Media Worlds

Anthropology on New Terrain

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The Materiality of Cinema Theaters in Northern Nigeria

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"Drop me at the Plaza." "Meet me at the El Dorado." These casual directions highlight the role of cinema theaters as built spaces in the urban geography of Kano, Northern Nigeria. Large, hulking buildings punctuate Kano urban topography. There, buses stop, taxis load up, motorbikes deliver people in the daily circumambulation from home to work to market and back again. Most of these travelers have little interest in films or the theater but have internalized the demarcation of public space marked out by cinema theaters, mosques, the post office, the emir's palace, and other institutions of the post-colony. Outside the theaters merchants, idlers, mechanics, and film fans depend on the particular social space created by cinema for their livelihood and leisure. Around the back and on the sides boys play football against the large dark walls. Men squat and piss against a wall painted with large letters "AN HANA FISARA A NAN" (Don't piss here).

This chapter is an examination of the fact of cinema in its materiality. It is about the fantasy space of cinema, but by this I do not mean the magical worlds to which cinema transports viewers. Rather, I view fantasy as the energy stored in the concreteness of objects, especially the commodified elements of every-day life (see Benjamin 1978). These objects are not just the products people buy but constitute the total sensory experience of urban living. In other words, this essay is about the material culture of cinema theaters as public institutions. I read the architectonics of cinema theaters and their location on the urban landscape as concrete allegories of the imposition of colonial urbanization and the experience of modernity in colonial life.

In Kano, the introduction of cinema theaters inaugurated a series of controversies over the siting of theaters on the urban landscape, the diabolical nature of cinema as a signifying technology, and the regulation of who was allowed to attend. Cinema theaters created new modes of sociability that chal-

lenged existing relations of space, gender, and social hierarchy. The controversies over cinema are moments of struggle in the reterritorialization of urban space, the attempt to define and rebuild Hausa moral space in the face of an encroaching colonial modernity. Cinema is a technology whose place in Hausa social life had to be defined. Its mass, the stories and rumors about cinema, and the words used to refer to the technology all contain traces of the history of colonialism and the urban experience. They tell us about the way that cinema as technology entered into Hausa space and took hold in the Hausa imagination.

In African postcolonies like Nigeria, a trip to the cinema has always been translocal, a stepping outside of Africa to places elsewhere.[1] To step from the foyer into the dark night of the cinema hall was to be magically transported into a universe where American realities, Indian emotions, and Hong Kong choreography have long occupied the fantasy space of Nigerian cinema screens. But cinema theaters are peculiar kind of social spaces marked by a duality of presence and absence, rootedness and transport, what Lynne Kirby (1997) refers to as the paradox of travel without movement. Cinema is seen as distinctively modern because of this ability to destabilize and make mobile people, ideas, and commodities. Onrushing images that raise the specter of cultural colonization threaten the local construction of space. This process of cinematic transportation is both ambivalent and multivalent. It erodes "the cultural distinctiveness of place" (Watts 1996: 64) by facilitating transnational cultural flows. But it can also reaffirm and intensify forms of belonging by providing a cultural foil against which local religious, ethnic, and national identities may be hardened. Finally, through Islamic or Hindu revitalization it can promote the rise of alternative forms of modernity that react against Westernization by providing their own modes of transforming space and people.

Elsewhere I have approached what I term the social space of media in this way, analyzing the fantasy worlds cinema transports one to by examining the ways Hausa viewers engage with Indian films as a secure third space from which they can imagine alternatives to Western modernity and Hausa tradition (see Larkin 1997). But while most often seen as engines of mobility, cinema theaters are also deeply parochial, intimate parts of urban topography that draw around them congeries of social practices that make cinemagoing an event that always exceeds (and sometimes has little to do with) the films that are shown on the screen. This aspect of the social space of media focuses on the spaces cinema theaters produce through their material qualities and their place on the urban landscape. My focus here is on the "materiality of specific domains" that directs attention to the "sensual and material qualities of the object" through which "we are able to unpick the more subtle connections with cultural lives and values" (Miller 1997: 9). The space of cinema is often rendered neutral by scholars in the attention given

to cinemagoing as a perceptual practice. Though Hollywood and Bollywood and other national cinemas have indeed devoted great energy to regularizing relations of textual address in the attempt to create a homogeneous viewing audience, in practice the experience of cinema is still profoundly local. Cinema theaters, while commodified, do not offer up material objects we can take home with us but an emotional experience based on a sensory environment regulated by specific relations of lighting, vision, movement, and sociality.[2] By analyzing the built space of cinema theaters and the struggle over where they were sited on the Kano landscape I wish to shift the study of cinema toward the social practices the theaters create. I examine how specific cinematic environments are produced and use this to explore the nature of colonial urbanism.

CINEMA, THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE SURFACE, AND COLONIAL MODERNITY

Walter Benjamin built a powerful hermeneutics around the interrogation of objects, once swollen with the force of history, whose significance had ebbed with transformations in social and economic structure. His famous analysis of the Paris arcades, for instance, was not based on their newness but on the fact they were once new and that their historical moment had passed. According to his friend Adorno, Benjamin created a "petrified . . . or obsolete inventory of cultural fragments" that provided concrete embodiments of historical process or "manifestations of culture" (cited in Buck-Morss 1989: 58). Benjamin shared this evocative theorizing of material culture with Siegfried Kracauer, who also pioneered the historico-philosophical interrogation of the marginal, the momentary, and the concrete. Like Benjamin, Kracauer was interested in surface phenomena and argued that their marginal, mass-produced nature was revelatory of the social order. "The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined . . . from an analysis of its unconscious surface-level expressions," he wrote in his essay "The Mass Ornament," arguing that these "expressions . . . by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things" (Kracauer 1995: 75).

For Kracauer and Benjamin, the quotidian landscapes of life—posters on the walls, shop signs, dancing girls, bestsellers, panoramas, the shape, style, and circulation of city buses—are all surface representations of the fantasy energy by which the collective perceives the social order. This structure creates an interpenetrated analysis of urban culture in modernity, one in which strikingly different phenomena are structurally linked. Benjamin is, of course, best known for his analysis of the perceptual and psychological effects of mechanical reproduction, which has fed the analytic tradition in cinema studies concerned with vision, perception, and apparatus. Kracauer's

and Benjamin's works are appealing to anthropologists because of their focus on the everyday, and by theorizing the workings of mass culture as part of a wider phenomenon of urban materiality they provide a sociologically rich means of linking critical urbanism and cinema studies with historical and ethnographic work in African studies and anthropology.[3]

I use the location of theaters on the urban landscape and the architectonics of theater construction as means of interrogating the nature of colonial modernity. The stained concrete, the open-air screens, and the proximity to markets reveal "knowledge of the state of things" (Kracauer 1995: 75), of both the structural conditions of colonial capitalism and the Hausa response. Cinema theaters were introduced to Kano as part of a much wider transformation of the colonial public sphere. Like beer parlors, theaters, public gardens, libraries, and commercial streets that preceded them, theaters created new modes of association that challenged existing social and sexual hierarchies regulating public space. The cinema theater thus created new modes of sociability that had to be regulated—officially by the colonial administration and unofficially within local Hausa norms—in a process of coming to be. Cinema theaters were not just involved in the creation of new modes of public; they also reaffirmed new modes of spatially ordering that public (Mitchell 1991; Thompson 2000).

I analyze the rise of cinema theaters as part of the much wider phenomenon of a transformative urban modernity that is deeply disruptive of relations of gender, class, and individuality. Because of this potential for disruption, how cinema theaters actually evolved and the social relations that surrounded them as technological and leisure practices cannot be taken for granted; they were a negotiation among built space, the apparatus itself, and local social relations. The formal and informal regulation of cinema— where it was to be located, who could attend, and what films could be shown—was a contested practice whereby a transnational phenomenon was constituted within local social, ethnic, and gender norms. This is true for the emergence of theaters in New York, Bombay, London, and Kano, but the particular relations of colonial rule make the trajectory of what cinema is strikingly different in the colonial arena. The rise of cinema in the United States, for instance, is famously rooted in the leisure practices of working-class immigrants. One of the most powerful stories about the origin of American cinema involves the way in which entrepreneurs actively tried to transform cinema into a bourgeois entertainment.[4] In the colonial context the trajectory is just the opposite: in most cases cinema was introduced as a specifically foreign colonial form of entertainment for European and native elites, and only after it became popular were auditoriums constructed (or opened) for the masses. Instead of being a marked lower-class activity it was often identified as an elite, racially coded, leisure practice. Despite this, in most places cinemagoing quickly became a local, indigenous activ-

ity (and in the case of India most notably, filmmaking itself became an indigenous phenomenon).

THE ARCHITECTONICS OF CINEMA THEATERS

In its materiality, its reproducibility over space and time, and its ubiquitous presence on metropolitan landscapes, the cinema theater appears reassuringly familiar, a self-effacing transnational technology that seemingly belongs to no particular country. The ontological security of theaters comes from the formal solidity of an auditorium that places audiences in a familiar spatial configuration: arranged in rows sitting beneath the ethereal spectacle of light and dark unfolding on the screen. In most parts of the world the theater has become second nature; we no longer query its existence or imagine a time when it could be queried, when its innovation brought with it a powerful transformative capacity. But this second nature is illusory and masks the process by which physical, public space becomes social: the forgetting of history in the creation of myth (Barthes 1986). The taken-for-grantedness of cinema theaters masks the historical conditions of colonial rule that made the technology possible.

The erection of cinema theaters in colonial cities created new social spaces of sexual, ethnic, religious, and racial intermixing, making them ambivalent institutions that often threatened existing hierarchies and boundaries about the public use of space. This ambivalence is seen very simply in the diverse ways colonies attempted to regulate the transformative capacity of these new institutions and reconstitute them within existing gender hierarchies. In India, for instance, separate entrances were built so that women could enter and exit without sharing the same social space as male cinemagoers (Arora 1995). In Damascus, by contrast, the same concern over female mobility and the threat of sexual intermixing was limited by reserving afternoon performances for women only (Thompson 2000). The same threat was contained in Lamu, Kenya, by making one night a week "ladies' night" (Fugelsang 1994), and in Northern Nigeria the immoral connotations of sexual intermixing were so intense that cinema theaters never became socially acceptable for women. This variety of structural and social regulations points to the necessity of interrogating the social space of the cinema theater, neither taking it for granted nor seeing it simply as a colonizing technology. Rather, cinema theaters are produced, and in the struggle over that production tensions over colonial urbanization are foregrounded.

In October 1937 the British colonial administration received an application from a Lebanese businessman for the construction of the Rex cinema, what was to become the first purpose-built cinema in Kano. The Rex was built as an open-air cinema, what was known as a "garden cinema," and consisted of two rooms as well as a bar, which the businessman proposed "to build quite

decently and with stones."[5] This exhibition was modified, and two years later J. Green Mbadiwe, a hotel owner in Kaduna, the capital of Northern Nigeria, applied for a license to build a more formal and elaborate hotel and cinema complex in Kano. It was to include "all the latest amenities usually associated with first-class Hotels and Cinemas in the Aristocratic Countries of the world."[6] His application was denied, but his proposal gives witness to the conceptual construct of what constituted a cinema space in Nigeria at this time. In the proud insistence on the quality of construction material and the boast that Kano cinemas would be like "first-class" cinemas in the West, the applications signify the elite European clientele that the owners intended to attract. The emphasis on first-class quality found in "the Aristocratic nations of the world" promised reassuring familiarity for Europeans and created a spectacle of grandeur for local Hausa filmgoers. And the inclusion of a bar would have offered recreation other than the cinematic event itself, intended for Europeans only who could "come out and enjoy the cool air and evening." The design and social function of these early theaters was intimately associated with another public space of colonial modernity: the hotel. Like the hotel, the cinema is a public space of anonymity, a transient coming together of people unconnected by relations of kin, religion, or ethnicity. Making the cinema like a hotel means that the experience was not organized solely around watching a film but was part of wider complex of leisure activities that emerged for expatriate recreation.

As a product of a colonial ideology of transformation, the architectonics of the cinema theater expressed the particular historical conditions of colonial rule. Cinema as a social space helped create a new public, "the imagining of human beings as, in principle, an indefinitely extensible horizon of anonymous and interchangeable members" (Barber 1997: 349). Kracauer referred to this public as a "mass," arguing that the spatial organization of the audience at "mass ornament" events, arranged in patterns of "tier upon ordered tier," contributed to the spectacle itself (1995: 76). Through the disciplinary process of attendance the individuality of the audience member became subordinate to the totality of the mass, and space became the "aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires" (1995: 79). The arrangement of seating in cinemas reflected the new bodily configurations of colonial rule, though of course could never be contained by them. The attempt at constructing an abstract and equivalent public was often frustrated by colonial and Hausa practices of hierarchy and distinction that were embedded in the conception of cinematic space.

In the highly stratified colonial world one immediate problem of common public space was the potential of racial mixing. What were the possible consequences of mixed-race audiences? In response to people's fears the Lebanese owners of the Rex originally intended their cinema for European
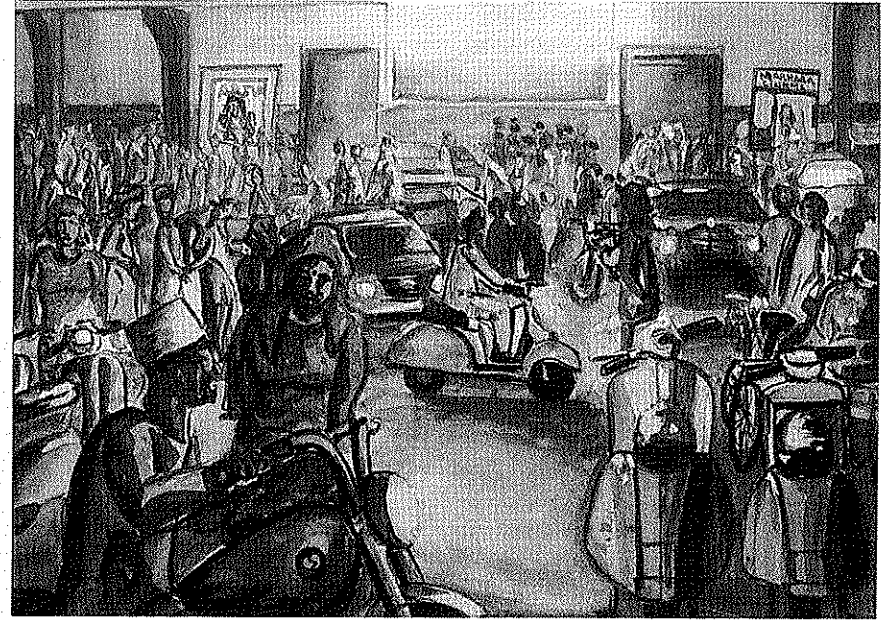
Crowds outside the Marhaba Cinema, Kano, Nigeria. Watercolor by Abdulhamid Yusuf Jigawa. (From the collection of Brian Larkin.)

use and finally divided the exhibition schedule so that two nights a week were reserved for Europeans and Arabs and two for African audiences. This segregation was intentional but informal and was regulated mainly through the pricing of seats.[7] J. Green Mbadiwe went further, proposing to divide his auditorium into two discrete compartments, one for Europeans and one for Africans, which would be approached through separate entrances. The only connection was a fire door, but this, he assured the authorities, "will be always locked." This attempt at encoding practices of racial segregation into the architectonics of the theater space reveals how the solid materiality of the cinema theater expresses local ideologies of (in this case) racial hierarchy. The secretary of the northern provinces who wrote to the chief secretary in Lagos with a response to fire safety regulations reveals stunningly how the physical space of cinema can be the outcome of a specifically colonial situation of racial prejudice:

> As regards seating: In view of the natural tendency of some Africans when in a crowd to be seized by panic at the mere rumour of danger it is thought that in Cinema halls in Nigeria much wider spaces should be allowed between fixed seats, wider alleyways and more and wider means of exit than as obligatory in England.[8]

In Kano, the British imperial presence was reflected in the naming of theaters themselves. The first cinema in Kano following the Rex was the Palace, and later came the Queens Theater. These names encoded imperial splendor into the spectacle promised by the experience of cinema. Other theater names such as El Dorado (long part of the imperialist imaginary as the lost city of fabulous wealth waiting to be "discovered"), Plaza, and Orion connote travel and movement and are titular embodiments of the promise of transportation, of removal from the local and the mundane, which is the hallmark of cinematic escapism. Only one cinema in Kano has an identifiably local connection, Wapa (named after the area where the cinema is located).

THE MORAL AURA OF CINEMATIC SPACE

From their inception, cinema theaters were mapped onto a moral topography of Kano City from which they borrowed (and to which they were to contribute) a strongly immoral aura. Most significant in this mapping was Sabon Gari, the area that grew up after the Kano-Lagos railroad began to import large numbers of southern Nigerians to work in the North. Sabon Gari (literally, "New Town") was marked, in the words of one British Resident, as "an enclave of disrepute" that was full of "dissolute characters."[9] This was the area in which the new colonially constructed spaces of churches and schools, beer parlors and dance halls, brothels and theaters were built, creating new forms of sexual and ethnic intermixing that were deeply disruptive of Hausa moral practices. For Hausa living in the old city, the Sabon Gari (and Waje as a whole)[10] became the antithesis of Hausa moral space and known as the site of *bariki* culture, an immoral complex of alcohol, prostitution, dancing (and later cinema), named after the barracks that were constructed to house migrant workers to the north. One Hausa scholar summed up the difference between the restrictions of the old city and Waje, indicating the depth of this symbolic cleavage for Hausa:

> In the waje . . . life was permissive. The southerners, who were predominantly Christians, had built churches and Western schools there. There were beer parlours and brothels full of prostitutes and their pimps. There were also shops full of imported European goods. . . . To the majority of Kanawa, birni (the Old City) was home, and one only ventured to waje out of necessity. Its life was an evil which was tolerated because one had no choice. (Barkindo 1993: 94)[11]

The first film screenings took place in Sabon Gari, in dance halls like the Elsiepat, where film-watching became part of the emergence of a new public world of leisure defined by alcohol, commodification, and mixed-sex activities, which for Hausa was stigmatized as ethnically foreign, or southern Nigerian.[12] By 1934, however, cinema had become popular among poor Hausa youth, though it was still stigmatized as an illicit activity. The Kano

British Resident's annual report announced that films were being shown "with considerable frequency" at these irregular venues,[13] and within three years the first purpose-built cinema, the Rex, was opened on the edge of Sabon Gari market on the ethnic borderlands between the Kano commercial district, Sabon Gari, and Fagge (an area for Muslims outside the old city).

The Rex was situated on the edge of Sabon Gari, placing it in a liminal position for Hausa Muslims for whom Sabon Gari was culturally out of bounds. Cinema quickly established a reputation as an illicit, immoral arena, and cinemagoing was stereotyped as a cheap, poor man's entertainment, to be avoided by people in positions of respect. "The local outlook is as follows," wrote one colonial official in the early 1950s: "The intelligent and educated malams (religious teachers) simply do not go. . . . They disapprove of the sort of low-type Hausa that revels in the cinema."[14] The low-class, mixed-sex nature of the cinema theater meant that it became socially unacceptable for most Hausa women. Those who did attend were seen as *karuwai* (independent women/prostitutes), and their presence added significantly to the illicit nature of the arena. Sexual availability and sexual activity within the cinema meant that pleasure and desire were to be found both on and off the screen, the erotic pleasures of one context feeding off of the other.

Cinemagoing became established as a social activity, an experience that was always much more than the viewing of the film itself. "Among a large youthful class of Kano City, Fagge and Sabon Gari," the Kano Resident Featherstone remarked in 1948, "it has become quite the thing to go to the Cinema quite regardless of whether they understand what they see or hear or not." Featherstone's paternalistic disapproval of Hausa audiences misses the importance of cinemagoing as a social, as well as a visual, event. One viewer told Featherstone that although he did not always understand the films being shown, "he went regularly to the cinema to be seen and to see his friends."[15] This social activity was taking place in a particular social space that drew its moral aura from its social and moral place on an urban landscape in the process of transformation. One educated Hausa man who went regularly to the cinema in the late 1940s told me that cinemagoing involved leaving the safe confines of the old city and crossing from a moral to an immoral space (the Sabon Gari). For him this was an intentional act that involved a radical attitude toward Hausa authority and Islamic orthodoxy. Defined as undesirable by the values of orthodox Hausa Islam, the pleasure of going to the cinema was thus highly local, an intimate experience of illicitness that framed the spectacle of watching the film and that derived from the peculiar nature of Hausa colonial urbanization.

Religious questions about the ontology of the cinematic apparatus itself contributed to the wariness with which this colonial technology was greeted in mainstream Hausa society. Since the early days of British conquest, part of what Barkindo (1993) has termed the "passive resistance" of conservative

Islamic teachers to colonial rule had taken the form of intense resistance to the new commodities introduced by colonialists. Hiskett (1984) relates that elderly Muslim moralists condemned to hell-fire Muslims who used hurricane lamps, battery flashlights, or starched or wore buttons on their shirts. Nasiru Kabara, a prominent Kano sheikh who served on the first colonial censorship board, similarly told me that "local *malams*" (by which he meant poorly educated, neighborhood Islamic teachers) condemned cinema because they were unsure whether the images on screen were true or false. According to their logic, if someone was killed in a film they thought he might actually be dead. If not, then film was magic, and because Islam was against magic then film was *haram* (forbidden).[16] Many also believed that cinematic representation contravened the Islamic prohibition on the creation of images and idols.[17]

For Kabara this religious insistence on the blasphemous, magical nature of the rational technology of cinema was a mark of ignorance of both the world at large and Islam in particular. But the early Hausa names for cinema—*majigi*, derived from the word magic,[18] and *dodon bango*, literally, "evil spirits on the wall"[19]—reveal how popular the sense of the enchantment of cinema was. It reveals powerfully the symbolic layers that saturated cinema so that it could only be experienced through its associations with Christianity, paganism, and colonial rule.

THE PALACE, EL DUNIYA, AND THE MAINTENANCE OF HAUSA MORAL SPACE

Colonial rule in Northern Nigeria incorporated a non-Islamic, economically aggressive metropolitan space into Kano City but kept it outside of local Muslim control. Although the British promised to preserve Hausa cultural and religious practices in return for acceptance of their political rule, the consequence of this was to emphasize the distinction (for both Hausa and the British) between a traditional, Hausa Muslim old city and a modernizing, multiethnic, and liberal modern sector. The old city remained under the Islamic legal and political authority of the emir and was the repository of traditional Muslim Hausa values. It was the area where female seclusion (*kulle*) and the strict segregation of the sexes was maintained; where prostitution and the sale of alcohol were forbidden; and where children were educated at Islamic rather than Western schools. Waje, by contrast, was un-Islamic. It was particularly associated with the rise of new forms of public space—beer parlors and dance halls, workers' barracks and brothels, gentlemen's clubs and European shops, churches and Western schools—that created new modes of sociability and leisure.

The introduction of cinema theaters in Kano intervened in an ongoing conflict over the moral definition of urban space under colonialism.[20] How

cinema theaters were to be built, what they were to show, and whether they could sell alcohol were all issues of formal regulation by which the transformative spatial and social ideologies of colonialism were embodied and enacted. Conflicts within the Hausa community over where theaters were to be located and who could attend them are best seen as attempts at the moral reterritorialization of an urban space that was rapidly expanding outside of Hausa control. Appadurai (1996) has referred to this process as the "production of locality," which, he argues, involves the assertion of socially organized power over places that are potentially chaotic. The mediation of cinema as a moral space was an attempt to reassert the Muslim basis of Hausa life in opposition to the encroachment of non-Muslim (both European and southern Nigerian) cultural and religious values. Cinema theaters became markers of neighborhoods, embodying the moral qualities that allowed those neighborhoods to exist. For urban Hausa the cinematic experience was (and is) thus embedded in the history of ongoing debate over the nature and regulation of urban public space.

In 1949 a Lebanese cinema distributor wrote the Resident, Kano emirate, asking for permission to build a cinema, the Palace, within the old city, in Jakara quarters, next to Kurmi market. When the application for the Palace was received, cinemagoing was well established in Kano; many Hausa regularly left the old city to travel to one of two cinemas located outside in Waje. The uniqueness of this application was that the Palace was to be the first cinema theater constructed within the confines of the old city. I can date the application and the opening of the Palace from the colonial archives in Kaduna, which contain copies of the application file. However the story of the Palace I engage with rests on rumors and prejudice, stories and memories that do not provide an objective history of the Palace as much as they reveal the social place that it and other cinemas occupy in the social imagination. Rumors about cinemas, stories that have come down from parent to child, are a form of local hermeneutics. They are quasi-religious allegories by which people divine the "real" motives underlying phenomenal events.

The emir's decision to allow the construction of the Palace cinema provoked a strong backlash in different sections of the Hausa community. Kano *ulama* (religious leaders) were outraged by the penetration of this disruptive sexual arena into the Islamic space of the old city. The more conservative among them issued a *fatwa* (religious teaching) forbidding the showing of films and citing the religious injunction on the creation of images as evidence that the technology itself was *kafirai* (pagan). According to a story I was told, this *fatwa* was overruled when it came before the emirate council despite the fact that the Kano emir at the time, Abdullahi, was widely known to be socially conservative. Abdullahi's decision then sparked its own set of rumors, including one that Abdullahi was forced into the decision as a result of pressure from the British Resident.[21]

In 1951, while the controversy over the Palace was raging but before the cinema was actually open, matters were brought to a symbolic head when the El Duniya cinema burned down, killing 331 people in an audience of 600.[22] The government enquiry that followed established that the cause of the fire was flammable nitrate films that caught fire in the projection room and spread along the ceiling. Hausa complicity in the tragedy was reinforced by the fact that 82 percent of the cinema audience during the afternoon performance were Hausa, not southern Nigerian or European. The youngest was only nine years old.

The rational, functional explanation of the colonial state for why the disaster occurred was accepted by Hausa as explaining how but not why the disaster occurred. In the context of the growing controversy over the Palace, it was widely believed by many that the fire was direct divine retribution for Hausa participation in illicit and immoral activity. The tragedy became seen as a judgment about the growing Westernization of Hausa society, and a series of rumors emerged to explain the tragedy. Most common, and still widely believed, was the accusation that the film being screened that night in the El Duniya contained the image of the Prophet Mohammed, the colonial technology of representation being harnessed for blasphemous ends. Others believed that during construction of the theater people passing every day cursed (tsine) the theater and the theater was engulfed not just by flames but by the combined magical force of these curses.[23]

In a religious society such as Kano, where God's divine intervention in the material world is an everyday occurrence, rumors and stories become part of a critical discourse in which everyday events are interrogated. Stories about the El Duniya represent conflict and ambivalence about the Western cultural arena that was infiltrating the Hausa moral world. They underscore the profane nature of cinematic representation, making it guilty of the heresy of representing Mohammed. These rumors grew so strong that the colonial government was forced to take official notice and counter them over the radio. Twice daily for two days in four different languages, the Radio Diffusion Service announced there was no truth to the stories that the people handling the bodies of El Duniya victims died, or that Native Authority Warders who helped in the tragedy had all gone mad, or that prisoners from Kano prison (who helped in handling the corpses) could not eat for days afterward.[24] Stories about the El Duniya became part of the informal moral economy that regulated the evolution of cinema in Kano.

On July 2, 1952, a year after the El Duniya burned down, the Palace finally opened after months of controversy. When the opposition to the cinema turned violent, the emir was forced to call in the police to arrest youths who were demonstrating against the opening.[25] Three months later, the British superintendent of police reported that ever since the Palace opened youths outside the open-air theater had been regularly stoning patrons inside. What

was worse, he complained, was that the alkali (Muslim judge) to whom the cases were being reported was letting the youths go free and that it was difficult for the police to ensure "good order" during cinema performances.[26] Ironically, or perhaps inevitably, the Palace became the immoral social space that its opponents feared. It became a notorious place where, as one friend said to me, men would go to drink alcohol, take drugs, and engage in sex with women and other men ("There! There! Right there in the seat next to you!"). In the early 1980s the governor of Kano State, Sabo Bakin Zuwo, who came from Kano's old city and who was a veteran of the anti-Palace campaign, closed down the cinema and in a grand populist gesture converted it into a hospital clinic. Since that time no cinema theater has been opened in the old city,[27] and to this day hundreds of Hausa youths travel nightly through the mud gates marking the city's boundaries to cinemas that lie outside in Sabon Gari, Fagge, and Nassarawa.

CONCLUSION

The controversy over the Palace and the rumors that surrounded the El Duniya tragedy emerged from and helped to define the symbolic layers that gave cinema its particular moral aura in Hausa society. Cinema theaters in Kano were not discrete buildings but integrated nodes in an urban environment from which they drew their significance. As the site for screening fantastic texts of love and adventure, cinema theaters projected Hausa audiences into the imagined realities of American, Indian, and British culture (see Larkin 1997). Here my focus has been on the place of theaters as part of a wider urban materiality produced by, and thus expressive of, transformations in colonial modernity. Their social significance cannot be divorced from the other technologies and public spaces produced under colonial rule. Cinema theaters in Kano came into being only twenty years after the construction of the Kano-Lagos railroad. They were built in the areas created for the masses of male migrants uprooted and brought into Kano by the railroad's annihilation of space and time (Schivelbusch 1986); they were sited alongside the new colonially constructed markets marking out the borders and moral qualities of the new colonially constructed metropolis; and they formed part of the construction of new modes of sexual and ethnic interaction produced by the transformation in urban public space. Encoded in the physical mass of the theater, in the dirty bricks and broken lights, in the walls that divide the arena, and in the absences where divisions did not occur are traces of history of colonial rule and colonial urbanism. My aim has been to move away from the taken-for-granted quality that so often makes the cinema theater seem like second nature, an accepted and already understood site that disappears from analytic view as the lights are turned down and the films are projected. Instead, I analyze the mate-

riality of the theater itself, theorizing its significance for an anthropology of the media that situates technologies in the wider social realms in which they take on significance.

The conflict over the Palace, the rumors that spread following the El Duniya tragedy, and the religious wariness of the cinematic apparatus are all attempts by Hausa to reestablish the moral and spatial equilibrium of urban Kano society in the face of the threat posed by colonial rule. The attempt to control the physical position and social place of cinema on the urban landscape by keeping cinema theaters outside of Muslim Hausa areas is thus a moment of reterritorialization, an attempt to recuperate potentially uncontrollable transnational technologies within local social frameworks. It reveals how cinema as a social as well as a physical institution is produced, often within the context of local political struggles.

NOTES

1. From the 1930s to the 1950s Kano cinemas were dominated by British and American films. By the mid-1960s Indian films had emerged as probably the most popular film genre (in northern Nigeria at least), and by the 1970s Hong Kong films began to gain in popularity. When I conducted my research in the 1990s, Indian films were shown five nights a week at cinemas, with one night for Hong Kong films and one night for American films.

2. The Russian film historian Yuri Tsivian (1994) provides an elegant account of cinemagoing as a sensory activity, paying attention to the temperature of the auditorium, the placing of the projector, the quality of light, and the nature of aural and visual interference.

3. For an introduction to early cinema in cinema studies, see Allen 1983; Bowser 1990; Chanan [1982] 1996; Friedberg 1993; Hansen 1991; Koszarski 1990; Kuhn 1988; Musser 1990; Petro 1989; Tsivian 1994. On the site of cinema theaters outside the West, see Armbrust 1998; Himpele 1996; Hughes 1999; Thompson 2000. Though only marginally interested in cinema, Martin (1995) provides a powerful account of the rise of new leisure practices in colonial Brazzaville.

4. This was accomplished in a number of ways: by attracting a female audience; by using bourgeois cultural forms such as the novel and plays as the basis of narra-

tive form and content; and through the construction of elegant "palaces" for exhibition in nonimmigrant areas (Sklar 1975; Hansen 1991).

5. Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna (NAK), Kano Prof. 2600, The West Africa Picture Co. (1) Application for C. of O. (2) General Correspondence.

6. NAK, Kano Prof. 4430, Mr. J. Green Mbadiwe, application for permission to erect a hotel and cinema at Kano.

7. "It is probably true to say that if an African sought admission on one of these [European] nights and was prepared to pay 3/6d he would not be refused admission but the number of Africans who would wish to pay 3/6d admission when they can attend exactly the same performance on another night for 2/-, or 1/- or 6d is very small" (NAK, Kano Prof. 2600). Informal segregation by pricing was a common practice in South India also (Stephen Hughes, personal communication). This raises the question of whether the practice was an empire-wide means of keeping races separate while avoiding the negative ideological connotations of hard-line racial segregation.

8. NAK, M.I.A. Kaduna 2d collection vol. 2, R.1493, Cinematograph Audience 1932–1952, Letter no. 16497.10A, Secretary, Northern Provinces to Chief Secretary Lagos, June 2, 1932.

9. This phrase, which may well sum up the entire symbolic value of Sabon Gari in the eyes of Kano Hausa, was coined by Resident Alexander of Kano in a speech to the Conference of Residents in 1926 (cited in Allyn 1976: 138).

10. Waje (literally "outside) was the name given to African areas of Kano that lay outside the Muslim heart of the old city.

11. Tahir describes Sabon Gari in much the same terms. Sabon Gari is, he wrote, "the home of strangers, on their way to assimilation, Nigerian and foreign Christians, the European Christian, *Nasara* or Nazarene, the urban drifter, the wage worker, the prostitute and the pimp. It contains churches, beer houses and dance halls, hotels and brothels. There deviant conduct prevails and custom does not have a stronghold" (1975: 110).

12. This mode of exhibition mimics the history of film in the United States and Britain, where the first films were often shown as part of a wider program of burlesque (see Hansen 1991) or vaudeville (see Chanan [1982] 1996).

13. NAK, Kano Prof. 1391, Kano Township Annual Report 1934.

14. Minute by M. H. (?), October 20, 1954, in response to a letter from the Director of Education, Northern Region, September 15, 1954, requesting an assessment of censorship, Kano State History and Culture Bureau (HCB), Simple list of files removed from cabinet, R.918, Films and Film Censorship.

15. Letter, from E. K. Featherstone, Resident, Kano, to The Secretary, Northern Provinces, January 9, 1948, HCB, Simple list of files removed from cabinet, R918, Films and Film Censorship.

16. Interview, Sheikh Nasiru Kabara, November 1995.

17. Although the Qur'an itself does not explicitly forbid the making of representations, the hadiths (the sayings and deeds of the Prophets) are explicitly negative about the status of artists (see Grabar 1973).

18. Later the name began to be applied mainly to the British government's mobile cinemas that traveled the cities and rural areas screening educational and propaganda films.

19. Both terms were later replaced by the more neutral *sinima* or *silima*.

20. In using "moral," I refer to two things. Cinema in Kano is defined as an immoral, sexualized space, one that (unlike in the United States) never achieved social legitimation. On another, underlying level, I follow Beidelman's (1993) concept of morality as the set of images and practices through which people both comprehend their world and act within it in ways that conform and subvert their moral understanding. Space, for Beidelman, is a "moral metaphor," a social product that encodes the imagined order of society and personhood and reveals basic ideas about, and conflicts between, the individual and society. Beidelman's assertion of the active presence of the imagination in moral space has the advantage of foregrounding the concept of space as formed by human action, as something *produced*.

21. Interview with Alhaji Adamu, April 1996.

22. See Report of the Commissioner appointed by His Excellency the Governor to enquire into the circumstances in which a fire caused loss of life at, and destroyed, the El-Dunia Cinema, Kano, on the 13th day of May 1951, Justice Percy E. Hubbard, NAK, Zaria Prof. vol. 2, EDU, 5 Cinema Cinematographs, Cinema Office, (2) Mobile Cinema Routine Correspondence. See also NAK, Kano Prof. 7564, El Dunia Disaster, Colonial Office (CO)583/317/8, Cinema Disaster at Kano, 1951.

23. The power to curse is a powerful magical attribute in Hausa society, as it is elsewhere in Africa. Certain people are believed to be have the magical power to make their curses come true, though if they are not evil people they may have this ability and not realize it. One person explained the rumor to me by saying that so many people were cursing the construction of the El Duniya that the combined weight of all these curses brought the theater down.

24. NAK, MOI, 55, Broadcasting, Radio Diffusion Service and BBC.

25. Interview, Alhaji Adamu, April 1995.

26. NAK, Kano Prof. 6945, Jakarta Palace Cinema, Letter to S.D.O.K. from Senior Superintendent of Police, Kano N.A., P. G. F. Sewall, June 9, 1952.

27. In Sani Mainagge, the Kano State History and Culture Bureau (HCB) operates an open-air theater that it uses for cultural performances such as plays and dances by the famous Koroso dance troupe. When it is not being used by the HCB, videos of Hausa dramas and Indian and Hong Kong films are screened there through a projection unit, making it something like a cinema but with the patina and authority of a government institution.

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17

Mobile Machines and Fluid Audiences

Rethinking Reception through Zambian Radio Culture

Debra Spitulnik

The very force and impact . . . of any medium changes significantly as it is moved from one context to another (a bar, a theater, the living room, the bedroom, the beach, a rock concert . . .). Each medium is then a mobile term, taking shape as it situates itself—almost always comfortably—within the different roadside rests of our lives. That is, the text is located, not only intertextually, but in a range of apparatuses as well, defined technologically but also by other social relations and activities. One rarely just listens to the radio, watches TV, or even goes to the movies—one is studying, dating, driving somewhere else, partying, etc.

LAWRENCE GROSSBERG, *"The In-Difference of Television"*

WIDENING THE FRAME OF RECEPTION STUDIES

Over the past decade there has been a serious rethinking of the concepts of "audience" and "reception" within media studies.[1] Most significantly, this work has rejected the familiar assumption that "the audience" is a unified aggregate that receives a fixed message. Scholars have increasingly shifted their attention to the fact that people *use* mass media and thus are not passive receivers but *active participants* in ongoing communication processes. In supplanting a simple picture of the function of media as one-way message transmission from sender to receiver, such revisionist research has moved into a "post-content" or "post-text" era (as suggested by Lawrence Grossberg's words above) and toward more ethnographic accounts of people's on-the-ground engagements with media. It is crucial to recognize, however, that interest in active media users and diverse interpretive practices are not entirely new concerns. Such issues have been central problems in empirical media research for well over fifty years (see Curran 1996; Spitulnik 1993). Thus many of the developments in the "new revisionism" or "new audience studies" have been critiqued for "reinventing" earlier models, creating mislead-