

Gender Sensibility and Cinematography in the Sokoto Province, 1922-1976

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Abstract

Cinema has remained a female influencer; though somehow view as a male oriented domain. Hence, women participation is somewhat not at the mainstream. This paper therefore interrogates women and cinematography in Sokoto metropolis with the establishment of Nigeria Television (NTV) station in 1976. The paper uses primary and secondary sources of data to elicit its data. Primary data include archival documents, oral information from participants and observers, and the secondary data include textbooks and journals articles used to interpret and analyze qualitatively. The paper reveals that women constituted more than sixty percent of the pull factors to the cinema centres which encouraged the patronage received by the commercial Cinema houses; while they also influenced the establishment of media houses and stations by the government which curb moral decadence among the female folks. It discovers that cinema media perceived as male dominated profession is a wrong perception rather the female gender's contribution constitutes part of the main stream of cinematography in Sokoto. Finally, the paper discusses the contributions of female gender to the success of some sensitization programs of the Nigerian Television (NTV) Sokoto.

Keywords: gender, camera work, movies, television, societies

Introduction

The term Cinematography is from the Greek word "Cinematographe" meaning writing with light and motion. It is the art and practice of making and showing motion picture.¹ The history of cinema in the former Sokoto Province (The present day Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara States) and Sokoto metropolis in particular can be traced to the general history of the phenomenon in Northern Nigeria. The people of the former Sokoto Province came in contact with cinema for the first time in 1922 when the then Colonial Health Officer Sellers Williams² visited Gusau and Sokoto during his routine visit to Northern Nigeria for the purpose of training health workers who in turn educated the general public on simple ways of maintaining hygiene to prevent the spread of communicable diseases in various communities. Since then mobile cinema show became a regular event in Sokoto organized by the colonial government through the Mobile Film Unit of the Colonial Information Department. The Mobile Film Unit maintained regular itinerary film show in Sokoto as in other towns and villages in the former Sokoto Province disseminating information on good health practices, improved agricultural practices and civil patriotism. The activities of the mobile cinema- Majigi continued up to the postcolonial period as it was not only taken over by the postcolonial government but received expansion and covered more areas of influence.

It could be recalled that right from the beginning of the establishment of colonial administration in Northern Nigeria, the colonial socio-economic policies attracted immigrants into Sokoto city from other parts of the north and southern Nigeria as well as other areas of British West Africa.³ These immigrants were in search of employment opportunities in the colonial establishments which made Sokoto assume a cosmopolitan status, comprising of diverse ethnic and religious groups resident in the metropolis.⁴ This development aided the advent of commercial cinema in Sokoto metropolis as a result of business

expansion drive of some foreign film merchants, especially the Syrians, Lebanese and Indians who had established Cinema houses in other parts of Northern Nigerian cities like Jos, Kano, Zaria and Gusau.⁵ The first commercial cinema house established in Sokoto was the Northern Cinema. It was established in Emir Yahaya area of the metropolis in 1959 by the duo of Mr. Jamil Akkari Abdallah- a Lebanese, and Alhaji Garba Na'Allah Arzika.⁶ The patronage received by Northern Cinema influenced the establishment of another Cinema house – Sokoto Cinema at Tudunwada area of Sokoto in 1974, by Alhaji Garba Dikkon Gande- an indigene of Gande town. Apart from the two regular cinema houses, there were two other venues where occasional cinema exhibitions were held by Sokoto Club also on commercial basis. They were Oriental Hotel at Sokoto Cinema area and Waffa Hotel, at Katindaji area of Sokoto metropolis. These commercial cinema houses provided a new avenue for entertainment for the people in Sokoto Province.

The establishment of Nigerian Television (NTV) Sokoto in 1976 as an offshoot of government Mobile Cinema Unit constitutes a significant benchmark in the history of Cinematography in Sokoto Province. With the new development, the activities of mobile cinema crew as well as that of commercial cinema houses in the Province were taken over by the new television station. In the area of information dissemination, the television station served as a new channel through which the public were informed, educated and sensitized about government's policies and programs and the need for the public to embrace modern healthcare practices, improved method of cultivation as well as civil patriotism. Thus, the television programs were watched from homes by members of the public who could afford a television set, while the government through the Ministry of Information also built viewing centers across Sokoto Province which enabled people who could not afford television set had access to information about government activities.⁷ Furthermore, in the area of entertainment, the television station began to show entertainment films such as American, European, Chinese as well as Indian Movies.

Having examined the history of Cinematography in Sokoto Province, it is important to discuss the roles played by female gender at each phase of the development of cinema media in Sokoto Province.

Roles of Women in the era of Mobile Cinema in Sokoto Province

An outstanding feature of the Mobile Cinema show organized by the Information Department of the colonial and postcolonial governments in Sokoto Province was a pedagogical documentary. This documentary genre was designed to instruct the public about health, farming and citizenship patriotism. On health related issues, quite a number of genres were screened which were targeted at female gender. This was because it was through this gender that the aims and objectives of the film shows could be achieved. A typical example of these genres was "Mama Learns a Lesson".⁸ The film became so much popular in Sokoto Province and indeed the entire Northern Nigeria because the mobile cinema crew screened it virtually in every village, town and city. The film tells the story of a lady -Fatima who got pregnant and was advised by her mother to consult with a traditional healer for her medication instead of a modern medical practitioner in the hospital. When the treatment she received from the traditional healer could not cure her she was eventually taken to the hospital, given proper healthcare and was delivered of her baby but Fatima died during childbirth. The didactic lesson presented in the drama centers on: first, the need to patronize modern healthcare services; second, to educate people on the effects of delay in seeking modern medical care in the case of a woman in labour; and thirdly, creating awareness on the devastating effect of maternal mortality and morbidity in the society.

Another genre produced and screened by the Northern Nigeria Ministry of Information for pedagogical purpose in Sokoto Province like other areas in Northern Region was titled "Child Bride".⁹ It was a production targeted at curbing the rate at which girls were given out for early marriage which often culminates into virginal vascular fistulae (VVF) disease- a terrible health condition that was more prevalent in Northern Nigeria than other parts. According to information gathered during oral interviews,¹⁰ the pathetic images of these films created awareness among people, especially mothers and young ladies about the devastating effects of the common practice of early marriage for girls and the necessity to seek modern medical care in hospitals during child birth. The central issue here is that

throughout the period of mobile cinema show, for any family health related matter to be screened female gender was often more targeted and mobilized as major audience, than male counterparts. According to Alhaji Musa Koroka¹¹ the objectives of the screening exercise would not have been achieved then without the cooperation of the female gender. He explained further that members of the mobile cinema crew were often mandated to ensure that special seats were arranged and reserved for the females than their male counterpart. Archival evidence,¹² pieced together through the itineraries and touring reports of the mobile cinema crew indicates among others, the place of exhibition, films exhibited, the number of male and female adults, male and female youths in attendance. Alhaji Musa Koroka explained further that the touring report must be duly endorsed and comments made on it by the representatives of the Native Administration without which the report would be treated as invalid.

The essence of the touring report was to ensure that the targeted audience especially the female gender attended the film show. According to my informants,¹³ women played significant roles in achieving the objectives of the mobile cinema screening.

Women and Commercial Cinema Patronage in Sokoto Province

In the period under consideration, the commercial cinema houses in Sokoto Province enjoyed good patronage from men. However, oral investigations conducted revealed that apart from relaxation purpose, a significant percentage of men that patronized the commercial cinema houses did so in order to enjoy the company of female folk. Information pieced together from observers, patrons and operators of cinema houses indicate that three categories of female patronized cinema houses, they were: young ladies, few married women and prostitutes. According to Alhaji Adamu Wagana¹⁴ more than sixty percent of men that patronized the cinema did so in company of females. While some newly married young men then did patronized cinema houses on regular basis with their wives, particularly non Hausa settlers in Sokoto Province. He explained further that as at that time, cinema being the most popular medium of entertainment and relaxation, served as avenue for young men in courtship to demonstrate a feeling of love for their female partners by taking them to the Cinema for relaxation, most especially among the settler tribes.¹⁵

Moreover, as for the prostitutes who always “hang out” in Cinema houses, according to Mallam Abukakar Bello Daniya¹⁶ a regular patron of Cinema in Sokoto metropolis then, pointed out that some men were attracted to Cinema because of ladies, especially the so called ‘free women’ they would take in first to watch movies and thereafter take such ladies to hotels and sleep with them. This information was confirmed by Mr. Mike Akkary¹⁷ (one of the descendants of Mr. Jamil Akkary Abdalla, the proprietor of the Northern Cinema in Sokoto metropolis). He pointed out that female-influence in the patronage of cinema houses could not have been underestimated, because if the factor of female gender were to be removed, men that patronized cinema houses would have been significantly reduced. Also, Mr. Olusegun Adewuyi¹⁸ explained further that when he was in charge of Oriental and Waffa Occasional cinema houses in Sokoto metropolis, he introduced incentives such as free tickets, free cigarettes and free drinks to some prostitutes to ensure they were always around the cinema premises in order to attract men for cinema patronage. And that was the reason why operators of the cinema houses always frowned at anybody who maltreated any lady that patronized their cinema houses then, including prostitutes. The reason being that women folk constituted a major pull-factor for men in cinema house patronage.

A lot of Archival evidence further attests to the pivotal roles female folk played in commercial cinema patronage. One of these archival evidence shows a correspondence dated 20th April 1961,¹⁹ from the Divisional Officer in charge of Sokoto to the Resident Officer for Sokoto Province which contains a desire by the Sokoto Native Authority to be allowed under section 37(48) of the Native Law to make Regulations to mandate commercial Cinema Operators to construct a special “Kulle” Section (an apartment for only female) with its own entrance and exit in the cinema houses as it was obtainable in Pakistan and Egypt. The rationale behind the request by the Sokoto Native Authority, Mallam Isa Talata Mafara²⁰ pointed out, was to prevent in its entirety the uncontrollable ways and manner both sexes mixed up at cinema venues quite contrary to the custom and traditions of the society. However, Mr. Olusegun

Adewuyi (D. J.Manson)²¹ explained that the request was also meant to prove that not all female gender that patronized commercial cinema houses then were irresponsible as erroneously believed by many people.

Another archival record dated 1st May, 1961,²² shows a correspondence between the Resident Officer for Sokoto Province and the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Social Welfare and Cooperatives, Northern Nigeria Kaduna, which contains a request by the Sokoto Native Authority again to make regulations to stop children from admission into the cinema and prevent what they called “soliciting by prostitutes” in and around the cinema houses. After deliberations on the matter, the Resident Officer was emphatic that though the children could be prevented from admission, but it would be practically impossible to prevent prostitutes from admission into the Cinema because many of them were often attached with men who paid for their admission ticket at the entrance.²³

Furthermore, it must be stressed that commercial cinema enterprise has been one of the sources of revenue for the government at each phase of its developments. Table 1 below shows the revenue generated by the government from cinema business in the former Sokoto Province.

Table 1-Revenue Generated from Cinema Entertainment Tax, Cinema Licenses and Fees in the former Sokoto Province between 1968 and 1972.

Year	Entertainment Tax E	Percentage Contribution to Annual Revenue	Licenses and Fees E	Percentage Contribution to Annual Revenue
1968	5,170	Not available	161,070	Not available
1969	16,988	0.1	31,6782	2.2
1970	24,342	0.12	430,522	1.87
1971	28,842	0.10	474,458	1.70
1972	35,575	0.13	621,578	2.19

Source: Northwestern State Statistical Handbook 1968-1972, available at the Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto.

From table 1 shown above, available records of 1968 to 1972 indicate that the total revenue generated by the government as a result of cinema patronage in the former Sokoto Province was always on the increase yearly. Archival evidence attests further that in the entire former Sokoto Province, Sokoto metropolis had the highest concentration of commercial cinema houses, that is, two Regular Cinema and two Occasional Cinema houses.²⁴ This archival evidence further shows that the influence of women folk in the patronage received by the commercial cinema houses could not be underestimated.

Women and Television Broadcasting Programs in Sokoto Province

The establishment of Nigerian Television (NTV) Sokoto in 1976 brought a turning point in the history of Cinematography in Sokoto metropolis, as the Ministry Information established Television viewing centers in strategic locations, accessible to the general public in the Province. This was because the new media form took over the functions of mobile cinema crew and that of commercial Cinema houses, as it transmitted from its office location and was watched in people’s homes and viewing centers across the Province, at the same time more people had access to news and free movie entertainment.²⁵ Right from the inception of NTV Sokoto, female gender has been playing important roles in the actualization of the objectives of some television programs targeted at the public. According to Alhaji Abubakar Shekara,²⁵ some health and social programs targeted at families would not have any meaningful impact without women offering significant contributions.

Some of these health and social programs include ‘Kuntanbayi Likita’(Ask the Doctor), ‘Kula da lafiya’(Healthcare Checkup), ‘Mujallar Iyali’(Family Magazine), ‘The Girl Child Marriage’, ‘Foot Prints’ and many more.²⁶ Virtually all these programs were able to yield positive results in the society because of the collaborative efforts of female gender. For instance, ‘Mujallar Iyali’-a family Magazine program aimed at sensitizing families on how to handle family issues like training of children on good and moral value, avoiding violence and criminal tendencies among youth and how to maintain quality family life, have made tremendous impact on viewers in Sokoto metropolis partly because different

categories of career women who have distinguished themselves in their fields of endeavor have been invited to share their wealth of experiences on the program. According to Alhaji Bala Aliyu²⁷ of NTA Network Centre Sokoto, the success stories of some of the television programs would not have been possible without the support of the female gender.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the important roles of female gender in our seemingly male dominated society. The paper asserts that right from the inception of the phenomenon of cinema especially in the period under consideration, the female gender constitutes an influential factor in the achievement of the set goals of the media form at each phase of its development in Sokoto metropolis. Though Cinema media is perceived by many people to be a male dominated profession particularly at its formative stage, which informed the opinion of some people that the female gender's contributions does not constitute part of the mainstream of the history of cinema. The impact of female gender contributions could be seen in the area of increased awareness of female gender rights, increased women participation in other fields of human endeavors such as businesses, academics and many more. From the above analyzed oral and archival evidence, this paper therefore submits that women folk have been playing significant roles in the achievement of the set objectives of cinema media all through its developmental phases and that without the active participation and support of the female folk the success story of the Cinema media would not have been possible.

Endnotes

1. S. Barclay, *the Motion Picture Image: From Film to Digital*, Boston, Focal Press, 2002, Pp17 – 18.
2. NAK/1923/File no 622 Vo. IV – Public Health Matters.
3. R.O. Olaniyi “Yoruba in Kano: A Commercial History of a Migrant Community 1912-1999. PhD History Thesis, Ado Bayero University, Kano, 2004.Pp.55-70.
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5. Ekonyerengoz Michael Chima “Recognizing Nigeria Earliest Movie Stars- Dawiya, King of the Sura and Yukaba the witchdoctor “Indiewire Shadow and Act: [ltp://w w w. blogs indiewire.com/shadow and act](http://www.blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact). Accused 23/04/2016.
6. Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau (WJHCB) Sokoto, /Sok2/50/422/1961-1974, Cinematograph Licenses.
7. Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah “The Cinema House in Northern Nigeria, and a Theory of its Continue Struggle” In Abdalla U.A, Yusuf, M.A, & Umar, Y.F (eds), *Hausa Home Video: Technology, Economy and Society*. Kano Nigeria: Centre for Hausa Culture Studies, 2004. Pp. 54-59.
8. “Mama Learns a Lesson” (1960) was produced by the Information Department of Northern Nigeria Ministry of Information to promote family health and hygiene. The production was aimed at basically to reduce child mortality.
9. “Child Bride” (1970) A production on the effect of early marriage, with the possibilities of resulting in Virginal Vascular Fistulae (VVF) disease. It was written by Dr. Imam a Medical Doctor from Kano and acted by Bashir Samaila Ahmed.
10. Alhaji Adamu Musa Koroka 75years, interview in his house Bosso Quarter Minna 15/06/2016. He was the former Assistant Head of Cinema Unit, Northern Nigeria Ministry of Information Kaduna. Also, Mallam Haliru Serikin Kende 77years, retired Civil Servant Northern Nigeria Ministry of Information, interviewed on 24th April 2018 his house Badaria area Birnin Kebbi.
11. Ibid
- 12 NAK/MOI/Kaduna, 1st collection, Vol.1 CIN/3/Cinema Crew, NAK/MOI/Kaduna-Sok.Prof 3rd collection Vol2. *Cinema Show and Touring Report*; WJHCB.SOK/49/4/22/855-857(1962 – 1971). Mass Publicity.

13. Ahaji Adamu Musa Koroka, Mallam Haliru Serikin Kende,...Oral interviews. See also NAK/SokProv. Annual Report 1959. Pp.56-71. The oral information from these informants was corroborated with the annual report on Sokoto Province for 1959 which indicated that there was a significant reduction of the reported cases of VVF occasioned by early marriage among young girls, which was attributed to increased awareness among female gender.
- 14 Alhaji Adamu Wagana, 68years, interviewed at Sokoto Cinema Area Sokoto, 22/02/2016, Retired Civil Servant, Sokoto State Ministry of Information. Also, Mr. John Oladoye, 73years, interviewed in his house at Iella Garage area, Sokoto. He explained that when he and his friends newly got married in 1975, they used to patronize cinema houses with their wives, like other tribes such as Igbo, Nupe, Idoma, Tiv, Ghanaians and other settlers.
- 15 My informants told me that as at the time cinema business was booming in Sokoto there were significant number of non Hausa tribes that were resident in Sokoto metropolis which included the Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe, Ebira and other ethnic groups from southern Nigeria and Nationals of other West African Countries many of whom were cinema goers.
- 16 Mallam Abubakar Bello Daniya, 71years, interview at Kalfiu Area Sokoto, on 08/03/2018 Retired Civil Servant, Sokoto State Ministry of Urban and Regional Development Board (SUDA).
- 17 Mr. Mike Akkary, 68years Interviewed in his office at Golden Palace Hotel, Minna on 16/06/2016. He is the son of Late Mr. Jamil Akkary Abdalla-The Proprietor of Northern Cinema Sokoto.
- 18 Mr. Olusegun Adewuyi (D.J.Manson), 72years, former Secretary of Sokoto Club and operator of Occasional Cinema Shows at Oriental and Waffa Hotels in Sokoto metropolis. Interviewed in his house behind kware Motor Park, Kware, Sokoto State, on 24/05/2019.
- 19 WJHCB Sokoto/815/1953 – Native Authority Regulation Cinema 1961, Ref No. D.O. 38/164.P.1
- 20 Mallam Isah Talata Mafara, 70years, Muslim Cleric, interviewed in his house GidanTank, Gwiwa Low-Cost, Sokoto.12/ 05/2019.
- 21 Mr. Olusegun Adewuyi (D.J.Manson)...Oral interview
- 22 WJHCB Sokoto /8/5/1953 – Native Authority Regulation, Cinema 1961. Ref. No. RUL /70/2. P.10.
- 23 Ibid.
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- 25 Alhaji Abukakar Shekara, 57years, Managing Director, Sokoto State Media Corporation Interviewed at Rima Television Sokoto, interviewed in his office on 19/02/2018.
- 26 NTA Sokoto Zonal Network Center Archive NTAZNC, File No.35, 1978 –1995 – Programs.
- 27 Alhaji Bala Aliyu 59years, Zonal Director NTA Sokoto Network Center Sokoto interviewed in his office on 25/07/2017.