindi films true global media. By the 1950s, Indian films were beginning to be exported all across the socialist world and into much of the Third World as a whole. In Russia, Bulgaria, Poland, and elsewhere, as relations with the West settled into the structured estrangement of the Cold War, Indian films found favor with socialist states.

It is this same fantastic, extra-real engagement with Indian films that we see mobilized in the continuing popularity of Bollywood in Africa and the Middle East, where the films’ popularity was established outside of any meaningful connection with India itself (with the notable exception of the substantial Indian
populations in parts of East and South Africa, work on Indian film in African

The work of the Kenyan photographer Omar Said Baker, Otel, revealed an example of the identification Baker, a Swahili of Yemeni descent living in Lamu Island off the coast of Kenya, developed a style of portrait photography that he termed "the Lamu style." This style is characterized by the use of traditional kashmiri clothing, the setting for his portraits, and the use of local themes. The portraits are often seen as a representation of the cultural identity of the people who come into his studio. Baker's photographs are often used for practical purposes by people who wish to secure the legal status of their property. The portrayal of the Indian film industry has been influenced by the history of colonialism and the presence of Indian film companies in Kenya. The film industry has also been shaped by the influence of Western cinema and the need for local artists to create a national identity. The film industry in India has a rich history of innovation and creativity, and this has been reflected in the work of Indian filmmakers. The film industry has also been influenced by the tradition of South Asian cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake. The film industry in India has also been shaped by the influence of the Western cinema, and this has been reflected in the work of filmmakers such as David Lean and Kenji Miyake.
love magic threaten to transgress those boundaries where magic worked upon the image will have consequences on the person to whom the image is tied. Behrend makes the fascinating point that the portrait of a man’s head superimposed over a reclining Sridevi also has another ghostly image. Superimposed over Sridevi, but underneath the image of the man is the spectral, hard-to-see image of a second, African woman. Behrend argues this suggests love magic and the mixing of a real with an ideal partner. Who can say? But the use of the photographic space to bring into one field love and transgression, the (mass) mediated and the spirit world, the local and the global, makes it a rich site of imagination and transgression.

In Nigeria, Indian films offer ways of being modern and traditional that create a template for exploring the tensions of postcoloniality. In the Indian diaspora, Bollywood can be both a conduit into an essentialized, traditional past and the site for the production of a hip, hybrid present. Indian films betray a love/hate relation with both the West and a mythic India and in doing so open up interscenes in which heterogeneity and ambivalence flourish, allowing the films to be both Westernized and traditional; corruptor of local values and a defender of them. Vasudevan (2000) analyzes the ways Indian films create a politics of cultural difference by reinventing themselves to establish dialogue with and assert difference from universal models of narration and subjectivity. He analyzes these workings internally to India, but the same process operates on a global stage. Indian films travel because they become a foil against which postcolonial identity can be fashioned, critiqued, and debated. They allow an alterity to Bollywood domination but offer their own aggressive commercialism in its stead that is at the same time traditional and modern. The reasons for the global popularity of Indian films – crucial to the ability to map and understand the phenomenon of global popular media – lie in this interwoven process where Western media, Indian media, and local cultural production interact, at times coalescing and at other moments diverging.

Before I turn to the relation between Indian film and Nigerian Hausa videos, I first wish to make a brief detour in order to contextualize the rise of Nigerian videos in the past ten years and what this means for our understanding of that discursive construct “African cinema.”

**Nigerian Video Films and the End of African Cinema?**

By *cinema* in this heading I refer not just to a body of films but to the critical cultural project that is inherent to the idea of African cinema (see Cham and Bakari, 1996; Diawara, 1992; Pines and Willemen, 1989; Ukadike, 1994). This is clear in the overt political and aesthetic project of “third cinema” (Pines and Willemen, 1989) but more important has informed state media policy and practice in many postcolonial nations. The concept of “national cinemas” derives from a legacy where the nation-state is posed as the definier and defender of cultural values (cf. Meyer, 1999). The Nigerian state sponsored “Nigerian” cinema to preserve “Nigerian” values, and so on. The video industry, by contrast, emerged outside of state participation, frequently in opposition to it and driven largely by commercial rather than political motives.
In what is truly a remarkable cultural renaissance in Africa, in the past eight years or so a mass media genre – Nigerian video film – has come to dominate local media production and to become regionally hegemonic in exporting media to other nations in West and East Africa. Over 3,500 of these video films have been released in the general market. These “films,” shot and released on video but known locally as films, can be broadly broken down into three main categories according to language (and culture): Yoruba, English, and Hausa (for an introduction, see Haynes, 2000). The appearance of these films is remarkable in that the industry developed outside of state or foreign support, in a time of intense economic deprivation and based wholly on a mass viewing audience.

These films nearly all exhibit the qualities that Vasudevan (2000) associates with the cinema of “transitional” societies negotiating the rapid effect of modernity: the cinematic address is to a world governed by kinship relations, the plot is driven by family conflict; melodrama predominates, relying on excess, Manicheanism, and privileging the moral over the psychological. In “Nigerian” videos, the term used to refer to English-language videos (as opposed to Hausa or Yoruba videos), this melodrama is intensified by the use of horror and the supernatural. Here magic mixes with the world economy, and capitalist accumulation is only possible through occult means. Husbands sacrifice their wives to become rich, mothers bewitch their children, and the devil, through his intermediaries, is ever present in Nigerian life. In dramatizing the work of witches and the prevalence of human sacrifice, video films move from the world of melodrama into the suspense and gore associated with horror. Nigerian films, in particular, are known for their special effects, as humans transform into animals, witches fly through the night, and money is magically produced (for similar issues in Ghanaian film, see Meyer, 2003). It is the mixing of melodrama with horror and magic and the linkage of financial with sexual and spiritual corruption that makes the melodrama of Nigerian and Ghanaian video film distinctively African. In contemporary postcolonial West Africa, where the everyday suffering of the vast majority stands in stark contrast to the fantastic accumulation of the small elite, the tropes of sorcery, witchcraft, and supernatural evil have provided a powerful way to express the inequalities of wealth.

African cultural heritage here is rarely represented as the valued cultural patrimony we are familiar with from the debates around African cinema. Rather it is frequently represened as evil, a place where the forces of darkness operate unchecked, a representation that is the outgrowth of the emergence of what Meyer has termed (in another context) a Pentecostalist public culture (Meyer, 2003; Marshall-Fratani, 1998; Ukah, 2000) in which styles of Pentecostalist discourse have proliferated in a variety of popular cultural forms. Nigerian videos address a cosmopolitan public in which the modern and the Pentecostalist, consumption and Christianity, are intertwined. The realist verities of modernist development and cultural authenticity are rejected, as is any attempt toward a progressive political project. These videos represent the working out of a specific form of Nigerian melodrama in a society that is both modern and sacred. Peter Brooks’s argument that melodrama rises when the traditional hierarchies of a sacred society are dissolved captures the sense of spiritual insecurity and permanent transition that marks Nigerian melodrama, but God, the devil, and the supernatural are the everyday
forms through which modernity emerges (on melodrama as a postcolonial project, see Abu-Lughod, 2002).

The rise of these videos highlights several ironies inherent in the concept of African cinema. African cinema, for instance, has tended to refer to the films Africans produce rather than those they watch. Films that travel under the sign of African cinema are still much more readily available in festivals in London, Paris, and New York, than they are in Abidjan, Lagos, or Mombasa. The calls by African filmmakers for a “popular” film practice glossed over the fact that this cinema referred first and foremost to an auteur artistic practice that rarely had to rely upon the marketplace or a mass audience for its funding and survival. This now stands in stark contrast to the rise of local video film industries in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria that, while accused of being much more “Westernized,” are successful in an African marketplace. Video filmmakers have been much less concerned with ideas of cultural authenticity and cultural value. Most clearly, Nigerian videos have indeed fashioned aesthetic forms and modes of cultural address based on the experiences of the societies they address rather than those of the West—a prime concern of third cinema—but this fashioning has emerged not so much in opposition to Hollywood and Western cultural values, but through and out of the history of that engagement.

So far I have used the term Nigerian videos or Nigerian film without unpacking the regional hegemony that is built into this concept. As Jonathan Haynes (2000) has pointed out, the scholarly and film festival circuits that have deployed the concept of “African cinema” have found it extremely difficult to deal with the issue of ethnicity and of subnational difference. This is in part the legacy of the struggle against colonialism and, later, against a cultural imperialism that downplayed ethnic allegiance in favor of identification with the nation-state. In part, it also has to do with the history of cinema studies, which has tended to concentrate on the dynamics of national rather than ethnic cinemas. Nigerian videos, however, are divided into Yoruba-, English-, and Hausa-language films. The term Nigerian films in fact often refers to English-language films primarily made by Igbo and minority group producers who address their productions to a pan-Nigerian, English-speaking urban subject. This means the claim to “Nigerianness” has been constructed through exclusions, as a specific form of urban culture and experience serves as the sole basis of a a pan-Nigerian address. This is an urbanism marked by fast-growing capitalism, consumption, Pentecostalist Christianity, the occult, temptation, and corruption, the central themes around which the abstraction of “national” cinema and national subject is constructed.

If these videos address a cosmopolitan “modern,” urban subject, then Muslim Hausa are the internal other against which that modernity is imagined. Hausa cosmpolitanism, focused as it is on dynamics in the Muslim world more than in the West, is readily stigmatized as “backward,” “traditional,” and “ignorant,” in southern Nigerian stereotypes. For Hausa viewers and Hausa filmmakers, the melodramatic form of southern Nigerian videos— their focus on sexual and magical excess, their unrelenting materialism, the frequent stereotyping of Pentecostalist pastors as culture heroes—makes these videos an ambivalent space for cultural imagining. As one Hausa video storeowner said to me, while he sold southern
videos, he wouldn’t allow his family to watch them. This is not to say that southern Nigerian videos are not popular in the north, where they do sell well, but the form, content, and even distribution of Hausa videos have developed along strikingly different lines. And it is here that Indian films have proved to be a powerful intertextual presence.

Hausa Video Films

While magic, materialism, and corruption are all present to a certain extent in Hausa video films, perhaps the primary narrative difference is the focus on love and romance and the spectacular development of this through song-and-dance routines (*waka da rawa* in Hausa) – a genetic convention rarely seen in English-language videos. The focus on love comes about for a number of reasons. Most obviously, the first Hausa videos evolved from a literary genre of local Hausa-language love stories, *soyaya* books (see Furniss, 1996; Larkin, 1997). These became hugely popular among youth just at the time that the first Nigerian videos were being produced in the south of Nigeria. The first Hausa videos tended to be adaptations of these “best-selling” books and maintained their preoccupation with love. This tendency was intensified, however, by several producers who sought to make films that were explicitly not like southern Nigerian videos and were closer to Hausa culture. In this search for alterity producers fell back on familiar cultural forms that were separate from southern Nigeria: *soyaya* books and Indian films.

Indian Films and Hausa Viewers

First imported by Lebanese cinema owners in the 1950s, by the early 1960s Indian films were, perhaps, the dominant film form in the north. Since that time Indian films have remained an integral part of the Nigerian media landscape and form the everyday media environment through which people move. Stickers of Indian stars emblazon trucks, cars, and bikes of the north. Popular stars are given Hausa nicknames, such as *Sarkin Rawa* (King of Dancing) for Govinda, or *Dan daba mai lasin* (licensed hooligan – in the same way that James Bond is licensed to kill). Indian jewelry and clothing have influenced Hausa fashions and Indian film songs and stories have penetrated everyday Hausa popular culture (see Larkin, 1997).

In northern Nigeria there is a familiar refrain that Indian culture is “just like” Hausa culture. While indeed, there are many similarities between Hausa and “Indian culture” (at least how it is represented in Indian films) there are many differences, most obviously the fact that Indians are predominantly Hindu and Hausa are Muslim. The popularity of Indian films rests, in part, on this dialectic between difference and sameness — that Indian culture is both like and quite unlike Hausa culture. It is the gap between difference and sameness, the ability to move between the two, that allows Indian films to function as a space for imaginative play in Hausa society. The intra-Third World circulation of Indian film offers Hausa viewers a way of imaginatively engaging with forms of tradition different from their own at the
same time as conceiving of a modernity that comes without the political and ideological significance of that of the West. Moreover, when Hausa youth rework Indian films within their own culture by adopting Indian fashions, by copying the music styles for religious purposes, or by using the filmic world of Indian sexual relations to probe the limitations within their own cultural world, they can do this without engaging with the heavy ideological load of “becoming Western.”

The sense of similarity and difference is produced by the iconography and mode of address of the films themselves as well as by the ways in which Bollywood deploys a reified “culture” that acts as a foil against which Westernization in its myriad forms can be defined. Bollywood films place family and kinship at the center of narrative tension. Traditional dress is remarkably similar to that of Hausa: men dress in long kaftrams similar to the Hausa dogon riga over which they wear long waistcoats much like the Hausa palmaran. Women dress in long sarees and scarves that veil their heads in accordance with Hausa moral ideas about feminine decorum. Indian films, particularly older films, express strict division between the sexes and between generations. Hausa audiences are not familiar with the main tropes of Indian religion, but they realize that the visual portrayal of Hindu religion and Indian tradition provides a cultural field that is frequently opposed to the spread of “Westernization” or modernity. It is this reified sense of tradition that Hausa refer to when they say that they “have culture” in a way that American films seem to lack. Britain and America are the structuring absences here and form the Other(s) against which Hausa can define their relation to Indian culture as similar. Hausa recognize the similarity in traditional dress; more, they realize the relational value of how one wears traditional dress. When characters code-switch from English to Hindi, when they elect to wear Western instead of Indian clothes, when they refuse to obey parents and follow their own desires, Indian films create a narrative in which action is based on moral choice. Ashis Nandy recognizes a communal mode of address in this moral choice in Indian film, arguing that commercial Indian cinema tends to “reaffirm the values that are being increasingly marginalized in public life by the language of the modernizing middle classes, values such as community ties, consensual non-contractual human relations, primacy of maternity over conjugal, priority of the mythic over the historical” (1995, p. 202). In short, the battle is against the values associated with Westernization.

It is the discourse around love, especially the tensions between arranged and love marriages, that has most influenced Hausa viewers. Indian films provide Hausa youth with an alternative style of sexual interaction, a different pattern of speech and bodily affect between the sexes. As these patterns of behavior have migrated to Hausa videos, the effect has been exhilarating. This migration is, of course, a matter of translation and accommodation and not merely copying. Like Indian films themselves, the act of borrowing plots, dance style, or visual effects entails detailed processes of rejection and addition, a stripping of superfluous detail and insertion of culturally relevant matter. Jeremy Tunstall’s (1977) argument that Indian films were a dream factory locally assembling dreams manufactured 10,000 miles away (in America) has recently been decisively countered by the work of Tejaswini Ganti, who traces the transformations of narrative and form that go into the “copying” of an American film by an Indian one (Ganti, 2002). In the next section, I turn to the
work of translation in the Hausa context, tracing the global flow of Indian film to Nigeria through the adoption of themes of love and song and dance sequences in Hausa video, concentrating on a transitional video, *In da So Da K'ana* (The Soul of My Heart, 1994) by the author/producer/director Ado Ahmad.

The introduction of new media forms always brings with it moments of ambivalence as the potential possibilities of the medium have to be reconciled within existing social and cultural norms. *In da* is a fascinating example of this ambivalence, especially when compared to the subsequent evolution of Hausa films. When *In da* was released in 1994, it was one of about four or five Hausa videos (there are less than ten Hausa feature films). In contrast, in 1999 alone, 125 Hausa videos were released in the market. *In da* inaugurates a new cultural form in a society where previously none existed, and introduces visual and narrative themes that have strong overlaps with Indian films. But because it is an innovation, it foregrounds an uncertainty about how these themes should be handled and what the reception of this new form will be. *In da* treads delicately over themes that later videos represent unproblematically and is interesting because it is a transitional video that reveals the cultural work that goes into the process of cultural translation.

**In da So Da K'ana**

*In da* is set among the world of the urban elite in Kano, Nigeria. It follows the relationship between a rich girl, Sumayya (Ruk'ayya Mohammed), and a poor man, Mohammed. The theme of love and the sexual precociousness of the heroine signify the intertextual presence of Indian film. Sumayya initiates contact and pursues Mohammed, against his admonitions that their difference in status can never be overcome. In reality, as director Ahmad told me in an interview, Hausa women are expected to be sexually modest, and such an open pursuit would be socially unacceptable. His dilemma as a director was how to invoke the desire and romance of Hindi cinema, while at the same time preserving a Hausa moral universe. The film treads delicately through the rituals of courtship in ways that seem unimaginable when compared to contemporary videos.

In one of the central scenes of the film, Mohammed declares his love for Sumayya. Until this point he had resisted her advances, wary of the gulf between them in terms of wealth and status. The scene consists of a series of parallel edits between the two. It opens with the lovers separated in space and time. Mohammed is in his dormitory at school; Sumayya is in her bedroom writing a letter to Mohammed. Music plays in the background as Sumayya writes. As the film cuts to Mohammed reading her letter, the same music continues to play, linking the lovers across the rupture of space and time. As the scene continues, Mohammed writes back. Their experience of each other is mediated by writing. The scene heightens when, as Sumayya receives her letter from Mohammed, his face is superimposed over the letter. As his voice-over reads the contents, the camera zooms in on Sumayya and his face appears again, superimposed over an extreme close-up of Sumayya.

Ahmad here preserves sexual segregation in the diachronic space of the film. While Mohammed's body is absent from Sumayya's room, his physical presence is made
manifest through his voice and his superimposed face, permitting the lovers to share the same cinematic frame. This is a careful game that allows Ahmad to allude to the intimacy and sexual interaction familiar to Hausa viewers from Indian films while keeping its sexual excess safely separate. Ahmad repeats this narrative device frequently in the film, separating lovers in space and establishing that separation through a series of parallel edits and a mediating device—a letter, a tape, or even dreams—to create a space for the lovers to unite through sound and montage.

The bedroom is a key space here. Sumayya first spies Mohammed as she passes him sitting outside with a group of friends. This is a male activity forbidden to Hausa women, especially wealthy ones, who are expected to remain inside the domestic space. Sumayya is narratively identified with her bedroom: this is where she writes her letter to Mohammed telling him she loves him; it is where she plays his tapes and where she returns to and listens to them after (later in the film) he tells her they should separate. Spatially and visually, then, Sumayya stays where a proper Hausa woman should be, restricted to the interior space of the house where men rarely are allowed to visit. It is only the fantasy of the film that allows her to move out of that space.

Visually these scenes are marked by restriction and immobility. In the song sequence I described in the introduction and in the scene where Sumayya first reads Mohammed’s letter Sumayya is confined by both her bedroom and by the extreme close-up on her unmoving face. This restricted consumption of love is in stark contrast to the kinetic freedom of the dancing in Indian films. Here, the Hausa film stays within the bounds of cultural realism, adopting moral and bodily codes of Hausa expression, yet it always threatens to transgress that boundary with its constant mimetic reference to a fantasy world outside of local Hausa norms. This transgression was noted frequently by a group of young Hausa friends I watched the films with. The muted, minimalist nature of the love scenes seemed, to me, to bear little relation to the excess of Indian films, but for them the song scene was hilarious and immediately seemed culturally false. “Indian song!” one friend shouted as the scene began, “How can someone sing songs to a woman?” he asked in amused disgust. Hausa viewers know that a sequence such as this, or scenes in which couples openly declare their love for each other or even spending unchaperoned time together, go against the conventions of Hausa sexual interaction. For them, such scenes are obviously derived from the style of courtship in Indian films.

In Mala, in its emphasis on love and relationships, and on the spectacular use of song-and-dance sequences, represents an early attempt at what is rapidly becoming an elaborate genre in Hausa cultural life. In contemporary films, song-and-dance sequences are common and few betray the cultural and religious delicacy of this transitional film. To take one example, the film Daskin da Ridi (dir. Aminu Mado, Sabo) includes a love song sequence between Indo (Hauwa Ali Dodo) and her lover Yarima (Nasir Ismail). The song sequence opens with a medium shot of the couple splashing each other at a lakeside. It then cuts to them holding hands and running toward the camera and then, cutting again, to the two of them, still holding hands, running up a small hill. Still in medium shot, they begin to dance and sing to each other. As the sequence progresses, Indo dances away from Yarima. He follows, chasing her playfully, and they splash each other again. Here the use of Indian film
style is blatant and unashamed: the lovers change clothes frequently during the song sequence; Indo sings in a high-pitched voice more reminiscent of the famous Indian playback singer Lata Mangeshkar than of a Hausa singer, and the teasing, playful chasing is associated strongly with Hindi film. The difference from Ahmad's delicate balancing act seems immense. When Ahmad adapted In Da from his book he changed one of the scenes so that Sumayya dropped a ring into Mohammed's hand rather than putting it on his finger as she did in the book. Unsure if Hausa audiences would tolerate physical contact of any kind, he developed a style that allowed sharing of filmic space while preserving strict physical separation. In contrast, instead of being separated in space and time, nearly the entire Daskin sequence is filmed as a two-shot with both lovers constantly present in the frame.

In da and Daskin are revelatory of the deep intertextual influence that Indian films have had on the evolution of Hausa video film form. As I suggested elsewhere (Larkin, 1997), this influence has emerged because Indian films are useful repositories for Hausa audiences to engage with deeply felt tensions over the nature of individual freedom and familial responsibility, providing a safe imaginative space outside of the politicized contexts of western and southern Nigerian media. Indian films work for Hausa because they rest on a dialectic of presence and absence culturally similar to Hausa society but at the same time reassuringly distant. These films have allowed Hausa filmmakers to develop a genre of video films that are strikingly different from those of their southern Nigerian counterparts. This is not to say that the success of Hausa videos does not generate its own controversy. The engagement of Hausa with Indian films involves a sort of mimicry that carries with it the ambivalence of border crossing. As Hausa videos have boomed so has criticism of their cultural borrowing, leading in 2001 to a state ban on mixed-gender song sequences. Interestingly the intense criticism has not focused on Indian films (which are unaffected by any censorship) but on the Hausa written and visual forms that are accused of translating their themes into Hausa social life.

Conclusion

Contemporary Indian film theorists have insisted on the "Indianess" of Hindi film. Chakravarty (1993) has elaborated on structuralist film theory to argue that Hindi film has developed a "communal" mode of address that interpellates an individual spectator as part of a wider national or religious community rather than as an isolated viewer. Vasudevan (1993, 2000) and others have examined the concept of the "darsanic" mode of vision enacted in Indian film. They argue that the formal construction of filmic meaning depends upon mobilizing extra-filmic cultural and ritual modes of knowledge in the (Indian) audience -- at least in certain genres. These arguments emerge from the long-standing struggle against cultural imperialism and a desire to establish the cultural logics of a film form not totally subsumed by the Hollywood narrative and form. Studies of non-Western film therefore derived from the need to explicate the alterity and particularity of national cinemas partly, as Willemen has argued, to resist the "projective, universalizing, appropriation" that
situates the Western experience of media as the model for the rest of the world (Willemen, 1991, p. 56; see also Shohat and Stam, 1994).

Similarly, in this essay, I have sought to decenter the Western experience of media, not by insisting on the alterity of Nigerian video but on its thoroughgoing intertextuality. At the same time, I have tried to place the historical and geographic spread of Hindi films at the center of an analysis of global media, rather than on the margins of a theory centered around Hollywood and the West (for a similar argument, see Ginsburg et al., 2002). Timothy Mitchell has recently argued that modernization continues to be commonly understood as a process begun and finished in Europe, that to be modern is to take part in a history defined by the West and against which “all other histories must establish their significance” (2000, p. 6). The privileging of Western media as the only “global” media has had a similar effect, downplaying the social significance of other long-standing global flows. By highlighting the global flow of Indian films, I do not mean to downplay the cultural and financial hegemony of Western media, especially since Indian films travel, in part, precisely because they counter Western media. I do want to suggest, however, that we must shift our focus to analyze the cultural flows of goods that do not necessarily have the West at their center.

The reasons Indian films travel and have traveled are diverse, evolving, and culturally specific. While southern Nigerians cite the popularity of Indian films among Hausa audiences as evidence of the northerners’ “backwardness,”11 for young British Asians sampling dance beats with Hindi film tunes, Indian films can be the source of a hip hybrid modernity (Sharma et al., 1997). Analyzing Indian films as global media entails revising the ways in which media scholars have tended to conceptualize national and transnational media. It necessitates revising our concept of African cinema to understand Indian films as part of African media. Similarly, the excellent work on the cultural particularity of Indian cinema, specifying the Indianess of Indian cinema, only goes partway in helping us to understand the phenomenal popularity of Hindi films in cultures, religions, and nations whose grasp of Indian and Hindu realities is weak. Central to this project should be the acceptance of diverse media environments in which audiences engage with heterogeneous cultural forms. Hausa youth, who listen to fundamentalist Islamic preaching, admire Steven Seagal, are captivated by the love tribulations of Salman Khan, and are voraciously consuming emerging Nigerian videos are part of a post-colonial media environment in which the Western domination is only a partial and contingent facet of global media flow.

NOTES

1 In recognition of local Hausa usage, I will use Indian film interchangeably with the more specific term Hindi film in this essay.

2 When the film Taal (dir, Subhash Ghai) was released in the United States in 1999, it entered the Variety list of the top grossing American films at number 20. The New York/New Jersey-based Asian Variety Show that caters to the South Asian population announced the news with the title: “Bollywood invades Hollywood.” A few months later...
when \textit{Hum Saath Saath Hain} (dir. Sooraj Barjatya) was one of the top grossing English films, the \textit{London Times} reported, "Bollywood knocking Hollywood for six" (November 20, 1999).

3 It may be that the term \textit{Nigerian video} came about from the popularity of English-language videos outside Nigeria in countries such as Ghana and Kenya.

4 To give an example, in May 1962, 33 Indian films were screened in Kano, the main city of northern Nigeria. This compared to 21 American films and 3 English ones. In June the numbers were 32 Indian, 23 American, and 1 English. In July there were 30 Indian films, 19 American, and 3 English (figures taken from the \textit{Daily Comet, Kano}). Until the rise of Hausa Indian films videos were shown 5 nights a week on Kano screens compared to 1 night for American and 1 night for Hong Kong films.

5 Interview with Ado Ahmad, July 1996.

6 This is ironic give that only a few years later Hausa video films became famous precisely because of men singing love songs.

7 The credits for the video include listings of "Play Back Singers" (Fati Aboabakar is the female singer) and "Music Director."

8 The radical novelty of this mode of romance was brought home to me during a discussion with an older Hausa (male) friend. He said that, as a youth in the 1970s, he went to see many Indian films at a time when they were mainly restricted to the cinema and thus to men. He said this caused problems when he got married, as in Indian films women openly declare their love for their partners and are passionate in their relations. In the 1970s, he continued, Hausa men were expecting, or wanting, this behavior from their wives but when he got married his wife, acting with the modesty that a "proper" Hausa wife should have, was initially reluctant to talk with him, or even spend much time with him alone, creating disappointment and friction in the relationship. He saw the problem lying in the fact he wanted the relationships he was used to in Indian films, but that this sort of relationship could not be realized within traditional Hausa gender relations.

9 Ibid.

10 For three months all filmmaking was prohibited. After intensive lobbying by the film industry, filmmaking was resumed but placed under the control of a new censorship board.

11 This was a common observation made to me by southerners living in northern Nigeria. They emphasized their participation in Western culture and especially what Gilroy calls a "black Atlantic" world, listening to rappers like Tupac Shakur and Puff Daddy and watching Hollywood films. For them, Indian films were a marker of temporality, an index of marginalization from a history that is centered around the West. Abadzi makes the similar point when she argues that the popularity of Indian films waned in Greece at the moment during the 1960s when Greeks wished to emphasize their westernness and their distance from the Eastern heritage.

\textbf{REFERENCES}


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