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Trans-Indian Ocean Cultural Flows

The Influence of Hindi Cinema on Hausa Popular Fictions[1]

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Introduction

The sight of a 15 ft image of Sridevi, dancing erotically on the screens of the open-air cinemas of northern Nigeria, or the tall, angular figure of Amitabh Bachchan radiating charisma through the snowy, crackly reception of domestic television have become powerful, resonant images in Hausa popular culture. To this day, stickers of Indian films and stars decorate the taxis and buses of the north, posters of Indian films adorn the walls of tailors' shops and mechanics' garages, and love songs from Indian films songs are borrowed by religious singers who change the words to sing praise of the Prophet Mohammed. For over thirty years, Indian films, their stars and fashions, music and stories have been a dominant part of everyday popular culture in northern Nigeria. If, as Bakhtin (1981) writes, communication is fundamental to human life, and self and society emerge in dialogue with others surrounding them, then Indian films have entered into the dialogic construction of Hausa popular culture offering Hausa men and women an alternative world, similar to their own, from which they may

[1] The first draft of the paper was presented at the Indian Ocean World Studies (INDOWS) International Symposium titled 'Currents of Metamorphosis across the Indian Ocean', which was held at Osaka University in December 2023.

> imagine other forms of fashion, beauty, love and romance, coloniality and post-coloniality (Larkin 1997:470).

As the above quote from Brian Larkin's 1997 essay 'Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers' reveals, the Hausa people's engagement with Indian films is not just a passing trend but a cultural cornerstone that shapes their everyday life. In the late 1980s, a new wave of Hausa prose fiction writers emerged, weaving love stories and emotional themes in their works. This development prompted comparisons between their storylines and Hindi films among literary and cultural critics, leading to a rich cultural discourse about the influence of Indian cinema on Hausa culture.

Larkin's research, as an outsider, transcends the typical narrative of cultural imperialism, uncovering the intricate connections and influences between Indian and Hausa literary productions through film. His initial expectations, shaped by existing Nigerian and Western scholarship, were of a media landscape dominated by Western and particularly Hollywood films. However, he recounted how his first visit to Kano, a major city in northern Nigeria, revealed a surprising reality: Indian films were screened at cinemas five nights a week, far outpacing Hollywood and Chinese films. The most popular television program was the Sunday morning Indian film on City Television Kano (CTV), and video shops dedicated the majority of their space to Indian movies, followed by Western and Chinese films, Nigerian dramas, and religious videos.

Larkin's observation of the Indian film's influence on Hausa culture was from the 1990s. Fast forward to the present, many Hausa people now speak Indian languages due to decades of watching Bollywood films. Using this ability, some people dubbed Indian films in Hausa, and these have become popular. In tune with current technology, these films are being watched on smartphones either online via the YouTube channels of those who translated and dubbed them in Hausa or offline through video download and distribution kiosks. People pay a small fee to have the videos sent to their smartphones for offline viewing. Nowadays, several FM radio stations across northern Nigeria have programs focusing on various aspects of Indian culture, such as movies, news, and language learning, presented by young Hausa people, both male and female, who have learned Indian languages through watching Indian films.

This paper explores the interactions between the Indian Ocean Region and external regions, focusing on the Hausa community in northern Nigeria. Although the region being studied is not directly connected to the Indian Ocean, it demonstrates that the dynamism of reception and transformation of cultures across the Indian Ocean is not limited to land and maritime routes. It extends as far as West Africa through exchanges facilitated by the global media flow. In this paper, I discuss the influence of Indian cinema on the social life of the Hausa, particularly through the medium of Hausa literature, focusing on *littatafan soyayya* (love stories). I explore how the popular romance genre, which emerged in 1989, has nurtured a readership and literary movement that are passionate about protagonists who mirror the love and sexual encounters depicted in Indian cinema. My analysis also explores the diverse viewpoints and contestations that have arisen among various groups, including authors of those books, readers, cultural critics, and religious leaders. These viewpoints and contestations range from the celebration of cultural exchange to concerns about the erosion of traditional Hausa values.

The data for this article was collected through several phases of fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2017 as part of my doctoral research. During this period, I interviewed many authors who have also ventured into filmmaking, including scriptwriters and film producers. Additional fieldwork took place in 2023 and 2024, during which I interviewed contemporary Hausa authors and enthusiastic fans of Indian films who are also readers of *soyayya* novels. The active participation of the audience has been instrumental in shaping this research. Along with consultations of secondary sources related to Hausa prose fiction that enrich this study, I employed comparative analyses of selected Hausa books and the corresponding Indian films from which they were adapted.

Framing the paper

While conceptualizing the influence of Indian movies in the metamorphosis of Hausa prose-fiction, I am compelled to engage with the notion of intertextuality, particularly from the multidimensional perspective of how Bollywood shapes the reception, transformation and even repulsion of thoughts and cultures in Hausa literature of northern Nigeria. As the *Indian Ocean World Studies* (INDOWS) symposium (in which this paper was presented earlier) pointed out, literature is

not a self-contained entity but a product of diverse cultural and linguistic influences. These conceptual and analytical perspectives are particularly relevant when examining contemporary Hausa prose-fiction, which is shaped both by external forces (Hindi films in this regard) and the local cultural milieu that produced it. Usman (2021) reinforces this assertion, contending that literary works are deeply embedded in the societal and cultural fabric from which they emerged.

Moreover, while each cultural group may be considered local, they exist in a perpetual dialogue with other cultures with which they intersect. Therefore, by exploring the context, content, and function of literary works within a specific cultural framework, we can gain insights into both external influences and distinctive cultural reactions of different groups within the space in which those cultures interact, which are produced based on divergent worldviews, emotions, feelings, and expectations. Adamu AU (2006) succinctly sums it up when he says that the interplay between local, national, and transnational is shaping a world where dealing with local and domestic issues requires placing them in cross-national contexts and understanding the 'emerging global order' requires greater cultural sensitivity to similar problems elsewhere.

The dynamism of reception and transformation of literature across the Indian Ocean, as pointed out earlier, extends beyond land and maritime connections, as specified in the INDOWS call for papers leading to this publication. It reaches West Africa through media-technology-based exchanges. Therefore, I see the media and transnational cultural flow theory relevant to my analysis of the metamorphosis of Hausa literature that results from media-based exchanges between Nigeria and India. This perspective draws on the works of Larkin (1997), Sheme (2001), and Adamu (2007; 2012), all of whom have studied how the transmission and circulation of media between non-Western nations have influenced Hausa cultural productions.

Within this framework of global media flow, Larkin (1997: 406) echoes Bakhtin's (1981) notion of 'The Dialogical Imagination' that 'as communication is fundamental to human life, that self and society emerge in dialogue with others surrounding them, then Indian films have entered into the dialogic construction of Hausa popular culture by offering Hausa men and women an alternative world, similar to their own, from which they may imagine other forms of fashion, beauty,

love and romance, coloniality and post-coloniality.' This perspective is corroborated by Sheme (2001) and Adamu (2007), who assert that the consumption of Indian films by Nigerian youth has been reflected in the works of Hausa novelists in the 1990s. In the subsequent sections, I will delineate significant milestones in the colonial and postcolonial literary culture of northern Nigeria before returning to the role of Indian cinema in reshaping Hausa literature and the resulting cultural dialogue.

An Overview of Modern Hausa Prose-fiction Writing

The period between 1980 and 1985 marked a significant shift in Hausa prose-fiction writing as the third generation of Hausa writers emerged on the literary scene. This generation of writers showed a great diversity in its themes and opened up new frontiers in the Hausa fiction writing. They explored modern and contemporary themes, departing from traditional topics such as kings and kingdoms, witches and thieves, princes and princesses, horses, and swords. Instead, they ventured into new topics such as politics, the bourgeoisie and proletariat, cars and guns, terrorism, and smuggling, reflecting the changing cultural and social order of their time. This change in Hausa prose-fiction writing was evident in the new books published by the Federal Ministry of Information, based on the same tradition of writing competitions in Nigerian languages. Among the winners were Sulaiman Ibrahim Katsina's *Turmin Danya*, which focused on the issue of smuggling, and Bature Gagare's *ƙarshen Alewa*, which narrated a rebellion by the native Hausa people, also known as Maguzawa (those who practiced traditional Hausa religions).

The emergence of private publishing companies during the early to mid-1980s revolutionized the Hausa literary scene. These companies provided a platform for writers whose books did not make it to the government-organized writing competition to publish their work, thereby democratizing the literary landscape. As a result, prose fiction, which had previously been overshadowed by poetry, gained prominence in the Hausa literary landscape. Novels and novellas became the new face of Hausa literary culture, and Hausa literature became synonymous with prose fiction (Adamu Yusuf Muhammad. 2021).

In addition to the winners of the writing competition mentioned earlier, three other novels had significantly impacted the emerging literary scene in the region.

These novels, namely *Mallakin Zuciya* by Sulaiman Ibrahim Katsina, *So Aljannar Duniya* by Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwahid, and *Amadi Na Malam Amah* by Magaji Dambatta, all belong to the soyayya (romantic) genre. *So Aljannar Duniya*, in particular, was influential because it was the first novel written by a woman in the Hausa language. This inspired many young people, especially women, to tell similar stories, ultimately leading to the emergence of the fourth-generation Hausa prose-fiction writers from the mid-1980s, whose thematic focus was mainly on soyayya (romance), and their storylines are heavily influenced by decades of watching Bollywood cinema in the region.

The following section delves deeper into the influence of Bollywood cinema on the soyayya books, which have become a prominent genre of Hausa prose-fiction. The cultural discourse surrounding this phenomenon is also analysed.

Indian cinema and the transformation of Hausa literature through litattafan soyayya

The Nigerian Government's education policies, particularly the Universal Primary Education (UPE) initiative launched in 1976, have significantly boosted literacy rates across the country. This policy, aimed at ensuring all school-age children received primary education and encouraging adult evening classes, led to a remarkable 500 percent rise in primary school enrolment within a year (Csapo 1983, 91). Within a decade, a substantial portion of the Hausa-speaking population could read and write in the Hausa Western script format, sparking a surge in creative writing in the Hausa language (Adamu, YM. 2002; Furniss 2003; Krings 2015).

The genre of popular fiction that emerged during this period has some variation in the name among academics. Meanwhile, Malumfashi (1994) refers to it as '*Adabin kasuwar Kano*' or Kano market literature, Adamu YM. (2002) and McCain (2014) call it Kano Literary Movement. Larkin (1997), Whitsitt (2002), and Hirokazu (2012) refer to it as '*Littattafan Soyayya'* (Romance Literature), which is the common name used by ordinary people. Regardless, Adamu YM (2002) and Whitsitt (2002) note that many women and men enrolled in adult literacy classes to learn the Latin script to be able to read books and write their own stories.

During the same period, some state-owned television stations used to

broadcast Hindi films from their transmitters to home viewers. For example, between October 1977 and June 2003, the Kano substation of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA Kano) alone broadcasted 1,176 Hindi films on its transmitters. The first Bollywood movie broadcasted by NTA Kano was *Aann Baan,* directed by Prakash Mehra. When those Hindi films were first introduced for home viewing, young school boys and girls aged seven or less became avid watchers of these films, and they gradually absorbed the behavioural patterns of the screen heroes they admired (Adamu AU 2021).

These intertwining phenomena significantly shaped the direction of the fifth generation of Hausa writers, with a turn towards the soyayya (romance) genre. Initially faced with a shortage of publishing houses across northern Nigeria, this new crop of soyayya book writers and sellers defied the challenges and established their own small-scale printing companies. The first of these Hausa romantic books printed and sold was *Rabin Raina*, written by a female author, Talatu Wada Ahmad, in 1984 (Adamu YM 1996, 2002; Adamu AU 2000; Whitsitt 2002; Furniss 2003). By the mid-1980s, dozens of new writers had emerged in Kano, flooding the city with soyayya novels. As of the first quarter of the twenty-first century, according to Adamu YM (2021: x), no African language had as many female authors writing in a local language as Hausa.

By the late 1980s, more children who had been exposed to both literacies in Latin script and Indian cinema had become novelists, and the imaginative investment of Hausa viewers in Indian films was increasingly reflected in their fictional writings. When the new wave of Hausa soyayya book authors started producing prose fiction interlaced with love stories and emotional themes in mass quantities, literary and textual critics started comparing their storylines with Hindi films, leading to accusations that they rip off such films. Adamu AU (2021) provides examples of some Hausa novels that can be directly identified as rip-offs of Indian cinema. These include *Alkawarin Allah* by Aminu Adamu (1994), a direct adaptation of the 1983 Indian film *Romance,* produced and directed by Ramanand Sagar. Bala Anas Babinlata's novel *Sara Da Sassaka* is an adaptation of the Indian movie 'Iqlik De Khaliya,' while his other work, *Rashin Sani* is inspired by *DostanaI* (1980), directed by Raj Khosla. Additionally, *In Da So Da Kauna,* a Hausa soyayya book by Ado Gidan Dabino, shares similar plot elements with the 1979 Bollywood romantic drama *Amar Deep*, directed by R.

Krishnamurthy and K. Vijayan.

This pamphlet-type literature has created a popular reading public for wilful, passionate heroes and heroines who mimic a style of love and sexual interaction found in Indian films (Larkin 1997). The readership of these novels, much like that of Indian films, is diverse and spans various demographics. A significant portion of readers consists of young females and males. Among female readers, who make up the majority, we find students and married women aged between thirteen and fifty. While the gender distribution among readers varies, greater attention is often directed towards female readers. This focus is understandable given the patriarchal structure of Hausa society, where moral subjectivities tend to favour men. It is important to acknowledge that this description of the readership may be limited. Many men who enjoy this genre might refrain from identifying themselves as readers due to the criticism it faces from predominantly male religious and cultural authorities. In contrast, female readers frequently embrace their association with these books, valuing how the stories resonate with their shared imaginations and reflect their personal experiences.

By the mid-1990s, hundreds of new soyayya novels had flooded the market, sparking a literary movement that gained popularity and cultivated a dedicated readership even beyond the borders of Nigeria and Niger. Hausa in the diaspora became avid fans of these books, and vendors began exporting them to countries like Benin, Togo, Ghana, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Sudan, Gabon, and Central African Republic. Interestingly, the books also gained a following among Hausa people living in Saudi Arabia, and trading in those books became a big business as more booksellers from within and outside Nigeria flocked to Kano to purchase them (Adamu Yusuf Muhammad 2021).

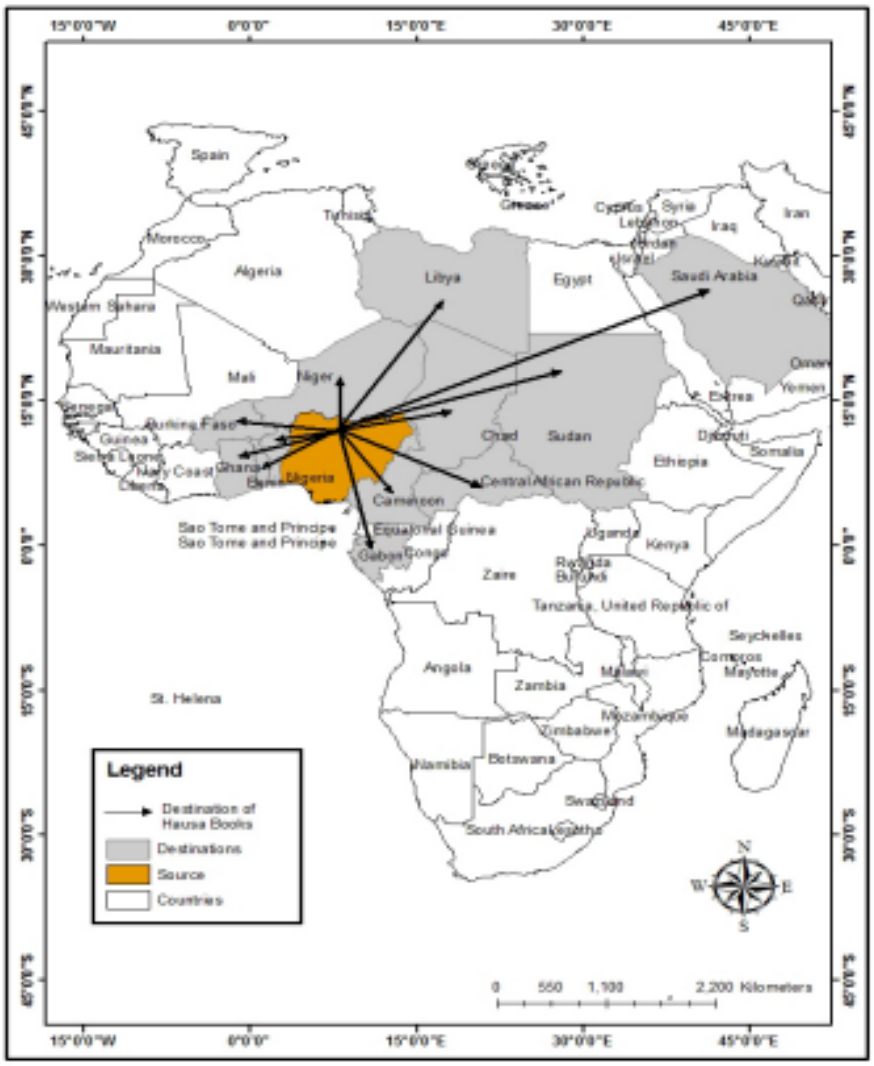

Figure 4.1: Destinations of Hausa Novels.
Source: Adamu Yusuf Muhammad (2021) An Account of Modern Hausa Prose-Fiction in the 21st Century.

In other words, the authors of soyayya books incorporated the imagined alternative of Indian romance within the local Hausa realities, creating an abundance of prose fiction interlaced with love stories and emotional themes (Adamu Yusuf Muhammad 2021; Adamu Abdalla Uba 2021; Ibrahim 2018a). According to Larkin (1997), this long-term exposure of Hausa viewers to Indian films has resulted in a unique dynamic that involves the imaginative engagement of the viewers with forms of tradition different from their own while also conceiving a version of modernity that does not carry the political and ideological significance of the West. Therefore, since the late 1980s, Hausa prose fiction writers established a considerable foundation for the integration of Indian cinematic elements into the local cultural milieu. Nevertheless, a multitude of factors, including the emergence of Kannywood cinema in the 1990s (also influenced by Bollywood) and Politico-Islamic reforms of the 2000s, have contributed to the evolving interactions between Indian films and Hausa culture over the years, as will be further explored in the following section.

Cultural Discourse at the intersection of Bollywood and soyayya novellas

The intersection of Bollywood cinema and soyayya novellas has sparked cultural discourse among various groups. Ibrahim Malumfashi, a professor of Hausa studies, is one of the few academics who have shown interest in the soyayya literature from its inception. He criticized the emerging Hausa popular literature as producing sub-standard literary materials. Malumfashi (1992) approached this literary movement with disdain, categorizing it as mere market literature. This perspective suggests that soyayya books hold little to no literary value, akin to ‘Onitsha market literature,’ a 20th-century genre characterized by sentimental and moralistic novellas and pamphlets crafted by 'semi-literate' writers, which were sold at the bustling Onitsha market in eastern Nigeria (Rexroth 2021). Examples of Onitsha market literature include titles like ‘Rose Only Loved My Money’, ‘Drunkards Believe the Bar is Heaven’, ‘Why Some Rich Men Have No Trust in Some Girls’, and ‘How to Get a Lady in Love’. Additionally, some works serve as guides on various subjects such as writing love letters, managing finances, and achieving prosperity, all of which have seen commercial success (Rexroth 2024).

In his critique of the soyayya literary genre, Malumfashi (1992) expressed

concern over the focus on escapist themes that fail to address the pressing issues of poverty and declining living conditions prevalent in everyday life. He further critiqued the phenomenon of cultural borrowing, describing these books as 'gwanjo' (second-hand) due to their overt reliance on external cultural narratives, which, in his view, fabricate scenarios incongruent with the realities in Hausa society. Malumfashi (2000) predicted the demise of both the soyayya genre and the literary movement it created, and he went on to declare it dead despite its surging popularity.

On the contrary, Larkin (1997) posits that the soyayya literature embodies a convergence of transnational cultures facilitated by media infrastructure. He sees the metamorphosis of Hausa literature through soyayya books as a mode of social inquiry that allows a Hausa audience, and Hausa artists and writers to actively imagine their lives through the mediating lens of a culture they see as similar to their own, particularly Bollywood. Larkin highlights that Indian cinema provided an extended narration of the problems of arranged marriages and of the place of materialism in a 'traditional' society that resonates with everyday Hausa life. By framing certain narratives in soyayya literature as a mode of social inquiry, Larkin underscores the agency of Hausa audiences and writers, positioning them not merely as passive receptors of cultural imperialism but as active participants envisioning their realities through the filter of a culture they find relatable. For soyayya authors, their exploration of love carries didactic and moral implications, endowing their novels with a sense of social responsibility. Larkin contends that incompatibility in marriage partner selection leads daughters to run away from their parents to become 'independent women,' resulting in undesirable outcomes such as prostitution, suicide, or enduring an unhappy marriage, and an early divorce—even if the partner chosen is wealthy (Ibid: 421). Consequently, the soyayya literary movement emerges as a platform for Hausa youth to explore the limits of accepted Hausa attitudes toward love and sexuality through the narratives derived from both Indian film and Hausa traditions.

Despite the prediction of its demise, the soyayya genre has not only persisted but continues to flourish, inciting ongoing discourse about its societal implications. Adamu YM (2000) contributes to this debate by contesting claims that soyayya literature corrupts its readers. He mentioned, 'When a writer writes

about social inequality, brutalization, forced or arranged marriages, moral decadence, cultural imperialism, etc., it is because those things abound in his society' (30-1). Scholars such as McCain (2013), Ibrahim (2018b), and Adamu YM (2021) view these writers as advocates for the marginalized. In a focused examination of novels by Balaraba Ramat Yakubu, Whitsitt (2003a; 2003b) argues that her works critique patriarchal institutions and make the case for women's education.

Figure. 4.2: Covers of soyayya books from the author's collection.

Adamu AU (2021) reasserts that the soyayya genre significantly intersects with societal dynamics, noting that the biggest accusation against the soyayya books, which manifests itself in many of the 160 soyayya-themed novels he studied, is that of empowering girls to voice out a personal choice in marriage. Critiques interpret this influence of Hindi films on Hausa society through the soyayya books as *rashin kunya* (impertinence) or lack of *kawaici* (reticence) and, therefore, outside the scope of *Tarbiyar Bahaushe* (Hausa norms and values). In the archetypal Hausa society, girls subjected to forced marriages are expected to show *hakuri* (endurance) until they eventually get used to the man (or the woman, as the case may be since there are cases of boys being forced to marry girls they do not love). However, soyayya literature prominently features strategies for resisting forced marriage, which are often seen as adaptations from Bollywood cinema. These complex dynamics contribute to the criticism directed at soyayya novelists for allegedly reproducing foreign cultural influences that encourage young people to defy parental authority and adopt new norms and values.

Authors of Hausa romance novels are often vague about their sources. While they acknowledged being fans of Indian films from childhood, many consistently deny ripping off Indian films. Instead, they have asserted that their novels deal with the realities of everyday life and draw from their own experiences. For instance, Ado Ahmad Gidan Dabino, a popular soyayya novelist, reiterated this view in an interview I did with him, saying that his novels address the realities of everyday life in Hausa society.[2] He has maintained this perspective since the initial criticisms against them. In fact, in 1992, he wrote a rejoinder titled '*Zamani, zo mu tafi*!' ('Let's go with modern times'), which he directed at Malumfashi's (1992) *'Tsakanin gwanjo da orijina'* ('Between second-hand and original'). Gidan Dabino argued that Malumfashi was making sweeping generalizations and insisted that soyayya book writers were not simply copying foreign cultures but also drawing upon their personal experiences to foster positive changes in their society. He posited that if the themes in the Hausa contemporary novels resembled those from other cultures, it simply demonstrated the common humanity in all cultures (Gidan Dabino 1992; Larkin 1997).

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[2] Interview with Ado Ahmad Gidan Dabino conducted in Kano in November 2014.

Another prominent author of soyayya books, Dan Azumi Baba, reiterated that they were not copying Indian films while discussing his motivation for writing about love and marriage. He emphasized that the absence of love is the main issue in marriage within Hausa society. Indian cinema only reminded the people watching it about their own local challenges, and now many women understand that love is a necessary ingredient for overcoming any problem that may arise in marriage. As Larkin (1997) pointed out, the concerns expressed in the soyayya book over the increasing commodification of love and the iniquities of forced marriages reflect common themes in soyayya literature and Indian films. According to McCain (2013), this 'teaching' from the soyayya books often takes the form of exposing and challenging the corruption of an older generation and abuses of the elite, valorising romance between young people, and arguing that women and youth should be given greater choices in how they wish to live their lives. The soyayya novelist, 'Dan Azumi Baba, argues that reading soyayya books changes things. Girls do not agree to forced marriage anymore. Parents understand that if they force their daughter into marriage, she may leave them and eventually become a prostitute (Larkin 1997).

The interplay between Indian cinema and soyayya literature in northern Nigeria reflects broader cultural concerns and has sparked extensive public debates regarding the direction of the region's cultural landscape. In August 2007, a remarkable incident occurred when Malam Ibrahim Shekarau, the then Governor of Kano state, led a public 'ceremony' to incinerate thousands of soyayya novels confiscated from students at a local secondary school. Shekarau was elected governor through a populist agenda of implementing sharia (Islamic law) reforms, which included the censorship of popular culture, specifically targeting soyayya literature and Hausa films. Producers of these cultural products faced allegations under the sharia implementation context of perpetrating cultural corruption (Ibrahim 2018a; 2018b; 2020).

During the book-burning event, Bala Muhammad, the head of one of the government agencies tasked with 'sanitizing' the society through censoring literary works, explained that teachers at the secondary school in question, attributed students' academic failure, at least in part, to their reading preferences. To address this concern, teachers searched the students' belongings in their dormitories. 'Incredibly, about four thousand (4,000) romantic and titillating

novellas were retrieved in a school with about 2,000 students!' Muhammad stated that the government's objective was to exchange 'unrecommendable reading materials for our didactic novellas' (Muhammad cited in McCain 2014). While setting fire to the books the girls had chosen for themselves in the presence of journalists, Governor Shekarau labelled them as 'pornographic and immoral to the customs and traditions of Northern Nigeria society'.[3]

Despite censorship challenges, the soyayya literary form has thrived for over four decades, remaining popular among many generations of Nigerians. It has adapted to various trends while evolving in response to changing cultural contexts. For instance, the influence of Indian films on Hausa literary culture persists, yet the rise of the Nigerian film industry—particularly the bourgeoning Kannywood in northern Nigeria (which is not the focus of this chapter)—has introduced a shift from written narratives to audiovisual storytelling within the Hausa-India cultural dialogues (See Ibrahim 2020, 2025). Kannywood movies often draw their storylines and styles either directly from Indian films that resonate deeply with local audiences or indirectly from soyayya literature. Contrary to the initial understanding that Kannywood home videos overshadowed the Hausa literary movement, they actually serve to complement it. In essence, the Hausa literary movement and Kannywood have formed a collaborative yet competitive relationship, fostering a more nuanced dynamic within the popular cultural production sphere in northern Nigeria. Both are influenced by cultural exchanges with Indian cinema and continue to flourish without diminishing the original Indian cinema in the region, as elaborated in the subsequent sections.

The Bollywood-Hausa literary trend continues: A comparative analysis

Not only have literary scholars like Adamu (1994) demonstrated that early Hausa romance novels were influenced by Indian films, but my fieldwork conducted in 2023 and 2024 has revealed that this trend continues among contemporary Hausa writers. While authors tend to be cagey about their sources, local audiences—avid fans of Indian films and readers of Hausa novels—often identify the specific

[3] https://saharareporters.com/2014/08/24/book-burning-nigerian-minister-education-explains-why-he-did-it-governor-kano [Last accessed: 2025-2-25]

books and movies from which these writers have drawn inspiration. One example is 'Rayuwar Bilkisu,' a Hausa novel by Ayuba Muhammad Danzaki, first printed in 2011 and reprinted in 2016 and 2024. This novel is inspired by the Indian romantic film *Kal Ho Naa Hoa* (2003), directed by Nikhil Advani. I will return to this comparison later.

Additional examples include *Awa Ashirin Da Hudu* (24 Hours), a crime and revenge novel written by Khadija Abdullahi in 2008, which is an adaptation of the 2007 Indian film *Chirutha*, directed by Puri Jagannadh. This film also centres on the theme of revenge. Another example is *Muguwar Kaya,* a Hausa novel by Salmanu Faris Shuaibu Kudan printed in 2022, which is inspired by the 2017 Indian soap opera *Kundali Bhagya* (The Fate of Our Horoscope) directed by Sameer Kulkarni et al. *Kundali Bhagya* gained popularity in northern Nigeria after being dubbed in Hausa by Arewa 24 TV, where it is titled '*Kaddarar Rayuwa'* (literally translated as Fate of Life).

Returning to *Rayuwar Bilkisu* (2022), which offers a reimagined narrative of the Indian film *Kal Ho Naa Hoa* (2003), we can begin by comparing the titles**.** The phrase '*Kal Ho Naa Hoa*,' meaning 'Tomorrow may never come,' is adapted into '*Rayuwar Bilkisu*' (Bilkisu's Life). The story centres on Bilkisu, a female protagonist whose tomorrow never arrives due to various twists in her love relationships. Both *Kal Ho Naa Hoa* and *Raywwar Bilkisu* revolve around the same theme of intense love relationships, showcasing the connections between Sharukhan and Preity Zinta in the Indian film and between Bilkisu and her boyfriend, Sharfudden, in the Hausa novel.

Both narratives highlight the challenges of loving someone who does not reciprocate those feelings. They also depict the difficulties beautiful women face in public spaces, as they often attract attention from many men, some of whom would go to great lengths to win their affection. Additionally, both narratives touched on the effects of consanguineous and arranged marriages, themes present in both Indian and Hausa cultural contexts.

While discussing with those who have watched *Kal Hoo Naa Hoa* and read *Rayuwar Bilkisu*, many have agreed that the two works share similar plotlines while recognizing some differences informed by the cultural distinctions between Indian and Hausa societies. A major difference lies in the use of spiritual means in achieving objectives. In *Kalho Naa Hoa*, the emphasis is on endurance

and sacrifices to navigate challenges in love relationships and family issues. In contrast, *Rayuwar Bilkusu* incorporates the idea of seeking spiritual assistance from *bokaye* (sorcerers) to achieve certain goals, which include causing harm to an opponent.

Rayuwar Bilkisu is a blend of local knowledge and transnational influence from Bollywood. Therefore, claims by some Hausa authors that their books originate solely from their original ideas may only be partially true. While striking similarities exist, notable differences also arise—typical of adaptations—and that contributes to the authors' confidence in asserting originality in their works. However, these differences are not as pronounced as the similarities. Adamu (2006, 38) describes this bricolage in the Hausa creative and performing arts industry as 'divergent similarities'.

It is worth noting that the growing popularity of Asian movies beyond Bollywood, such as Korean dramas and Turkish telenovelas, is beginning to influence narratives within soyayya literature. This trend, however, has not diminished the significant impact of Indian cinema, which continues to introduce many satellite channels that air Indian soap operas, competing with media content from other Asian countries consumed in Nigeria. While the traditional themes of love and romance inspired by Indian films continue to thrive, elements from Korean dramas and Turkish films are gradually making their way into the storylines of Hausa soyayya literature. Consequently, authors of soyayya books are diversifying character relationships and expanding the social dynamics explored in their books. This diversification has contributed to the sustained popularity of this genre among readers in northern Nigeria. Moreover, this blending of various Asian film narratives within contemporary Hausa literature has the potential to generate new discourses that critique or celebrate hybridized elements from different cultures across the Indian Ocean and West Africa. In all, the dynamic showcases how literature is not a self-contained entity but a product of diverse cultural and linguistic interactions.

Having undergone various transformations, the demographic dynamics of the Hausa popular culture have also evolved in recent years, largely due to the influence of digital technology. Younger generations who have grown up with digital technology possess differing expectations and engagement levels compared to older generations. Their interactions with media are influenced by

global popular culture trends and local nuances, leading to varying degrees of enthusiasm for and engagement with Indian cinema. Hausa literary communities inspired by Indian and other cinemas have also embraced the digital landscape. Many writers and readers have moved to online novel-sharing platforms such as Wattpad https://www.wattpad.com/list/523145306-hausa-novels. This global website hosted in Korea is for publishing and reading fiction in different languages and connecting with fellow writers and readers. Wattpad is also available as a Smartphone application and YouTube channel. In addition, there are also local online platforms where such novels can be accessed, such as Taskar Novels (a repository of novels https://tnovels.com.ng). Some of these books were acquired through free licensing from the authors, and their motivation was to make their stories heard. The website owners also purchased copyrights of some uploaded books and offered them free to read. Some free and paid books are also distributed through social media sharing platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram.

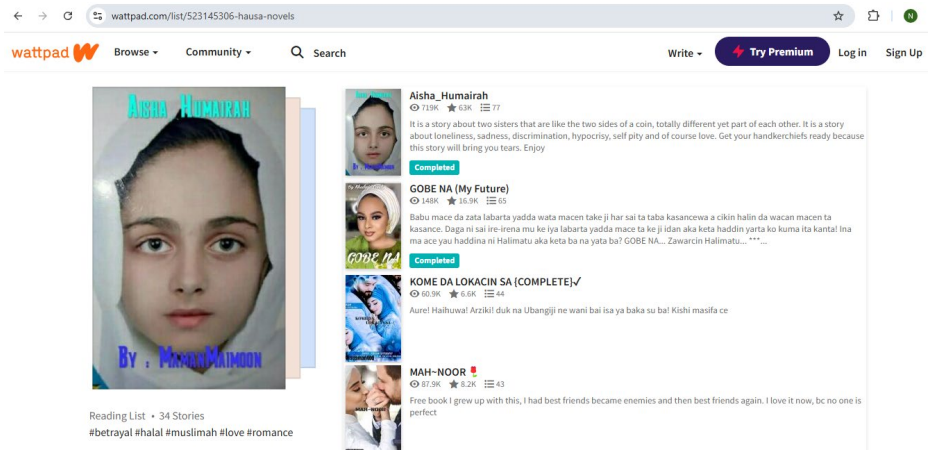

Figure 4.3: A screenshot of the Hausa novels gallery on Wattpad. (https://www.wattpad.com/list/523145306-hausa-novels)

To conclude, the interplay between Indian films and Hausa romance novels highlights that literature is a dynamic and open phenomenon shaped by various cultures, languages, and nations. The Nigerian Hausa romance novels that blend Indian romance into the local Hausa realities provide a clear example of cultural

exchanges across the Indian Ocean. As expected of any literary work of this composition, adapting Indian romance into Hausa novels sparked cultural discourse, leading to various social and cultural negotiation practices. While some literary critics expressed their discomfort with the direction of Hausa literature of borrowing foreign cultures, particularly Bollywood, others saw it as unavoidable cultural interactions that abound within transnational media exchange. Religious leaders expressed their concerns over social changes the Hausa literature and its readership brought to the Hausa society, leading to contestations and resistance based on different worldviews, emotions, feelings, and expectations of divergent groups. This dynamic has led to book censorship of varying degrees, including confiscation, replacement, and even burning of books. Despite these cultural contestations and negotiations resulting from transnational cultural exchange manifesting through literature, the soyayya books remain popular and have even moved online, where censorship is more difficult to implement.

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