Cinema is one of the quintessential tech-
- nologies of modernity. In the case of Kano, it is a colonial modernity. Often perceived as an un-Islamic (kalshi) threat to local construc-
tions of ethnicity and religion. Kano is the largest city in Nigeria and, while its inhabitants are mainly Hausa Muslims, it con-
tains considerable ethnic and religious diver-
sity. To go to the cinema in Kano is to step out of Africa, to move beyond the moral rela-
tions of an Islamic society and into the In-
dian, American, and Chinese realities project-
ed on the screen. Cinema is seen as distinc-
tively modern because of this ability to desta-
bilize and make people, ideas and commodi-
ties available. Yet at the same time cinema the-
as are parochial, an intimate part of urban topography that draw around them con-
genies of social practices that make cinema-
 going an event.

In 1937, the Rex opened in Kano. Before that, films had been screened in dance halls but not in purpose-built space of their own. This opening could be seen as unremarkable, the coming to prominence of an entertain-
ment form well established elsewhere in the world. But this ignores how moments like these were foundational in the incremental envel-
oping of Hausa society by a trans-
fusion of new technologies. Cinema theatres were introduced to Kano as part of a much wider trans-
formation of the colonial public sphere. Like the beer parlours, theatres, public gar-
dens, libraries and commercial streets that proceeded them, cinema theatres created new modes of public association that chal-
enged existing relations of space, gender and social hierarchy. The cinema theatre thus created new modes of sociability that had to be regulated — officially by the colonial administration and unofficially within local Hausa norms.

The construction of cinema was cemented when the construction of cinema halls was mapped on to the moral geography of Kano society. After the arrival of the mud-walled city of Muslim Kano was segre-
gated from the European township and Sabon Gari, the area where colonial names from the Christian south were arriv-
ing in numbers. Sabon Gari was and is an area of limit in Hausa eyes and stands as the place that Cinema-going was like nikah (dissolution) and was (and is) associated with many Hausas with the immoral cultural com-
plex known as barai: which includes beer par-
lours, dance halls, certain hotels, and male and female prostitution. The mixed-sex na-
ture of cinema theatres meant that they were also socially unacceptable for most Hausa women. Those who did attend were seen as korowu (prostitutes), and their presence meant that pleasure and desire were to be found both on and off the screen, the erotic pleasures of one context feeding off the other.

Despite its popularity with certain sections of Hausa society then, the space of cinema was quickly saturated with an un-Islamic moral aura. Third-world cinema was seen as an instance of whether the apparatus itself contravened the Islamic prohibition on the creation of images. As early as 1941, Hauwa Usman, a 13-year-old girl, wrote in an Islamic newspaper that, films had been screened in dance halls, and their presence was socially unacceptable for most Hausas with the immoral cultural complex known as barai: which includes beer parlours, dance halls, certain hotels, and male and female prostitution. This cinema-going was like nikah (dissolution) and was (and is) associated with many Hausas with the immoral cultural complex known as barai: which includes beer parlours, dance halls, certain hotels, and male and female prostitution.

Cinema theatres held in the Hausa imagination as a social space and practice that encoded the moral qualities of the areas in which they were located. In the cinema, the sexual, moral aura. There were questions about the pleasures of one context feeding off the other. Cinema theatres held in the Hausa imagination as a social space and practice that encoded the moral qualities of the areas in which they were located. In the cinema, the sexual, moral aura. There were questions about the pleasures of one context feeding off the other.

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drew around it satellite enterprises selling food or books and magazines, and it consti-
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In 1953, the construction of the Palace cinema took place in the Sabon Gari in dance halls where men went to meet women and alcohol was sold. This was where the Rex was built and its original appli-
cation included a request for an open-air bar that would promote social recreation beyond the film-going experience. The cinema in Kano quickly established a reputation as an illit, immoral arena which respectable people should avoid. Cinema-going was regarded as nikah (dissolution) and was (and is) associated with many Hausas with the immoral cultural complex known as barai: which includes beer parlours, dance halls, certain hotels, and male and female prostitution. The mixed-sex nature of cinema theatres meant that they were also socially unacceptable for most Hausa women. Those who did attend were seen as korowu (prostitutes), and their presence meant that pleasure and desire were to be found both on and off the screen, the erotic pleasures of one context feeding off the other.

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