



FRONTIÈRES ET INTÉGRATIONS EN AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST WEST AFRICAN BORDERS AND INTEGRATION

CROSS-BORDER DIARIES

BULLETIN ON WEST AFRICAN LOCAL-REGIONAL REALITIES

With the support of the Sahel and West Africa Club

● Kanollywood, video-mania without borders

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CROSS-BORDER DIARIES

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Local-regional realities in West Africa

"Another publication not worth the paper it is printed on ?" No, not another one. For many reasons, the main one being that information on cross-border cooperation is in demand. In its own region, today there is no regular media coverage on regional construction seen through the local and institutional level and through cross-border dynamics.

In this context, where regional integration is once again on political agendas, this periodical strengthens the WABI (West African Borders and Integration) Initiative : an investigative device helping actors committed to promoting cross-border activities as an engine of regional integration, development and peace. The WABI network aims at establishing regular dialogue between local actors and officials of regional integration institutions around concrete cooperation experiences.

Among the facets of this dialogue, workshops, an internet site, regular publications, finally the last creation : "Cross-border diaries", a tool providing extensive and unexpected stories, playing off geographic scales and various themes, countouring the border areas, thanks to on the ground investigations.

Who are the "Cross-border diaries", for ?

- local actors, elected officials, professional organisations and associations : to serve as a vehicle for and sharing experiences, constraints and proposals;
- officials of West African regional integration institutions : allowing a wider vision of sectoral policies on the basis of daily information coming from cross-border areas;
- cooperation agencies : abandoning a purely national perspective for a more regional approach, to set up a forum between interlocutors concerned by the common challenge of promoting integration through cross-border cooperation;
- editorials : to learn about West Africa at the regional level other than through conflict, relaying West African cooperation lived by the people.

"Cross-border diaries" chooses a journalistic approach : studying the border areas, presenting initiatives that could be thought of as cross-cultural, -economic or -social.

A long time ago West African borders went beyond apparent barriers : roads, rivers, police-customs posts. These borders support an invaluable multidisciplinary dynamism. This magazine focuses on the Kano-Katsina-Maradi corridor : an economically and culturally rich developing between Nigeria and Niger and beyond, a basting stitch of informal trade. The border disappears with the exportation of the hausa video market which this first issue explores. ●

How to nourish information on local and regional realities in West Africa ?

The "intrusion" of the local cross-border concept into the thinking process relating to regional integration is gaining ground in political agendas. This is due, on the one hand, to a demand originating from the field, and, on the other, to a possible approach on regional governance :

- ▶ In the field, a densification of border regions: West Africa is going through an exponential population boost correlated with the development of urban markets. This densification of demand encourages exchanges and is well illustrated in border areas, in particular in the band between Sahelian and coastal countries, and consequently plays a role in the regional construction process;
- ▶ Demands from regional institutions as regards the integration process: whether these questions be dealt with from NEPAD's perspective, in its willingness to entrust ECOWAS with the development of integration policies based on geographic, demographic and socioeconomic dynamics, or from the African Union's perspective in order to "re-energize the role of States via a participative action extended to the private sector and civil society", such demands require that local border experiences and institutional strategies work in synergy.

Being the foundation of the WABI initiative, the willingness to maintain a dialogue is shown with the fact that information on cross-border and regional dynamics is made available to each and everyone on a regular basis. The DLPIR unit of SWACS - an active entity of the WABI network - tends to encourage, with its financing and co-writing of Issue of "Border Chronicles", and as far as its mandate permits, a study on the common challenges facing border cooperation both at a local and regional level. ●

CROSS-BORDER DIARIES

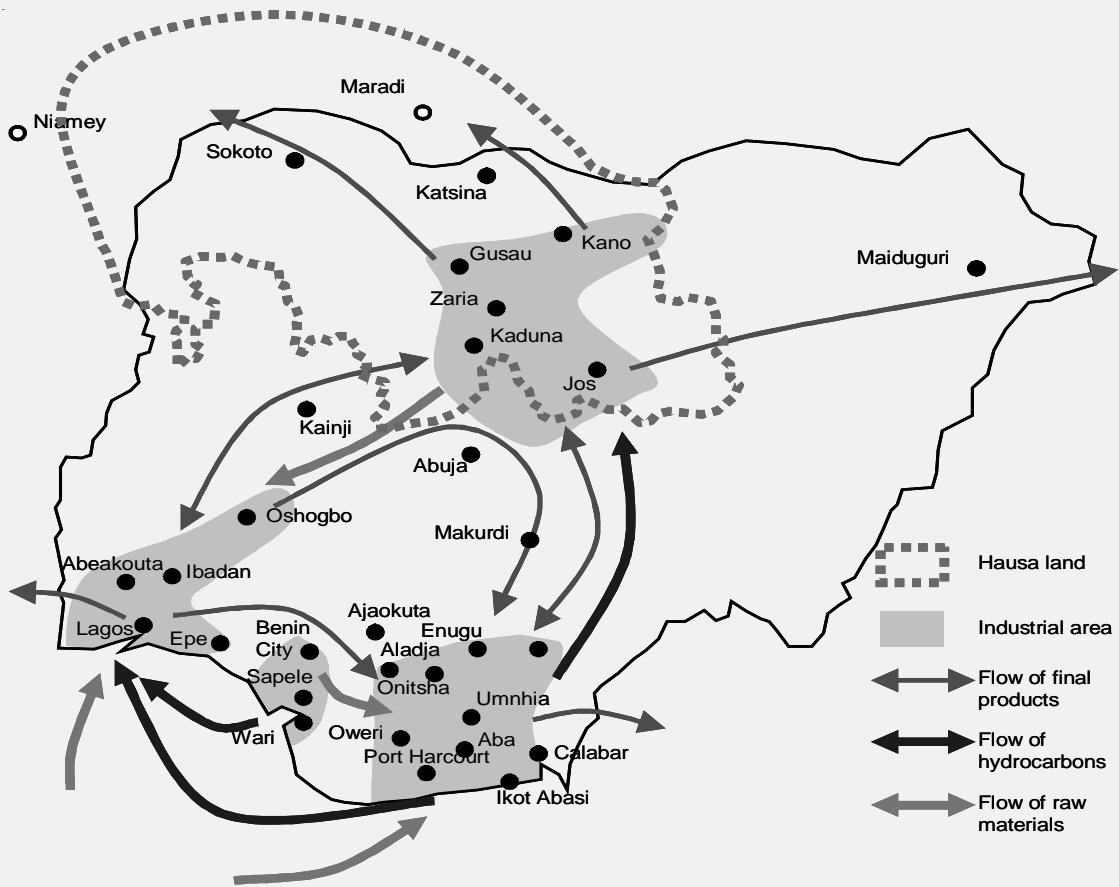
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The bulletin report
that opens borders to you.

The Kasar Hausa

The Kasar Hausa, neighbouring the coastal regions, is the main development centre of the West African hinterland. Like the Dioula territory, it is both an agricultural area and a mid-way point between the coastal and the arid zones of West Africa.

Niger-Nigeria border : Maradi-Katsina-Kano axis



The Maradi-Katsina-Kano corridor, which passes the Hausa lands, is perhaps the most important and most historic development axis in West Africa, for centuries a gateway to the Gulf of Guinea, North Africa and the Middle East. Its population density and urbanisation rate represent significant development potential, although the inability of its production structures to withstand international competition and an institutionalised smuggling system still threaten its progress.

Within the territory covered by the ECOWAS, there are, of course, many other cross-border areas where solidarity and exchanges thrive : southern Senegambia, with its complementary production systems, its border markets, its surrounding areas ; or the Mopti-Ouahigouya area (Mali/Burkina), a develop-

Slight differences in accent may indicate that they belong to different communities, but the Hausa are a united people in every way : in their language, religion, traditions of dress, matrimony, culture, their taste and aptitude for business... The "Hausa land" is a "border land" : it encompasses the border which is supposed to divide it.

"Hausa land", "Border land"

ment corridor stretching as far as Ouagadougou, with its associations and joint projects for local development. In many cases however, the territories are "Creole", shared by several communities who value different aspects.

They do not have the socio-cultural homogeneity of the Hausa lands, so reinforced by its population (although several peoples inhabit the territory, the Hausa are in the very large majority) and by Islam.

The Bornou princes were the first to spread the Islamic religion

widely during the 14th century, although the religion had been taught from the 11th century onwards. Islam started out as the religion of the aristocracy, the urban elite and merchants. But Islam and the traditional religions continued to co-exist in this region right up to the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio which began in 1804.

This marked the turning point in the Islamisation and unification of the Hausa lands as people rose up against the local aristocracy - the Sarakunas.

From the time of the Sokoto

caliphate, Islam was to spread to most of the Hausa lands.

Today the Hausa kasar has a population of 50 million spread over an area of 1,500 km along the border between Niger and Nigeria. Hausa, which has very few dialectal variations, is the most commonly spoken language in black Africa.

Here, more than in most other areas, the border is a flexible concept, or rather promotes a highly functioning cross-border dynamic.

The complementarity of production systems between the north - most suited to livestock farming ●●●



- and the arable south of the Hausa Kasar has long spurred considerable trade flows between the two regions.

Sokoto, Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Abuja and Kaduna have historically placed the centre of gravity of the Hausa Kasar - in urban, agricultural, political, religious and commercial terms - squarely in Nigeria.

From every point of view, Niger's territories in general and Maradi in particular have occupied only a marginal position in relation to the north of the Nigerian federation. Indeed, until 1816, Maradi was part of the kingdom of Katsina.

Today, however, the Hausa Kasar is a kingdom of smuggling, fed by the disparities in economic policy between Nigeria and its neighbouring countries.

All kinds of things pass through here : herds of animals, agricultural products from the surrounding regions, textiles from Asia, motor vehicles from Europe, petroleum, plastics, cigarettes - a whole host of banned or permitted goods travelling along established or improvised highways...●

Road stories

Crossing the border between Illéla-Sokoto

It is 6 pm, and almost dark already. The thermometer has not moved below 40 degrees Celsius, it is May and we are on the road from Niamey to the Nigerian border. Good quality infrastructure and little traffic. We reach Birni'n-Konni, the border point between Niger and Nigeria, after a 6-hour drive. A few stops, the time to change a burst tire due to potholes, tarmac heat and brake-slammings to avoid animals crossing the road in an attempt to join their herd. Population density is low, even though the region, attractive because of the dynamism of neighbouring lands, ranks among the most populated areas in Niger.

The town is quite large, but with few permanent buildings. It seems its only role is to provide fresh supplies to lorry drivers travelling towards Arlit or Zinder. Everything has been planned with the motorised traveller in mind: spare part shops, small stalls selling petrol and oil, many grocer's shops, as well as the unavoidable kebab, corn or mint tea salesmen. Document control seems to be a mere formality - very few tourists venture into these towns, whose main purpose is to carry out various transit activities towards Nigerian urban centres. Meantime, we discover our burst tire was probably the trick of one of the many mechanical tool salesmen established along the road. The benevolent customs post officers, concerned about their reputation, are prepared to pay for the dismantling of the tire as well as for a tubeless tire (with no air chamber) which is better adapted to African roads, it would seem.

Despite recommendations from the Birni'n-Konni's post, according to which we would be better off waiting until daylight before entering Nigerian soil, the car departs, possibly being guided by the full moon which lights up Sokoto in the distance. There are many highwaymen ("coupeurs de route") along this stretch of road, where a major part of informal traders supplying Kano or Katsina markets converge, before going even further south. All sorts of goods are being traded here: as well as international goods banned by the Nigerian government, you can find second-hand cars from European markets. We stop for a second time at the Nigerian customs post of Ileja to get our passports stamped and to sort out the car documents.

Forty minutes of bad road separate the two customs administrations. You have to pay 500 Nairas (3 Euros) to obtain a vehicle-related document in due and proper form. The night goes on close to the post after we're told for the second time about road safety issues on the way to Sokoto●

Kano the locomotive

History, geography and strong demographic growth have created an urban canvas at the heart of the Hausa lands with no equivalent in the hinterland of West Africa.

Urbanisation in this region, centred around the town of Kano, is testament to the genuine and significant process of change in the West African economy.



Because of its historic status as a trading town, Kano has long been a dynamic place. But its population, as in other cities in West Africa, expanded most rapidly after 1960 (at an annual average of 6%).

As Nigeria's third city after Lagos and Ibadan, Kano covered an area of just 17 km² at the beginning of the 20th century but has now spilled beyond the walls of the old town to cover 60 km², of which 48 km² are built up.

The state of Kano, ranking 20th in the Nigerian federation in terms of area, is the second most populated state with more than six million inhabitants in 1996, a density of 500 inhabitants per square kilometre.

The development of a network of secondary towns along the border between Niger and Nigeria has been supported by the existence of this large metropolis, the only inland city that can be compared to cities like Accra, Abidjan, etc.

Half-way between Maradi

and Kano, Katsina today is a medium-sized town of around 400,000 inhabitants. It is the capital of a state of six million people which, when added to the population of Kano state, forms a populated area of almost 15 million souls.

A little further north, Maradi, in Niger, is smaller but rapidly growing. Located at the heart of a much less densely populated area (around 60 inhabitants per km²), it has become a satellite of Kano.

This hierarchical arrangement of rapidly expanding towns creates new production networks, even around relatively small towns like Maradi. Self-sufficient agriculture was the main agropastoral activity (apart from cash-crop production, especially cashew) in the Sahelian part of Niger, until the new type of a regional exchange economy did develop. Agricultural land has gradually been bought up by traders or urban economic actors and a new class of agricultural workers has emerged,

made up of rural dwellers who no longer had the means to develop their land.

The peasant economy is being monetized and "in spite of the lack of a dense network of banking and financial institutions, integration of the peasant environment is speeding up thanks to the dynamism of Hausa traders and their networks of brokers and the intra- and extra-regional ramifications which embrace all the region's circuits of economic activity*".

Maradi's economy is focused on trade ; processing industries are hardly developed and the old agri-food industrial units have closed. Today, industry is concentrated in the larger towns of Nigeria, Katsina and above all Kano are veritable clusters with food processing businesses, tanneries, textile, metallurgical, plastics and packaging factories and sugar refineries.

Maradi's position within Niger is similar to that of Katsina in Nigeria - part of an urban system and

a local economy absorbed by the mighty city of Kano. Transactions which take place along the border, and the hierarchy of urban economies within this local economy, are testament to de facto regional integration based upon the exploitation of economic opportunities and specialisation within a community - the Hausa community being the case in point. ●

*Direction des services d'appui au développement régional et local, Schéma directeur de développement régional de Maradi, " Dynamique régionale et problématique de développement ", Ministry of Finance and Planning, Republic of Niger, UNDP, July 1997

or the necessity of bringing together integration actors...

If integration marks a notable "return" on development agendas and if the actors favoring closer collaboration between local and institutional dynamics are more and more numerous, the obstacles to overcome nonetheless remain formidable.

A recent mission in Southern Senegambia organized by Enda/Diapol illuminated some of the steps to be

Plunged for many years into a state of severe crisis, the Casamance region and its surrounding countries are currently witnessing the emergence of a genuine will for peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction.

Signs of this change can be most visibly observed in the repatriation of displaced persons to their villages of origin, and the rehabilitation of these villages, all of which is occurring with the help of former rebels attempting to reintegrate themselves.

Beyond "conventional" national approaches, certain associational actors have begun developing cross-border peace dynamics, both autonomously and in collaboration with traditional authorities.

This is the case, for example, with the negotiations transpiring between the King of Oussouye and his counterpart on the Bissau-Guinean side of the border. All of these actors rely on different types of cross-border exchanges: some predating the conflict, such as productive dynamics (cashew, sesame, livestock...), economic dynamics (transportation, cross-border trade of manufactured goods...), and development dynamics (vegetable cultivation, horticultural...); and others resulting from the conflict, such as cultural dynamics (cross-border festivals...) and dynamics associated with the wartime economy, such as the cultivation of Indian hemp and the illegal trade in wood.

However, it is important to

emphasize that the various actors intervening in the area experience difficulties. When they have the tools and capacities necessary to put their ideas into practice, they often run into trouble procuring funds that are earmarked for strictly national projects.

Moreover, these actors often confront problems associated with norms and procedures that do not yet take into account the regional conditions established by the treaties between West African countries. The gap between theory and practice in the field of integration thus persists.

In this context, it is not uncommon to see different actors, beginning at the level of state representatives, disregard certain regulations in order to resolve cross-border conflicts and issues, relying instead on local customs and authorities (as in the case of bamboo management between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, as well as in the handling of livestock theft and animal health...).

The numerous actors encountered by the mission also indicated that the development of local agreements was the most efficient form of regulation.

Various forms of local mediation, which are either being utilized on an ad hoc basis or are in the process of being institutionalized, contribute to strengthening cross-border approaches, and to attenuating tensions that are potential sources of conflict.

At the same time, a number of contact and exchange networks are forming and enlarging our understanding of cross-border tensions and complementarities.

However, the utilization of this knowledge within the frameworks of exchanges, projects, programs... remains limited and thus constitutes a challenge to be met. Some local organizations are in contact with organizations on both sides of the border.

This is the case, for example, with the Foddé NGO, which possesses a cross-border program, and with the Youth Movement for Peace and Integration, which undertakes some very specific cross-border activities. But such examples remain few. Changing the scale and scope of these various

activities seems to represent the next major threshold to be crossed.

Accomplishing this will require assisting stakeholders in the cross-border project to more effectively confront national, regional, and even international problems, by developing a large network that will facilitate the process of decompartmentalization.

The cross-border approach thus continues to respond to a social reality, undistorted by the prism of certain "developers," but it remains barely operational within processes of formalization. The necessary labor required for changing the approach so as to better incorporate the perspectives of regional stakeholders, beginning with administrative ones, therefore remains not only relevant but the substance of a long-term project.

One year after the launch of the West African Borders and Integration Initiative at WAEMU's headquarters in Burkina Faso, the next workshop to be organized within ECOWAS in Abuja in October of 2004, could therefore represent a landmark opportunity for two major reasons:

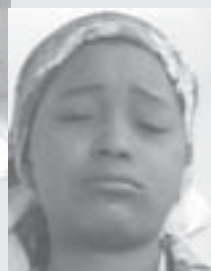
(1) First, because it should facilitate the opening of a dialogue between the local and institutional actors behind the dynamics of integration that will move towards a more informed analysis of not only the stakes but also the possible misunderstandings of the integration process.

(2) Secondly, because this change of scale is currently both desired and necessary for incorporating the vision of those favoring a different approach to spaces and territories. This work will not be possible without "investing" in the places where the life of the community is determined: the political sphere. If the WABI Initiative and the "Cross-border Chronicles" must have a reason for being, it is certainly around these two main lines that they can continue to keep their originality and their reason for being. The Workshop's summary record will be available on the afrique.frontieres.org site during 2004 ●

Kanollywood

Silence, shooting !

" Dan Dalin Soyeyya "



Hausa video mania or the "Dan Dalin Soyeyya" craze

Kanollywood, the borderless video



The stunning growth in home video in Nigeria has opened new doors for its professionals, darkened the horizon for film buffs and caused dark clouds to hover over cinema-video compatibility in neighbouring countries. Emerging from Ghana, taken up and magnified by Nigeria, home videos are expanding their reach irresistibly over the entire West African region.

They have caught up with Hollywood, Bollywood, the Indian studios, Hong Kong and all the others, and have now ousted them with their amateurism, bolstered by the fact that they stick to local issues. Whatever critics may say, the only quality that Nigerian home videos have is that of their sales. And there is no doubt that the little stories canned by studios in Northern Nigeria are selling like hot cakes. Hausa home videos are taking over the West African video market - a rather incongruous example of regional integration of a kind.

Kano, the capital of Hausa video films, has around 2,000 actors and up to 150 producers, including a handful of women.

Something that's considered quite banal else-where has taken on exponential dimensions in Nigeria for its 120 million inhabitants : home video.

The result is an irrepressible craze that is attracting and providing a livelihood to increasing numbers of people.

Notwithstanding the reliability of statistics, the home video and film industries support about 5,000 people.

Lagos, the economic capital, is home to most of them, as that is where most of the movies are shot, edited and duplicated.

But Kano, the capital of Hausa video films, has around 2,000 actors and up to 150 producers, including a handful of women, with actors turning into producers after a few years of experience.

It is very difficult to establish correct figures for all those involved in this industry, as most production companies only have a few full-time employees and prefer picking and choosing among intermittent workers - all actors, producers, choreographers and directors at the same time. Multi-tasking is becoming increasingly popular in the home video field.

You only need one thing to be able to act in a Hausa film : "The quality

required in women is beauty and a good figure, their behaviour on the sets. They must take the producer's or director's fancy. The rest is just learning while doing, a modicum acting talent and the ability to recite dialogue and sparkle on the sets.

In one way, you could say that producers are also trainers at the same time."

The same holds true for producers: "(...) There's no formal training as such. You're either an actor or interested in production - you just have to have the logistics in place."

The sector prides itself on generating the highest number of jobs in Nigeria

The quality required in women is beauty and a good figure, their behaviour on the sets. They must take the producer's or director's fancy.

today. The "marketers" - mere shopkeepers who have turned into proper managers in this business and operate at either end of the production line - enjoy exclusive distribution rights.

Having set up an Association, they act as agents for advertising and selling the films. They then reinvest their profits in new productions.

This is how home videos are funded, with no support other than the subsidies earned by those who distribute them. Circuits are set up fairly rapidly - with producers, actors, directors, resellers, news-

papers, critics, projectionists and, right at the top of the pyramid, those they call "marketers".

The latter dominate the market, often playing the role of executive producers.

In fact, the story goes that it was to sell blank cassette tapes from South-East Asia that these "marketers" - always on the lookout for a good deal - started looking for outlets for video productions.

Slowly, an entire industry developed, with no regulatory system, no guild, no charter governing distribution, and no government support. Nor does it have any cultural background.

The marketers are well versed in the promotional methods they use : posters, trailers, specialised magazines, media cove-

rage on radio and TV, etc. The same holds true for more original marketing methods that are closer to the public : street-side stands, auctions, sales in beauty parlours, advertising with a promotional team offering cassettes to passers-by, etc. This is followed by sponsorship by various brands - cars, soft drinks, hotels, etc.

There is not just a plethora of home video craftsmen - they are also prolific. "In the last two years", said a marketer, "two films have been released per day - around fifteen per week. A producer can ●●●





*Two films per day,
around fifteen per week.
A producer can make up
to three films simultaneously.
Moreover, Hausa videos are made not
just in Kano, but also in Katsina,
Boshi, Putua, Lumfashi, Kaduna,
Gusaw, Joss, Sokoto, etc...*

make up to three films simultaneously. Moreover, Hausa videos are made not just in Kano, but also in Katsina, Boshi, Putua, Lumfashi, Kaduna, Gusaw, Joss, Sokoto, etc."

It's impossible to really know how many films are made. The official average is around 200 Hausa video movies each year. With approximately 300 companies specialising in production, the annual national production is around 650-700 films, with an average of 15,000 copies of each being sold. This consistent turnover makes Nigeria a giant in

the video movie production business in Africa.

Kano productions offer a quality that is far from that of the traditional popular theatres from which they are inspired, and from their romantic image : "Theatre is not real life ; the trees are made of cardboard, houses of cloth, skies of rags, diamonds of glass, gold of false glitter, with make-up on faces, rouge on the cheeks, and the sun rising from below the floor" (V. Hugo).

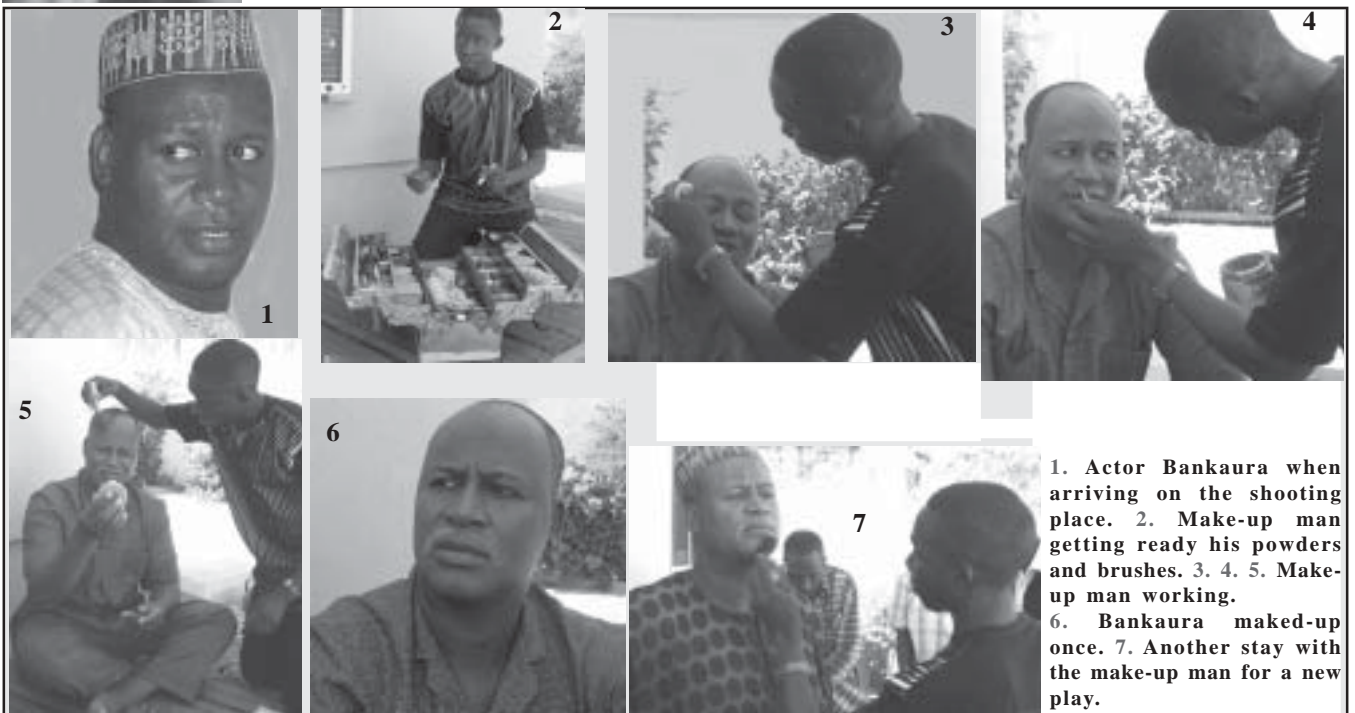
Of all those involved in the art, Hausa playwrights have only retained costume desi-

gners and make-up men. The city and its surroundings provide ample settings for shooting on location. The inhabitants, happy to see their homes on the small screen, have even stopped renting out their houses and are perfectly happy merely lending them to crews for the duration of a shoot.

So what does a video movie cost ? "Hausa films aren't expensive, as they focus on domestic problems. You can make a movie with just about F 500,000 - 1,000,000 (€ 764-1,527)."

The budget is negotiated with the actors, because except for the rare few who have become stars and with whom lump sums are negotiated, their fee depends on the time they spend shooting.

"Shooting time is calculated and paid once the film is released. They get around 10,000 Nairas, i.e. about FCFA 50,000 (€ 77)."



1. Actor Bankura when arriving on the shooting place. 2. Make-up man getting ready his powders and brushes. 3. 4. 5. Make-up man working. 6. Bankura maked-up once. 7. Another stay with the make-up man for a new play.

Time is money !

Once his movie is ready and his cassette is in his pocket, the producer rushes to the editing studio, then chooses a marketer for advertising and distribution.

Not until all this has been done does he prepare the budget.

In an environment where actors are often also producers, marketers and directors, the order to delivery time is fairly short, for commercial aspects are considered more important than artistic compulsions.

Movies are no longer produced on film but directly as VHS cassettes or DVDs, which spells certain death for the traditional movie circuit, all the more as celluloid film production costs have become prohibitive. A copy is then submitted to the local Kano State Censorship Board, along with 6,500 Nairas in charges (FCFA 1,625, about € 3) and a second to the



Once his movie is ready and his cassette is in his pocket, the producer rushes to the editing studio. Here the producer Yakubu Mohammed of «2 Effects Empire» company (in the foreground).

federal board in Abuja - the National Censorship Board, along with 10,000 Nairas (FCFA 2,500, about € 4). Since the Sharia was instituted as the law of

the land, certain images or expressions are monitored, particularly those to do with women. The Nigerian Censor Board informed us that

since 1997, over 2,000 video productions have flooded households. Up to 300,000 copies of a movie can be ●●●



The inhabitants, happy to see their homes on the small screen, have even stopped renting out their houses and are perfectly happy merely lending them to crews for the duration of a shoot.

The " Dan Dalin Soyeyya " craze

sold, through frenzied poster campaigns and international trade.

So this Hausa "fast-food" is turning into a major export product and even contributing to regional integration.

The films are first distributed all over Nigeria, then in Niger - the primary foreign market - from where they are re-exported to the entire Hausa-speaking West African region.

Nigerian videos have also had an impact on neighbouring Cameroon, in whose markets they can be found. Ghana is besieged with them as well, although it too is a producer. The same holds true for Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo, although the authorities have banned them officially.

Today, Nigerians are organising themselves to control their sales in American territory and make business trips to Europe as well, while Internet sales are becoming more orga-



Facing the camera, Bankaura and Amina as relatives in «Dan Gwal», and Ahmed as play director.

nised, in order to reach the diaspora.

The sale price of a Hausa film in Kano, on a VHS cassette or video CD, is 200 Nairas per piece, the wholesale price being

lower at 150 Nairas. Marketers only sell "originals" - one cassette or VCD per buyer. Thus, a shopkeeper wishing to purchase 200 copies for his clients gets just one cassette or CD for 150

Nairas, along with 200 cassette or CD covers at 50 Nairas per piece.

It is then up to him to buy as many blank cassettes and/or CDs as he wants and make copies, while ensuring that he does not sell more copies than the number of covers he has purchased : "In Nigeria", people are convinced that "piracy takes place outside the country only. The discovery of a cassette without a cover in a shop, or one with a cover other than the one already made familiar by the movie's posters, immediately puts the dishonest seller in the hands of the police."

In fact, the real anti-piracy barrier is the high speed at which the market is supplied with new productions and the strength of the distribution network beyond Nigeria's borders ●



Ahmed and Fati, lovers in the film «Dan Gwal».

A boom in endogenous images a field that is expanding beyond its borders

No one today really remembers what triggered the video mania sweeping through Nigeria. But the reference that is considered authoritative is the release in 1992 of "Living in Bondage", an Ibo film, shot with a VHS camera.



The confirmed actress Amina Garba protection is a perfect pedestal for the beginning of the young Amsa Shehu in the profession.

The filmmaker Chris Obi Rapu made news in 1992 under the pseudonym of "Vic Mordi", with "Living in Bondage", a video film that unleashed local passions with its endogenous story - that of a man who signs a pact with the devil in order to grow rich.

The film opened the floodgates for a video market in which local tales about evil sects, falling under spells and black magic abounded. Improved upon by computerised special effects, this new genre grew rapidly in the circuit, so far devoid of any real attractions.

In fact, only political messages, documentaries on the country's heritage or imported productions were being screened.

The sudden influx of reflections of Nigerian society, in a Nigeria that loved its local culture and had been brought up on a long tradition of street theatre and storytelling, combined with the advent of VCRs, was a blessing for home videos. Even VCD players were affordable - they cost around FCFA 30,000 or 45 Euros.

Video mania therefore began in 1992, with this first film, which sold about 300,000 copies. By bringing people back to the small screen, home videos opened up an unforeseen market.

Whether in Ibo, Yoruba or Hausa, in every part of

Nigeria, TV film producers mushroomed, attracted by the new, lucrative business.

A marketer explained that in Kano, the birth of home video was "something uncontrollable.

In the beginning, we never imagined that it would work, but demand exploded all of a sudden, at the expense of American films. Everyone preferred movies dealing with local traditions, demanding customary sets, shot in our language. Their success spread all over Nigeria and even to Niger."

The explosion of professional home videos coincided with the decline of Nigerian cinema. The end of the 1980s was also marked by the end of the oil boom, which had kept Nigerian cinema and its international co-productions going.

Producing films on celluloid then became a rather risky enterprise. Just one option remained : to turn to videos, which had already drawn the majority of moviegoers away from movie theatres. Another major advantage was that you could watch videos, bought at a fairly low price, again and again, at home or in your neighbour's house.

Leaving the field of American action movies strictly to satellite channels, the new Nigerian home video pros plucked local socio-emotional strings as hard as they could, tickling cultural roots by updating legendary stories, exploring social and emotional issues ●●●

from a local perspective, and showing daily life and daily problems. Marked by the popular, travelling theatre tradition, the characters were very clichéd and the acting was along the lines of theatre narratives.

So Nigeria is now among a handful of countries in the world, such as the USA and India, with a majority consumption of purely local video products.

Piracy and unfair competition are fiercely opposed. Just one marketer (representing a distribution company) and just one cover per film: "This movie is strictly reserved for home use. Any unauthorised reproduction, edition or distribution of this video, in part or in full, is strictly prohibited. Offenders will be prosecuted; renting Hausa films is prohibited in Kano and even considered an offence that can lead to prosecution."

Even screening videos in video clubs is prohibited. In Kano, video clubs are limited to video games and to showing football matches retransmitted by satellite channels.

Showing home videos on television is also prohibited: "If the movies were shown on TV it would kill the market for the producers and directors who invested in them." While this may be the case in Nigeria, in Niger, local television stations do not deprive their viewers and show Hausa movies.

The only places, apart from homes, where these videos can be shown, are movie theatres, which are considered as partners: "When a movie is released, the premiere takes place in a movie theatre, so that the money invested in production can be recouped. All other earnings are profits."



Emmanuel Ekaba is inconsolable.

An expansionism bitterly felt by movie theatre managers

The flood of images of dubious quality has opened a breach for filmmakers, with the prospects of digitalisation providing the means to bring both fields together - feature films and home videos.

The proven success of the sector has given Africa the opportunity to generate its own productions and its own images, and take over the regional market. ●



Example of Hausa movie cassette or CD cover.

While their technical defects make them a model that's difficult to export, on the other hand, Nigerian and especially Hausa home videos have turned into commodities that have succeeded in flirting with regional borders.

Despite flickering pictures, changeable colours, uneven and uncontrolled lighting and sound, and actors with awkward gestures, Hausa films are reigning triumphant. Nigerian home videos are growing rapidly, at the expense of other markets, and invading neighbouring countries as well (Niger, Ghana, Cameroon, Benin and, generally, the entire African market). Their low costs and practices like dumping and aggressive marketing have also played a role in their growth.

Nigerian home videos are not only making a name for themselves across borders but are also establishing themselves as the only viable models for film products, forcing movie theatres to project only video films. Thus, in Niger, Hausa films are flooding all film screening establishments: video clubs, TV channels and even movie theatres.

Emmanuel Ekaba, who runs the biggest movie theatre complex in Niamey, called Jangorzo, is inconsolable.



Earlier, his complex had a theatre with 1,500 seats for limited budgets and a 560-seat studio for those with bigger budgets. But he says that in less than ten years, feature films have had to face two challenges : the emergence of satellite broadcasts and the birth of private television channels, whose programmes are mostly filled with video film broadcasts.

Upset, he remarked : "Theoretically, there are films reserved exclusively for movie theatres. But when the very same films are broadcast on television before being screened in movie theatres, very few people are ready to go out and spend money on transport and on buying a ticket. And that's without taking account of piracy.

(...) Niamey's biggest movie theatre now houses *Air Transport*. It can no longer afford to hire 35mm films that cost FCFA 500,000 for maximum returns of just FCFA

60,000. We had to convert to digital, to video, and cut our ticket prices from F 1,000 down to 300." So now, just the 560-seat studio remains, and screens video films. Then, Nigerian producers started shuttling between Kano and Niamey to promote new releases and their distribution. After "radio and TV advertisements, they got a full house", as the competition from the small, neighbourhood video clubs was negligible.



The studio remains but screens video films.

The programmes altered between Hausa, Indian and American films, with three shows a day during the week (5 PM, 8:30 PM and 10:30 PM) and four on weekends. Then came the time when TV also got on to the Hausa film bandwagon. Suddenly, producers stopped shuttling around, as they couldn't recover their costs.

From then on, purchases were made "directly from the market, from cassette and CD shops, as there were no certified Hausa movie distributors in Niamey, and if there were, they would not resist pirating videos and CDs, as piracy has become an institution here, in Niger, due to an excessively rapid regional expansion" ●

Saved by video



La salle de projection, un abri de fortune qui fait fortune.



Tableau d'affichage de vidéoclub

They have spent so much time haunting videoclubs that they have been inspired by them.

The boom of the Hausa film industry did the rest.

In the district of Karadjé in Niamey's Commune III, at the end of primary school, Issouf Abdou and Issa Idrissa stopped going to school, at an age that is so important to many young people living in Niger's capital. Having become unemployed very early on, with no qualifications whatsoever, both friends managed to escape idleness by opening one of the seven videoclubs to which people from their good old district enjoy going in their free time. They were 'saved' by home videos and by the boom of Hausa soaps,

which cross boundaries and stretch out to the suburbs of Niger's capital.

A shed of around 10m², in the corner of Issouf's father's courtyard, with walls and roof made of millet stalks strengthened with secco (straw mats), this is a modest shelter which generates very high revenues.

This type of projection room, which costs about CFA Francs 15,000 (€23), abounds in the lower districts of the city, enjoyed by those who cannot afford a television, nor even a TV/VCR/DVD set - that is, in fact, the majority of Niamey's population, the capital of one of the world's poorest countries.

In 2002, Issouf Abdou managed to convince his father, an agent for the national electricity company, to lend him and his lifelong friend, Issa Idrissa, enough money to set up a videoclub.

Video-clubs had become very popular in Niamey, particularly in their district, on the right bank of the river, where no-one could remember when the only cinema's last ticket had been sold. As well

as a shed, they bought ten 5-6-seater benches and, more importantly, a 21-inch TV, a video-player, a DVD player and a first batch of American and Hausa video tapes and compact disc videos.

They went round all the stalls that sell or rent tapes in order to diversify their very successful club, open "24/7" as they proudly claim, explaining that their room is operational all day long until midnight or 1 in the morning, every day.

They gathered a stock of productions and widened their services to include video rentals, priced F 250 (€0.38) for 24 hours per tape and F 300 (€0.46) per CD. Because tapes are sold F 2,000 FCFA (€3.05) on the market and CDs 2,500 (€3.80), their business is extremely attractive to people in the area.

Those who do not have any equipment come in and get an eyeful for F 25 (€0.038) per show, while others save themselves a trip into town by using the rental service.

At the end of last August, during

the school holidays, their small room, which can accommodate about sixty "video lovers", was constantly full, and with ten shows per day on average, our young entrepreneurs' daily takings are about F 15,000 (€23).

And that's without counting the tape and CD rental side of the business.

Apart from the 10% commission on the projection room takings which they pay to the cashier, they pay no taxes. And anyway, public maintenance tax is no more than F 25 or 50 per day, so their profit isn't greatly affected by it.

Issouf Abdou and Issa Idrissa are overjoyed. Yesterday, they were big clients of the city's videoclubs, and today, they are proud to have moved to the other side of the "video world".

A clever combination of America-made action movies and plenty of Nigerian Hausa films ensures that their club is full all day long. "Children and young people of our age love action, while adults and mainly women cannot resist 'Dan dali Soyeya' films from Nigeria", which have replaced Bollywood films, which were true blockbusters in videoclubs and even in cinemas until not so long ago ●



Issouf Abdou (à gauche) et Issa Idrissa sur le seuil de leur salle video. Hier, grands clients des vidéoclubs de la ville, ils savourent aujourd'hui leur passage de l'autre côté de la "vidéo".



Amina Garba is one of Nigeria's best-known actresses. Indeed, there's no Hausa film fan of the vast Kasar Hausa who doesn't know her - that's how vital she is to the Dan Dalin Soyeyya thrillers, for instance. But it was purely by chance that she was born in Kano, although her parents came from Niger - her

Amina Garba

a star
among stars
in Hausa home
video

father from Tillaberi and her mother from Loga, in the west of the country. About fifty years old today, she still has the same charming and captivating fawn-like eyes. Braids that highlight her mulatto skin colour halo her regular features and she has a sweet, melodious voice. It was 22 years ago that Amina, a health worker, succumbed to the charms of theatre. At first, she played small parts in plays produced and broadcast on the State television network. Then she met Umar Yahaya "Bankaura", another Hausa film star, and her career took off. Ever since, they have become a vital element in most depictions of various slices of life in Nigeria.

Despite her popularity, Amina lives in a flat of just 4 sq. m. or so, in Kofan Kabuga, one of Kano's poorer neighbourhoods. Like any other star, Amina is recognised on the streets and greeted with respect by the people in her neighbourhood.

The children inevitably run and gather around her whenever she makes a public appearance, all the more so as both adults and children have benefited from her financial largesse.

Today, whether she plays a mother or even a grandmother's role, she plays them with great conviction.



Interview



"I was born an actress"

Chroniques Frontalières : How are actors and actresses recruited ?

Amina Garba : To get work as an actor, some minimum requirements have to be fulfilled. When young men or women introduce themselves - and you see newcomers every day anywhere a film is being shot, they have to audition.

If any candidates are selected, they have to fill out an information sheet and then the potential employers meet their parents or guardians to check their origins and matrimonial status, particularly in the case of young women. Often, women claim that they're single when they are actually married and want to become actresses without their husband's consent.

After that, potential actors or actresses receive an actor's identity card and the authorisation to spend the day on the sets.

C.F. : Aren't they asked whether they have any background or experience ?

A.G. : Kano has no special training institute for actors. Actors and actresses learn while they work, basically through observation, that's why real talent is vital. But that doesn't mean that there's no improvisation or training exercises.

For instance, making young people practice in order to improve their work in front of a camera, teaching them

some rudiments of how to behave on the sets, and so on.

C.F. : How much work does a confirmed actress like you get?

A.G. : My schedule depends on the means available to producers and directors. Shooting for a film can take two to three weeks, sometimes a full month.

When funds are slow in coming, shooting slows down too and can take up to two months or more, with the risk of actors leaving the sets to shoot somewhere else, although that happens fairly rarely.

C.F. : What is the command structure while producing a film?

A.G. : Scriptwriters order scenes to be shot. As soon as the order comes in, the crew meets to discuss the subject and settle the date and modalities for shooting.

C.F. : What are the main stories and subjects of the films in which you work ?

A.G. : The subjects always have to do with social problems and we

touch upon almost everything: marriage, cohabitation, divorce, unfaithfulness, love...

C.F. : What's the story of the film you're shooting right now, "Dan Gwal" ?

A.G. : A boy meets a girl and promises her marriage. Ecstatic, the girl thinks she's lucky and decides to make her future husband happy.

She offers him a trip to Europe. He makes his fortune there and returns to the country. Then he meets a girl who is more beautiful than his fiancée and goes back on his promise of marriage.

His friends try in vain to reason with him and make him stand by his commitment. But he remains adamant.

Unfortunately for him, the woman he wants this time is really "frightful".

C.F. : Since when have you been an actress? What are your plans for the end of your career ?

A.G. : I can't give you any specific date, because I've always been mad about movies, ever since my childhood. I only watched movies on TV.

I was born an actress and even after I got married, I knew that I would carry on, and my husband had no objections. I'd find it difficult to live without the sets. So I've been an actress ever since I learnt

how to express my feelings, but it's TV that threw me into the deep end, about 22 years ago.

As for my future, I will stick to life as an actress, that will never change.


C.F. : Do you have any other occupation ?

A.G. : In fact, I am a nurse and have been working in a medical centre in Kano for the last 17 years.●



Amina and her children, Zainab, Aïssa and Ashiru (from left to right).

Umar Yahaya Malumfashi alias " Bankaura " Reincarnated through home video



How many Hausa home video aficionados know that their idol is a customs officer - away from the cameras? For everyone in Kano, big or small, but also in Kaduna and the entire Hausa territory, he is simply Umar Bankaura, a Hausa film actor. The artist's pseudonym has replaced his surname, confirming that the man no longer belongs to himself, nor can he lay claim to any family. Reincarnated through home video, he has become part of Hausa cultural heritage and been decorated several times for services rendered to his culture. Umar Bankaura must be the only celebrity with no telephone contact in Kano.

Is that because he doesn't want to be disturbed? Not at all! "Everyone knows me. All you have to do is ask for me anywhere in the city and I'll be informed in minutes, wherever I am. Who doesn't know Umar Bankaura ?"●

Interview

Chroniques Frontalières : *What does your nickname, "Bankaura", mean and how did you get it ?*

Umar Bankaura : One day, I had been invited to play a role in an entertainment programme on State television and, as I have the gift of being able to make people laugh, I was given the nickname of "Bankaura", which means 'comedian' in Hausa. That happened 22 years ago - I was rechristened that day.

The term "Bankaura" refers to jokes, gags, something that makes you laugh, relax, get rid of stress. My professional career, if I may describe it as such, began in 1982 on NTA Television (Nigerian Television Asurety) in Kaduna, under one of the doyens of the field who's still working and who used to host a programme called "Tambari" (The Royal Drum) at the time.

C.F. : *How was Hausa home video born ?*

U.B. : It's a recent phenomenon. Earlier, we had popular neighbourhood theatre. Cameras and video broadcasts only emerged in 1997. That's when we shot a movie called "Al Haki Kuyu kuyu", which played a role in really launching Hausa productions. Since then, very few movies have been as successful, especially because with the surfeit of films being made now, much less time is spent on each film.

C.F. : *Have you received any formal training as an actor ?*

U.B. : Like most others, I received no training other than the popular theatre stage. I didn't start out with any degree, but now, I have received a number of honours and certificates. My greatest award was given by Bayero University (Kano) for my contribution to the development of the Hausa language and traditions.

C.F. : *Does the profession provide a livelihood to its followers ?*

U.B. : I have been able to buy a car and a piece of land, and to build a house. But it's true that in the beginning, the fees were really low. But now, each producer decides on the salaries and other practical details pertaining to a film in advance.

For instance, for the movie "Dan Gwal", which is being shot now, once the actors are selected, the producer gets the crew together to draft the film's budget, including our remuneration.

So the backer knows the financial and logistical means required to make his film in advance.

C.F. : *What's the average budget for a production ?*

U.B. : It's like when you build a house. It all depends on what you want to build. It's linked to the contents, which themselves determine the means to be made available to achieve the desired objective. So it's difficult to suggest a figure, because the same film could be made for 1 million or 2 million (Nairas) by two different people.

C.F. : *On average, how long does shooting take and how long are the movies ?*

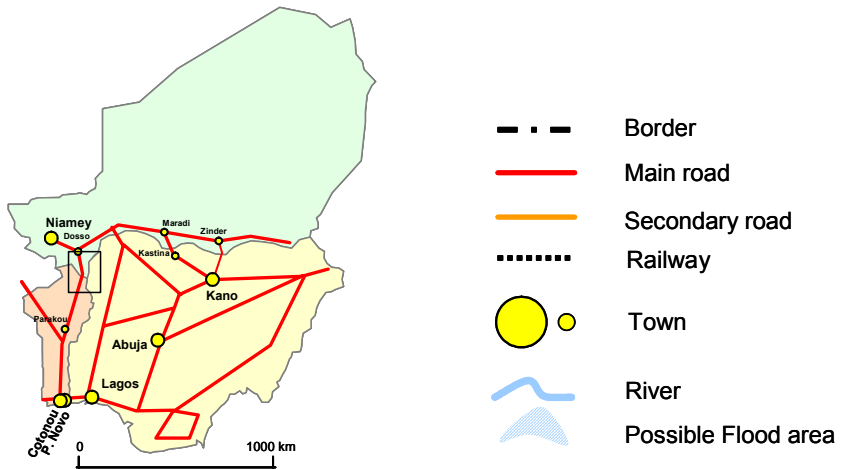
U.B. : Most movies now on the market are one and a half to two hours long. Audiences tend to get bored after that. The length of shooting depends on the nature and subject of the film. For instance, for a subject linked to chieftainship, special costumes are needed: huge boubous or turbans, complicated hairstyles, etc. The investments needed in both money and time are quite high. So some films take over a month to be shot, while others can be completed in just three weeks.

C.F. : *How would you explain the success of Hausa home videos ?*

U.B. : They reflect everyday life, they're familiar, and they express and share common social problems. Everyone wants their culture to be appreciated by others, to go beyond their borders once it has taken root locally. Hausa video films have managed to oust all other genres because, above all, they focus on local concerns. In fact, they are so successful that the Indians can no longer sell their movies. People are no longer crazy about movies whose language itself they can't understand, which is the case with

Indian films. One last remark that bodes well for the future success of Hausa productions: 50 million people across Africa speak Hausa! ●





Malanville in Benin and Gaya in Niger. Two towns, one community of languages, denominations and traditions. Two towns which would have been one, situated on both banks of the Niger River, like Niamey, or Paris, cut in half by the Seine but forming just one territory. But the colonisers came here with their branding iron and turned the river into a natural demarcation line, allocating one piece to Niger and the other to Benin: Gaya, part of Niger, on the left bank, and Malanville, within Benin, on the right bank.

They have, however, always evolved symbiotically. Two Siamese towns linked by a bridge - Malanville becoming a regional trading centre and Gaya a corridor linking the coast and the Sahelian lands, along which goods and people flow. These two towns contribute to regional cross-border dynamism which extends beyond their own borders, and their distinctive but complementary features are the foundation of continued development.



A market without borders in a border town

Cereal stalls to the north, its back to the river, to the east the cacophony of penned animals, to the west the Benin-Niger road, to the south the first few houses : the market in Malanville is a rectangle hemmed in by the river and the international highway, and with housing along two sides. Getting right to the middle of it, head first into the successive waves of languages,

smells and colours, is the only way to understand how cosmopolitan this market is, in spite of its guise as a shanty town of corrugated iron, planks and umbrellas. The Malanville market has kept the traditional infrastructure of any other village market but embraces modernism in its ability to cater to any demand●●●

Even if Malanville were home to all the greediest mouths on the planet, it is difficult to see how they could consume the quantity of food displayed at the town's market.

The town has fewer than 200,000 inhabitants and yet, every week, its market sells on average 2,000 tonnes of cereals, tubers, fruits and vegetables. There can be only one explanation: the market feeds people beyond its own boundaries.

Sellers from Niger, Nigeria, Togo and Ghana mingle with the Beninese here and they do not come just to make up the crowds. They contribute to the dynamism of a commercial centre which is

now regional in scale, and ensure that the most visible aspect of the town is its market. Malanville is not a border town, it is first and foremost a border market.

The market at Malanville has taken on such significance and is on such a scale that one must search the municipal archives to discover that, at the beginning of the 20th century, only a group of fishing huts stood on the same spot.

It must be assumed that, with time, bartering with fish alone was not enough, and that those who made their living from the river turned initially to agricultural products then to other goods necessitated by the process of ur-

banisation.

The market invaded the river's edge, attracted new populations, gave rise to permanent jobs and a permanent administration and created a border town, the physical body of which it is the soul.

From Ghana to Niger, to Nigeria via Togo, and for all other areas of Benin, when someone says "I'm going to Malanville", they mean "I'm going to Malanville market".

The feature of the border market is its ability to supply goods at low prices.

Malanville benefits from its strategic location between the coastal and the Sahelian countries in being able to offer goods from

A market without borders



The market is reached by a maze of tracks crossing fields and river. Goods arrive here duty free and leave in the same way. The networks of traders do good business here, some acting as suppliers, others as re-exporters, in an environment of mutual support and neighbourliness.

all to make a new class of traders richer, who are now integral to the urbanisation of this town.

The only metalled road in Malanville is a stretch of highway linking Cotonou in the south with Gaya, the first town over the Niger border, in the north. Its

Of course, the local authority gets its cut by levying fees for trading, the agents circulating daily between the stalls and booths to collect their monies, but it seems paltry gain in comparison with what could be collected by a watertight customs authority. Given the context, any money is better than none, some may say.

Ridiculously under-staffed and with no financial support, the border authorities in Benin and Niger are unable to monitor the bridge effectively and are resigned to the border leaking like a sieve. But they too benefit from this market, which is so well patronised with tact, expertise and intelligence by the networks of wholesalers in their 'boubous' and three-piece suits.

The system enables the market never to be out of stock, to prosper whilst keeping its down-at-heel appearance, and above

two major agro-climatic areas: the dry Sahel and the humid coast. Malanville market is an umbilical cord, attached to a mighty waterway - the natural border between Benin and Niger - but also linking the countries of the Atlantic coast and the Sahelian countries.

To the producers of Benin, Niger and northwest Nigeria, it acts as the trading post for grain and is the point of access to a three-way trading system based on the ancient socio-economic links between three states with their complementary agricultural production.

Malanville market is a kind of

agricultural trade show. Scattered around it, in the chaotic order common to African markets, one finds Benin, displaying its typical agricultural products : tubers (yams, manioc and its derivative products, e.g. gari and tapioca), vegetables (okra and tomatoes), fruits (pineapples, mangoes, oranges), corn and Sahelian grains from North Benin (millet, cashew and sorghum); Niger supplies beans, nut-grass, Bambara ground-nut, tomatoes, natron, mandarins, and has the monopoly on livestock products; finally, Nigeria, famous in the region for "running a prosperous business" in most manufactured goods, also supplies garlic, ginger and pepper.

This is but to name the most visible sellers at the Malanville market, a veritable powerhouse of buying and negotiating for two huge geographic zones and for regions beyond Africa's shores. ●

neighbourhoods are spreading and schools can hardly cope with the increase in numbers, motorbike and car ownership is booming and fuel smuggling is so widespread that service stations struggle to survive. Malanville is thriving and radiates its vitality beyond its boundaries.

It hums to the oscillating rhythm of its big shareholders and vibrates to the sensations that its market, its back streets and bars offer so affordably and without discrimination to the different nationalities which tirelessly solicit its charms.

Thrills are for the asking here, both traditional and modern, skilfully manipulated by the socio-cultural networks which have supplanted nationalism. The demographic development of the town reflects the dazzling dynamism of its market - the engine which drives progress at a speed which the authorities apparently have trouble keeping up with.

However, Malanville only came into being in the mid-1900s. Until then, it was merely a river bank dotted with fishing huts and Fulani herdsmen. The fishing huts filled the dual role of home and office and the herdsmen lived in the immediate neighbourhood of their animals. The town sprang up one roof at a time upon the sand banks created by the flooding Niger River. It is a natural holiday resort caressed by the munificent Sahelian sun.

But the people that settled here came to find food rather than to sunbathe. Instead of providing a haven for tan-seeking tourists, the site grew into a trading centre, a commercial cross-road between the Atlantic and the Sahel.

By 1910, a village had been created, consisting of a group of tatas or fishermen's huts along the river valley. It was a shelter in the sand, at the time simply called Tassi, which means "sand" in the Djerma and Dendi languages.

The future town of Malanville had been born and was to evolve gradually with the arrival of new inhabitants from areas either side of the river, mainly the Djerma-Dendi of Niger (the Gaya-Dosso region) and the Dendi and Fulani from northern Benin.

Tassi became Malan Ville, taking its name from "Malan", one of the governors of the former colony of Dahomey.

Even today, there are still strong links with the first inhabitants.

These ties have outlived the drawing of the border and promote the atmosphere of harmony and collaboration which has always existed between these communities, Nigerian and Beninese in origin but actually from an identical civilisation with shared existential priorities.

Malanville exemplifies the hatching and expansion of an urban centre from the dynamism characteristic of a market positioned on the border between nations. ●

Gaya, keystone of regional exchange

Gaya is not just "a small town in Niger"; it is "a keystone of regionalisation", the junction through which products from the coast pass on their way to inland Niger and the Sahelian countries, even to the Maghreb and the Middle East. Goods are also transported from here to the coast and to Nigeria and Cameroon.

The most important role Gaya plays is in the transit and re-export of goods towards inland Niger, Chad, Mali and Nigeria. The taxes levied by Niger on such movements account for the major portion of customs revenues on the Benin-Niger trunk road.

Here formal and informal systems collide, official and smuggling activities are pursued in parallel with one another. Goods in transit are mainly rice, sugar, noodles, vehicles, hydrocarbons, cloth and second-hand clothes, cigarettes, alcoholic liquor and building materials.

For some of these items their destination is already established. Thus, second-hand clothes reach the end of the line at the markets of Niger and Nigeria; cigarettes and liquor end up in Libya, Algeria, and even Iraq. Vehicles are for selling on in Niger, Mali, Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon. Niger's customs cannot deal with this traffic and the changing regulations in the destination countries - prohibition in Cameroon and Nigeria, embargoes in Libya and Iraq - and concentrate instead on revenue from transit operations.

The trade in vehicles is a long-standing one. For a decade now vehicle ownership in Niger has mainly involved models which would be considered "worn out" in Europe, "useable" elsewhere, and which are therefore scrapped and redirected to Africa.

Niger has become the number-one destination for these wrecks, which seem to have an unerring attraction for anyone drawing an average salary. Most of Niger's new vehicle dealers are consequently being driven to debt. Second-hand vehicles cross the border at Malanville-Gaya at a rate of 200-300 per day, or an average 1,000 vehicles each week, and are destined solely for Niger's roads. The people of Chad and Mali also have a fondness for second-hand cars, as do Cameroonians and Nigerians, whose countries have, however, banned the import of vehicles over a specified age (between 2 and 5 years). The aim, therefore, is to bypass legislation, a goal successfully met in regard to almost all the vehicles arriving from Belgium. The cargo goes through the initial export formalities on leaving Belgium, further re-export formalities on arrival at Cotonou or Lomé and again at Gaya, the point of entry to Niger. The transit or "travel" time once in Niger is generally no more than a week.

With the exception of vehicles destined for Niger, which are issued with transit documentation (a "carnet de titre", in the jargon of the transit agents) to get them through customs and to the place where they are sold and put on the road, all vehicles coming into Gaya are subject to formal re-export procedures. Tran-

sit fees, levied at 10% of the vehicle's value in Francophone countries and 13% of their value in Anglophone countries are, according to transit agents, the reason that false customs declarations are made. An agent declares, for example, that his vehicles are for Chad, a Francophone country, he then takes them to Maradi or Zinder in order to get them into Nigeria on the back roads.

To try and stop these false declarations, Niger's customs authorities have initiated a system of customs escorts, whereby vehicles are accompanied as far as the border of the destination country. But the stumbling block for this well-intentioned service is the availability of personnel at the Gaya customs post.

Also, the customs fees have to be calculated on the value of the vehicle as it arrives at Gaya (taking into account the purchase price, freight from Antwerp to Cotonou, road tolls en route from Cotonou to Gaya, insurance, etc). In reality, only the purchase price of the vehicle in Belgium is used as the taxable value, which constitutes a considerable loss of potential income. These false declarations are not only the prerogative of the car market. Significant quantities of second-hand clothing are officially declared as being for re-export, in order to avoid paying all but transit fees. Once safely past the customs post, and beyond the reach of anyone monitoring that goods are going to their declared destination, cargoes are taken to be traded on the Niger market.

The system for passing through border controls has prompted importers, forwarding agents and some customs officials to organise themselves into networks, all of which "feed" on this sales chain, which has its source in Europe and links at every stage along the way in Benin (or Togo) and Niger. The chain thrives upon the ineffectiveness of the customs monitoring systems as much as it does upon cultural solidarity. In addition to this, it is accepted that the larger traders can exercise a certain power over authorities at both central and local levels.

In many respects, Gaya is the symbol of regional integration which still has some way to go. Why are the regulations which define a "roadworthy car" different from country to country? Why is something banned in one place yet perfectly legal a few kilometres down the road? Why has Africa, ordinarily so reinforced by solidarity, become so divided by an equal measure of territorial regulation?

Gaya, for all this, is testament to the incredible dynamism of the networks of African traders. Clutching their mobile telephones, these traders are positioned at the very heart of the world market and highly expert in the regulations which govern it. ●

Malanville, a regional destination for food

The market at Malanville has emerged as a melting pot of tastes and spices, the point in the region where the flavours of the north and the south converge.

Due to its pivotal position, Malanville also dominates as a redistribution centre for food commodities. A tour of the market would provide all necessary ingredients for the perfect meal blending the flavours of the coast with the aroma of the Sahel.

To delight the palates of a host of countries in this region, huge quantities of food pour into the market each day.

Malanville is not typical, however, and counters the accepted plan for the sale of goods whereby markets in the capital city are the biggest sales outlets and therefore see the greatest convergence of goods, as is the case in most of West-African countries. Wedged against Benin's northerly border, it steals the limelight from the markets at Cotonou.

It has become Benin's foremost destination for local agricultural output. Unprocessed commodities (millet, corn and rice) grown in north Benin and much sought after by the Sahelians are in great demand, competing with products from further south, primarily tubers - yams and manioc and their products, e.g. gari (manioc flour) and tapioca. Malanville is also the destination for the housewives of southwest Niger looking to stock up on goods from Nigeria and other products from Togo and Ghana.

It is also where people from the coast come to buy Sahelian commodities in order to enrich their everyday diet.

The town is situated on a trading axis which superseded the old trans-Saharan route linking the coastal countries with those of the Sahel and the Sahara.



Malanville, the Beninese town at the northern frontier of the coastal countries, and Gaya, its counterpart at the southernmost point of the Sahelian and Saharan countries, is a centre made rich by the complementarity of the systems of production of northern Benin, which favours cereal growing ; southern Benin, which produces tubers and their derivatives, and Niger, a country which specialises in livestock rearing.

The links which have long influenced the cross-country exchange flows in this region, are many. This axis is structured as a development corridor around the market at Malanville, a regional trade fair for essential commodities, and as a road corridor through Gaya, the main transit route between Benin and Niger, i.e. between the coast and the inland markets.

It is, moreover, a diversion which is increasingly used to access Nigeria and destinations in central and North Africa and the Middle

East.

The Malanville-Gaya corridor is engaging cross-border dynamics at regional and local level. It is notable for the huge volumes transacted here and for its role in developing a relatively dense network of secondary corridors between the three countries which border one another here. The three locations (Malanville, Gaya and their Nigerian counterpart Kamba) form the cross-border hub which, thanks to its dynamism, is central to the economic logic which has given rise to it and which is propelling it towards a regional future.

Malanville has become the focus of regional convergence with regard to food. It is the key regional grain market for farmers of Benin, Niger and northwest Nigeria, and has meant that the town supports a cross-border dynamic in this region based on long-standing socio-economic links between three nations with complementary systems of production.●

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