Below is the accepted manuscript, pre-print version.

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in the Journal of African Cultural Studies in 2021:

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13696815.2020.1868291
https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2020.1868291

Hindi Films, Bollywood, and Indian Television Serials: A History of Connection, Disconnection, and Reconnection in Tamale, Northern Ghana

This article explores the circulation and reception of Indian media (including films and more recently television series) in the majority Muslim city of Tamale, Northern Ghana. This includes the arrival of Hindi films during the late 1950s, the subsequent (short-lived) circulation of Bollywood films in the early 1990s, and the more recent arrival of contemporary Indian television serials in the 2010s. In charting histories of these three regionally linked transnational media flows, this article complicates 'linear' experiences of Indian media in Northern Ghana. Though Tamale's Dagbamba viewers understand these three media flows as regionally linked, they are sensitive to changes in format, narrative, plot, and style taking place in Indian film and television over time. For over sixty years, Indian media flows have gained traction, broken down, restarted, and flowed in 'feedback loops', dependent on the ways in which Indian media reflect, align with, and at times depart from Dagbamba conservative cultural and religious values.

Keywords: Ghana, India, Bollywood, cinema, telenovelas, audience

Introduction

This article explores histories of Indian media circulation in the majority Muslim city of Tamale, Northern Ghana.[i] I focus on three different Indian media forms that have circulated in the city over time, including postcolonial Hindi cinema of the late 1950s-1980s, Bollywood films of the 1990s, and Indian television serials beginning in the 2010s.[ii] Rather than conceive of 'Indian media' as unchanging, bounded, or static, I ask how thematic and stylistic changes taking place between Hindi films, Bollywood, and Indian television series

are received and negotiated by viewers, distributors, and cultural authorities in Tamale. While Dagbamba viewers in Tamale refer to these three media flows interchangeably as ‘Indian films’, viewers experience Hindi films, Bollywood, and Indian television series differently, depending on the ways in which they align with or depart from Dagbamba conservative cultural and religious values.[iii]

Hindi films first arrived in Northern Ghana following Independence in 1957, when two cinema halls were built in the city. Films including *Aan* (1952) and *Albela* (1951) grew in popularity, as many viewers saw similarities between Hindi films and Dagbamba ways of life, including intergenerational family models, modest dress, and conservative moral values.[iv] This affinity for postcolonial Hindi films continued in Tamale throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. In the early 1990s, major shifts occurred in Indian cinema: films began to feature less modest (and often more ‘Americanized’) dress and choreographies, featured physical contact between love interests, and were often set in far-off diasporic (typically Western) locations, a cinematic shift now referred to as ‘Bollywood’. When Bollywood films entered Tamale’s market, they undermined and complicated a sense of shared values. Many adult viewers who had attended Hindi films in Tamale’s cinema halls expressed concern over the cultural and moral shifts evidenced in post-1990 Bollywood films. As a result, those in control of Tamale’s media flows – ranging from (majority male) distributors to video centre owners – intervened in the circulation of Bollywood in the city.

Bollywood arrived in Tamale during a period of significant change in Northern Ghana’s media landscape: most commercial cinemas in Ghana had closed down, and there was a subsequent rise in video centres – small businesses that converted large domestic rooms into viewing stations, with many benches facing a television. New video recording

technologies arrived in Tamale during the 1990s as well, resulting in the development of a Dagbani language film industry, including a small subgenre of Dagbani language films that adapted popular Hindi film plots and songs. As Tamale's former cinema workers transitioned to distributing VHS tapes (and subsequently VCDs and now DVDs), they drew on their knowledge of cinema-going audiences. Knowing that older Hindi films were popular in Tamale's cinemas, they worked to find, print, and redistribute hundreds of older Hindi films in Tamale's market, a process that continues to date. At the same time, distributors actively avoided pirating newly released Bollywood films.

By the mid-2010s, televisions became more affordable in Tamale, and many families began to purchase cable (and more recently satellite) televisions for their homes. The rise of cable and satellite television further diversified Tamale's media landscape, as today viewers choose between a wide range of foreign and local media. The introduction of televisions into the domestic sphere further complicated the 'feedback loop' of postcolonial Hindi films: by the 2010s, Tamale witnessed an influx of new Indian television series available on both cable and satellite television. Interestingly, these series have more in common with postcolonial Hindi films than Bollywood, as these series are purposed for an Indian domestic viewership rather than the cosmopolitan diasporic viewership of Bollywood. Recent Indian television series are set in local Indian contexts, espouse conservative family values, and feature modest dress. In Tamale, these series reaffirm long-standing perceptions that Indian culture aligns with and reflects Dagbamba cultural norms and values, ushering in a 'fresh', and accepted form of Indian media in Tamale for a new generation of viewers.[v]

My exploration of Indian media's circulation in Tamale draws on ethnomusicologist David Novak's notion of 'feedback'. Novak writes about processes of global media circulation through the lens of Japanese Noise, an experimental style of music that

manipulates, improvises on, and plays with connections between media input and output; connections can result in different kinds of ‘noise’, including static, distortion, and feedback. Novak (2013, 18) relates feedback in Noise music to broader conceptions of global media circulation, asking:

> what happens when circulations break down? Or more accurately, what happens when they break down, start up, and break down again in an irregular off-kilter trajectory? What happens to things that are not swept into the paths of intercultural dialogue, to the incremental differences that disappear or hide away?

Novak’s understanding of transnational media flows speaks to a less ‘neat’ and often non-dialogic exploration of circulation, one that echoes Anna Tsing’s (2005, 338) work on global flows; for Tsing, media flows are just as much reflections of connections and parallels as they are a reflection of ‘missed encounters, clashes, misfires, and confusions’. I suggest that Indian media flows in Tamale in unexpected ways, shaped by the actions, views, and moralist discourses of Tamale’s religious and traditional leaders, elders, parents, media pirates, and film distributors. Following an extended history of Indian media circulation in Northern Ghana reveals the unpredictable nature of media circulation over time, inclusive of frictions, breakages, loops, and temporary separations that can (and often do) reconvene at new points in time.

While this article is attentive to transnational flows, it is also concerned with audience reception. In her work on audiences, Karin Barber (1997) makes clear that audiences are not all the same – they are historical products that reflect shifting ways of convening in the world. Throughout, I am attentive to the ways in which changing media platforms (from cinema to video centres to domestic television sets) afforded new ways of convening in

Tamale. I show how the kinds of films and shows available in these public and semi-public viewing contexts are influenced by (largely male) film distributers, video centre owners, and those in charge of purchasing television sets and satellite subscriptions within the home. These figures have at times actively shaped viewers' access to certain Indian films and television shows to the exclusion of others. At the same time, Barber (2008, 137) suggests that 'audiences make the meaning of the text 'whole' by what they bring to it'; a text might have both a widely accessible meaning to a broad audience, as well as 'additional, special meaning to an inner circle' (*ibid,* 88). While access to Hindi films and Indian television series are shaped by moral discourses and those who work to uphold them in Tamale, audiences read these films and series in multiple and layered ways. For example, the same Indian television series that align with Dagbamba sociocultural values might also afford subtle insights into a range of experiences of love and romance, education, and class different to what is experienced in Dagbamba society. Small acts made by viewers – such as flicking to less 'appropriate' shows during commercial breaks – reveal the complex negotiations Tamale viewers make through their viewing practices. Viewers may at once adhere to moral norms while also complicating these norms in their interpretations, understandings, and conversations around recent television series.

Histories of Hindi film in Africa

Hindi cinema began to circulate throughout Africa in the 1930s, though circulation became widespread by the mid-1950s. Despite Hindi cinema's extended reach on the continent, research on this subject is often limited to anecdotes and passing observations (Barlet 2010, 138-140; Iordanova 2006). For example, Walter Armbrust writes of the 'ubiquitous non-presence' of Indian media in Egypt, explaining that 'below the radar of legitimate culture, the presence of India is palpable (2008, 216). Everyone knows that Indian films are in the

market'. An exception to this anecdotal approach is the case of Northern Nigeria, where scholars have studied both Hindi cinema and Bollywood's complex resonance with Hausa culture, as well as its influence on Hausa film production (Adamu 2007; Krings 2015; Larkin, 1997, 2004). Other scholars have explored Hindi cinema's reach in Africa, including Gwenda Steene's (2012) work on Hindi film dance choreographies in Senegal, Minou Fuglesang's (1994) examination of Hindi films and gendered viewing practices in Lamu, Laura Fair's (2010, 2018) history of Hindi film circulation in Zanzibar, and Andrew Eisenberg's (2017) work on Hindi film songs in postcolonial Mombasa.

The majority of scholarship on Indian media reception in African contexts has dwelt on a particular time period, with most academic focus being on postcolonial Hindi films. Consequently, discussion of Indian media flows tends to overlook the major shifts taking place in Indian film production. African film scholar Olivier Barlet's article 'Bollywood/Africa: A Divorce' (2010) hints at shifts taking place in Indian media in the early 1990s, however his argument – that Bollywood is 'no longer as popular' in Africa – overlooks nuances between Hindi cinema and Bollywood and their differing circulation patterns. Matthias Krings (2015, 120-149) offers a more nuanced exploration of Indian media flows and changing viewership patterns in the context of Northern Nigeria: Krings examines the reintroduction of Sharia law in 2000s Northern Nigeria and the subsequent censorship of Bollywood-influenced Hausa films. Krings is attentive to the contested nature of 1990s and early 2000s Bollywood media in Hausa culture, while also highlighting the subjectivity of media consumers: views on Hausa video censorship ranged dependent on one's positionality, including age, gender, and religious stance. Krings's case study reveals the contested nature of Bollywood films in an increasingly more conservative sociocultural and religious climate,

where Bollywood-inspired Hausa films were censored and burned for their ‘un-Islamic’ qualities.

Though scholars have acknowledged more recent Indian television series’ salience in varying African contexts (Dipio 2019; Dénommée 2019), scholarship has yet to link the rise of television serials with the circulation of both postcolonial Hindi cinema and Bollywood in African contexts. Exploring Indian media’s multiple flows over time reveals more nuanced modes of circulation, that can be at times ‘parallel’ (Larkin 1997), and at others ‘divorced’ (Barlet 2010), but never static. Rather, Indian media flows in African contexts may break down, disappear, start again, and move in unexpected or irregular ways. Transnational media flows are negotiated in creative ways ‘on the ground’ to suit new transnational contexts.

Postcolonial Hindi Films in Tamale

In the 1930s and 1940s, Lebanese, Syrian, and Sindhi merchants travelled to the Gold Coast to trade and set up cinema businesses, screening commercial films from America, Europe, and India in Ghana’s major urban centres. Hindi films were popular throughout the country, though they were particularly popular in majority Muslim areas, including ‘Zongo’ neighbourhoods in Accra and Kumasi (where majority Muslim Hausa and Dagbamba communities reside), as well as in Ghana’s Northern region. The popularity of Hindi films is evidenced in the daily advertisements for Hindi films in postcolonial newspaper cinema listings, such as the *Ashanti Pioneer* and *The Ghanaian Times,* where Hindi films are advertised mainly at cinemas located in Zongo neighbourhoods (Young 2021, 515-522).

Throughout my research in Tamale, viewers frequently noted religious commonalities between Muslim life in Tamale and depictions of ‘Islamicate culture’ embedded within postcolonial Hindi films.[vi] ‘Islamicate’ is a term introduced by Marshall Hodgson, defined as the ‘social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and…Muslims, both

among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims' (Hodgson quoted in Kesavan 1994, 246). Many postcolonial Hindi films featured Muslim characters with Arabic names, Islamic architecture (such as mosques), soundscapes (such as the call to prayer), and certain forms of 'Islamicate' dress (typically associated with Muslims) in India (Dwyer 2006, 97-131; Young 2021, 516). Another important 'Islamicate' aspect is modest dress: postcolonial Hindi films featured women wearing head coverings, reflecting a sense of 'Islamicate' culture for Dagbamba viewers. Even in Hindi films centring around Hindu culture, aspects of Hindu dress, such as women wearing veils around older men as a sign of respect, are more commonly associated with Muslim women's dress, especially for viewers in transnational contexts (Dwyer 2006*,* 111). Language plays an important role as well: Hindi films use key words borrowed from Urdu's Perso-Arabic lexicon, such as '*ishq*' (passion) or '*duniya*' (world) (Dwyer 2006). In Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana, viewers recognise Arabic loan words heard in Hindi films. These words are not only familiar because of one's Islamic practice, but also because many Arabic loan words occur in African languages, including Wolof, Fulani, Serer, Hausa, and Dagbani (Steene 2012, 312; Larkin 1997, 435).

Edward Said (1983, 226) writes that as ideas move, they become involved in 'processes of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin'. While in Tamale postcolonial Hindi films appear similar to Dagbamba religious values, within India Hindi films often situate Muslim characters as 'the other', especially outside of the 'Muslim social' film genre (Dwyer 2006, 126). The 'othering' of Muslim characters in Hindi films – an aspect intended for an Indian viewing context – becomes lost in a new West African context, where the inclusion of Islamicate iconography on screen reads differently. During the late colonial period, Arabic language films were banned in many parts of the subcontinent due to colonial fears of potential 'subliminal subversive messages' (Genova 2013, 35). For minority religious communities such as Muslims in Ghana,

depictions of 'Islamicate culture' embedded within postcolonial Hindi films provided something different to the largely Western films on offer, that may have appeared religiously aligned with Ghana's majority Christian South. In Tamale, the 'Islamicate iconography' found in postcolonial Hindi films became entangled with local religious sentiment and culturally conservative moral discourses.

New Circuits for Old Media: Morality, Bollywood, and the 'Hindi Film Loop' in Tamale

In the early 1990s, the Hindi film industry witnessed major changes in plot, style, and approach, a shift now referred to as 'Bollywood'.[vii] The neoliberal restructuring of the Indian state and economy influenced the Indian film industry at large, including film music, dance styles, and plots (Ganti 2012, 2-3). Both Madhava Prasad (2003) and Ravi Vasudevan (2008) attribute the term 'Bollywood' to changing logics of cultural production. For example, beginning in the 1990s, storylines shifted from topics such as working-class families living in India to movies filmed in diasporic locales featuring wealthy protagonists (Ganti 2012, 4-5). The 1990s also saw a change in dance styles, featuring athletic dancing and standardised group choreography (Morcom 2013, 120; Shresthova 2011, 31). Film music changed, with a 'New Bollywood' sound, spearheaded by Indian composer A.R. Rahman (Booth 2008, 287-291; Beaster-Jones 2014, 131). Bollywood characters began to wear more 'Western' styles of clothing, and lovers began to interact physically on screen.

The major changes taking place in Bollywood were apparent for Tamale viewers accustomed to postcolonial Hindi films. Tamale's distributors developed strategies ensuring a steady stream of postcolonial Hindi films to the exclusion of Bollywood: they began to pirate Hindi films known to be popular with Dagbamba viewers, while also seeking out older Hindi films never screened in Tamale's cinemas, offering 'new' material via 'old' content. For

example, one distributor explained that while the Hindi film *Nagin* (1954) was not widely circulated in Ghana's postcolonial cinema halls, it was procured, pirated, and circulated in 1990s Tamale, offering an old (and unfamiliar) film new traction in areas outside the reach of Bollywood's global rise. Bollywood media was actively erased in Tamale because it complicated perceptions of Indian media fitting within Dagbamba conservative cultural values. A focus on circulation makes clear that local distribution networks, controlled largely by Ghanaian men in this instance, shape the kinds of Indian media available to viewers in Tamale.

In Tamale's present-day central market, shops sell a mixture of Dagbani language films and foreign films (including Hindi films and to a lesser degree American and Nigerian films). Over several years, I got to know the owner of a well-known film shop in Tamale's central market. This market worker is also involved in Tamale's Hindi film distribution network. Regarding the distribution network for older Hindi films in contemporary Tamale, the shop owner explained:

> I inform the person in Accra what titles we need in Tamale. The man in Accra takes the titles of the movies, prints them, and prints out their picture for the cover... They ship the "new" films up each week.

Once the films are brought to Tamale, they are distributed not only to this particular shop, but also to majority men and some women who walk throughout Tamale each day to sell the films to passers-by. Interestingly, every distributor, shop owner, and DVD seller I met between 2015 and 2020 was above the age of fifty, and had memories of viewing older Hindi films in Tamale's cinema halls. Many remarked on their disapproval of newer Bollywood films. Those involved in making Hindi films available in Tamale at all levels – from pirating processes to distribution in the market – ensure the continual flow of older Hindi films to the

exclusion of Bollywood films. As was expressed in the introductory speech at a Hindi film screening at a Chief's palace in town amongst older Tamale citizens in 2016, postcolonial Hindi films were believed to 'save' Tamale youth from immoral dress and behaviour, an attribute not ascribed to more recent Bollywood films. These moments of distribution highlight an intergenerational element to Hindi films' continued circulation in the city.

With a continued stream of postcolonial films in Tamale, youth are exposed to the same films their parents and grandparents watched. This trend can be viewed in Tamale's video centres, a slowly disappearing media space. In Tamale's few-surviving video centres, youth and women visit and pay small fees to watch films. Beginning in 2015, and continuing throughout visits in 2016 and 2017, I frequented one of Tamale's three remaining video centres located north-east of the city centre. While the number of video centres has been dwindling with the rise of cable televisions and more recently satellite in 2010s Tamale homes, they still appeal to women without televisions in their rooms and to children who wish to socialise with friends during school holidays. Over time, I got to know one of Tamale's remaining video centre owners, who plays Indian films on Wednesday and Friday evenings. Similar to the trends taking place in the markets, the video centre owner plays almost exclusively pre-1990 Hindi films. When I first met the centre owner in October 2015, he showed me a stack of films he screened on rotation, including *Dharam Veer* (1977), *Kartavya* (1979), and *Nagin* (1976).

After attending various Hindi film shows at this video centre in 2015, I interviewed the owner, asking if he ever played newer Indian films, to which he explained that his viewers 'don't "feel" the "new" Bollywood films' the way that they feel 'old Indian films'. In a follow-up interview in November 2016, he further explained:

> People here, they don’t like the “new new films”. The olden times, they act that film in India. But these days, they go to America, exposing themselves, you see? That’s why [Tamale viewers] didn’t like it. When [we] watch, [we] don’t enjoy. In the old films, they are riding horses in it. They were acting the films in India. But now, everything.. eh! That’s why I don’t show those [new] films, because it doesn’t attract people.

In response, I asked how the owner knew that his younger viewers would not like newer Bollywood films, especially as he never played ‘newer’ films at his centre. He replied: ‘I cannot sit down here and say they didn’t like it if I didn’t play it – if I played it, they might enter and like it… it’s true, it’s true… if only I show it, they will like it…but the old people, they don’t like the new films.’ The above quote highlights the owner’s awareness of changes taking place in Bollywood films, including greater focus on diasporic contexts, and changing modes of dress. He also acknowledges that he plays pre-Bollywood era films because this media align with the sociocultural values of Tamale’s older generations, despite his centre being largely patronised by youth. As the owner makes clear, the active erasure of Bollywood films takes place between a nexus of (majority male) distributors, video centre owners, and parents, whose preference for older Hindi films reflects its perceived alignment with (and maintenance of) Dagbamba cultural and moral values.

Indian Television Serials in Tamale: A New Era of Indian Media Circulation

In the 2010s, the presence of cable and satellite television became a common feature of Tamale homes. The domestic nature of televisions allowed for more flexibility in viewer choice than in aforementioned video centres. Both cable and satellite television now allow for

a stream of new television series to Tamale from across the world, including series from South Korea, the Philippines, Mexico, South Africa, and India, but also Dagbani language content. For example, the cable station 'NTV' – known as 'the station that speaks your language' – provides viewers with access to Northern Ghanaian arts, music, and culture.[viii] Interestingly, even with the availability of diverse media content, new Indian television series feature prominently in Tamale's domestic viewing contexts. Many viewers situate Indian television series within similar discourses to those of older Hindi films, arguing that these new series do similar work in supporting Dagbamba conservative moral values.

Foreign television serials first aired throughout Africa beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, though due to a lack of access, it was not until the 1990s that rates of cable television viewership increased (Jedlowski and Rêgo 2019, 136; Werner 2006, 445). In Ghana, some television serials began to circulate in the early 2000s, but in Tamale, widespread access to cable and satellite television in the home is fairly recent (Mante 2016, 12-13). Television series are important sites to explore diverse media environments, as television stations throughout Africa screen content from different regional contexts including South America, India, and South-East Asia. In recent years, scholarship has explored the diversity of television series in differing African contexts. Writing of the many different kinds of telenovelas screened throughout Tanzania, Claudia Böhme (2019, 234) notes how viewers 'commented on the cultural difference and would read telenovelas as a kind of ethnography of the respective region'. In Uganda, Dominica Dipio (2019, 168) similarly writes that postcolonial viewers hold complex cultural and religious identities that mediate their encounter with movies and television series in the home. In the Ivory Coast, Julie Dénommée (2019, 248) writes that Indian television shows are often considered 'closer to Ivorian cultural values' than other telenovelas.

In what follows, I explore Dagbamba experiences and reactions to Latin American, East Asian, and Indian television series. Drawing on a range of interviews conducted between 2015 and 2019, I show how Indian television series feature within a particular moral discourse to the exclusion of other regional television dramas in Tamale. I further show how Indian television series are situated within the same moral discourse as postcolonial Hindi films available in Tamale homes and at nearby video centres. These similarities are read as culturally appropriate in Dagbon, whereas foreign television series (such as Mexican, Korean, and Filipino series) are perceived as culturally dissonant within a Muslim and traditionally conservative Dagbamba context (in much the same way as Bollywood cinema). Given the domestic nature of contemporary viewing contexts – where children watch television alongside largely female guardians – Indian television series provide 'appropriate' content for women, who are largely in charge of curating children's media access in the home.

In Ghana, foreign television series air on major cable stations, including Joy Prime, Adom TV, and TV3 every day. Cable is the main source for Indian television series amongst Tamale's lower income neighbourhoods, given the low cost of a cable television (costing roughly 300-400 cedis). Wealthier Dagbamba viewers (who can afford the cost of a smart television, decoder, cable, and dish, ranging from 800-11,000 cedis) tune into Indian satellite stations, including Star TV and Zee World. As a result, viewership for cable and satellite-based shows tends to correlate with the socioeconomic status of neighbourhoods in which residents live. For example, as of 2020, neighbourhoods with majority satellite sets in Tamale include Russian Bungalow, SSNIT flats, Vittin Target area, and Jisonayili. Cable television is accessed by residents living in Tamale's more densely populated urban areas, including Nyohini, Sagnarigu, Salamba, and Tishigu. In what follows, I draw on observations and

interviews conducted in both wealthier and lower-income neighbourhoods, including Jisonayili, Salamba, and Tishigu.

Though Indian television series are particularly popular amongst Muslim viewers in Ghana's north, certain Indian television series have gained traction at the national level. For example, the cable television show *Kum Kum Bhagya* became so popular that it was eventually dubbed in the Southern Ghanaian language, Twi (Mante 2016). The show also won Ghana Movie Award's 2016 best foreign television series, and in 2017, Ghana's current Second Lady and Muslim politician, Samira Bawumia, travelled to India to meet the cast members of the show. Later that year, *Kum Kum Bhagya* cast members travelled to Ghana for press conferences and meet-and-greets. In the mid-2010s, *Kum Kum Bhagya* was a cultural phenomenon in Ghana, popular with Southerners and Northerners, and Muslims and Christian communities alike. However, in Tamale, *Kum Kum Bhagya* was only one of many new Indian television series growing in popularity each year. For example, in 2016, I observed groups of children and women gathering in Tamale homes each day to watch series including *Bade Achhe Lagte Hain* ('Priya'), *Ek Veer Ki Ardaas…Veera* ('Veera'), and *Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon* ('Strange Love'), while in 2019, viewers would watch new series on a daily basis, including *Beyhadh* ('Til the End of Time'), *Tu Aashiqui*, *Meri Aashiqui Tum Se Hi*, *Kullfi Kumarr Bajewala* ('Kofi the Singing Star'), and *Razia Sultan*.[ix]

Unlike Bollywood films that continue to focus on diasporic contexts, recent Indian television series share similarities with postcolonial Hindi films screened in Tamale. These series are filmed in India or in nearby countries, including Pakistan. Characters sport regional Indian fashions, including *sarees* and *kameez*, but also makeup such as *sindoor* (Sandhu 2014, 85-86; Nagamallika 2018, 5; Charusmita 2020, 86). In this same vein, Indian series feature cultural traditions, including weddings, births, and funerals as well as major events

including Diwali, Holi, and Karwa Chauth (Sandhu 2014, 86-87; Nagamallika 2018, 5; Bhattacharya 2016, 64). Plotlines focus on 'traditional' multi-generational Indian families, following domestic dramas and disputes around issues of love, marriage, and class (Sandhu 2014, 85; Nagamallika 2018, 5; Bhattacharya 2016, 64-67). Unlike Bollywood films, romance in Indian television series tends to 'quickly culminate in marriage' following family approval, falling in line with traditional expectations and family values outlined in the show (Charusmita 2020, 123).

The shift from diasporic to domestic context from Bollywood to recent Indian television series is reflected in conversations with Tamale viewers. In an interview in December 2019, Sharifa, a Muslim Dagbamba woman who is married with three children, explained that she used to attend the neighbourhood video centres when she was young, where she watched a range of older Hindi films, including *Bhagavat* (1982), *Mr. India* (1987) and *Sholay* (1975).[x] Today, Sharifa tends to watch Indian television series in her room instead, with her current favourite (as of 2019) being *Meri Aashiqui Tum Se Hi*. In our conversation, Sharifa commented on the shift between postcolonial Hindi films and Bollywood, while also situating contemporary Indian television series within this trajectory. For example, with regards to the difference between postcolonial Hindi films and contemporary Bollywood films, she explains:

> Those days when an Indian appeared you'll know that's an Indian...they will go out in Indian dress. The dress will be long and will use the veil. So when you see the Indian you'll like her. But this time, they are like [regular] movies. It's not like the first ones.

Sharifa makes mention of differences between Bollywood films and more recent Indian series as well, explaining that while Bollywood tends to be set in the 'outside world', recent

Indian television series are almost exclusively filmed in 'the house or the town' where characters reside, reflecting the domestic nature of the Indian television series discussed above. Sharifa's observation makes clear that Tamale viewers actively engage with the nuances of and differences between Hindi cinema, Bollywood, and contemporary Indian television series.

Beginning in 2016, I attended nightly viewings of Indian television series with a young woman named Memuna, the daughter of a chief who lives nearby one of Tamale's major mosques. Every night in 2016, Memuna convened with her sisters, aunts, mother, and nieces at 6pm to watch the latest episodes of *Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon* and *Ek Hasina Thi*.[xi] Soon after I met Memuna, she began inviting me to watch television shows with her. My first time watching *Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon* offered insights into the viewing context for these shows: situated in her sister's small bedroom facing inwards towards a shared courtyard, I sat on the bed alongside several sisters, while others (including Memuna) sat on plastic chairs facing the television. Young girls (nieces and daughters) sat attentively on the floor in front of the television. A large space was set aside behind the chairs, and prayer mats were spread out so that each viewer could take turns praying while others watched the show.

Every night, Memuna's room was a space of entertainment, socialising, childcare, and religious practice. The television shows on screen reflected the sociocultural context in which there were viewed, both culturally and religiously. An avid viewer of recent Indian television series, Memuna often noted the relationship between older Hindi films, contemporary Indian television series, and life in Tamale. In an interview in November 2016, she explained:

> When I was a child, I liked watching mostly Indian movies, like *Karan Arjun* (1995), *Maa* (1976), *Teri Meherbaniyan* (1985), and *Toofan* (1989). My father would buy them [for us]… this time, the movies that I watch are *Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon* and *Ek Hasina Thi*…I like *Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon* because some of them are behaving like Muslims, that's the reason I like it.

Above, Memuna highlights several significant aspects of her viewing practices. She notes that in her youth in the early 2000s, she watched older Hindi films at home, reflecting the continued 'feedback loop' of older Hindi films for contemporary youth in Tamale. Memuna also highlights the 'Islamicate iconography' of contemporary Indian television series, noting that actors behave 'like Muslims'. She further notes that her father, a Dagbamba chief, purchased older Hindi films for her while she was growing up, and that he pays for their satellite subscriptions now. Given that her father is a chief, who works to uphold and promote traditional (and often conservative) cultural values in Dagbon, the presence of *Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon* and *Ek Hasina Thi* in the home affirms the well-established relationship between traditional, cultural and religious values in Tamale and Indian culture on screen. The role that Memuna's father plays in her viewing practices is important: Indian television series in Memuna's home 'parallel' the older Hindi films of her childhood, a parallel that stands in stark contrast to Bollywood media. It is no coincidence that Memuna's father, a chief involved in the maintenance of Dagbamba conservative cultural values, prefers Hindi films and Indian television series in his home, as these series might encourage similar conservative values amongst young viewers. However, it is important to recognise Memuna's own subjectivity: though she speaks about her father influencing her viewing experience, her desire to engage with shows where characters 'behave like Muslims' was often clearly self-motivated. Memuna would leave her work early to make sure she would not miss the

beginning of her favourite Indian series. At the same time, Memuna would switch to NTV during commercial breaks, engaging with (often more sexually explicit) Dagbamba hip hop videos, making clear her diverse and multiple media interests that straddle generational divides and moral boundaries.

Saida, an avid television series fan and a Muslim college student in her early twenties, grew up watching postcolonial Hindi films with her mother in their roadside shop in Tamale. More recently, Saida and her mother have transitioned to watching the latest Indian television series while working at their roadside shop, a viewing context that has become increasingly common in woman-owned businesses, including in salons and boutiques (Dipio 2019, 166). When I asked Saida what television series she preferred, she chose the recent series *Beyhadh* and *Bepannah,* and highlighted her favourite aspects of these series:

> The Indians, like *Beyhadh* and *Bepannah* and co, they are Muslims... I don't know in real life whether they are Muslims but in the movie they are Muslims… they were celebrating Eid… there was a part that they said Ramadhan and they were fasting and I saw them praying too…and the way they dress is always lovely… and when you are watching them like kissing and seeing them having sex, you will not see it.

Similar to other postcolonial Hindi films she viewed with her mother growing up, new shows including *Beyhadh* and *Bepannah* parallel religious values in Tamale in ways that both Bollywood and other foreign television series do not. For example, when I asked Saida about her engagement with Bollywood media, she explained that the content did not resonate with life in Tamale:

> [In] our community, we are Muslims… dating is forbidden in Islam, unless you get married. It shouldn't exceed maybe one month or two months… So that's why those

> love stories like dating, maybe going out, partying, so many like travelling and those things. We don’t see it in our communities.

Coupled with imagery of Muslim life, contemporary Indian television series feature a dating culture and intergenerational family structure similar to traditional Dagbamba lifestyle that is thus suitable for intergenerational viewing contexts as well. As most homes in Tamale centre around a polygynous family structure, children live in their mother or female guardian’s bedroom for extended periods (Pellow 2011). As Saida explains, mothers show their children Indian series over others because ‘you’ll never see kissing, sex, and nudity in these shows’, emphasising the role that women play in upholding certain Dagbamba moral values through censoring certain expressions of sexuality on television. The Northern Ghanaian experience parallels viewership patterns in Uganda, where Muslim Ugandan viewers similarly complain about the “inappropriate and shameful” adult nature of telenovelas broadcast to children, preferring Indian or Filipino films instead (Dipio 2019, 171 and 175).

Like postcolonial Hindi films, contemporary Indian television series offer content that reflects Dagbamba conservative sensibilities, especially regarding public expressions of physical intimacy. For this reason, many of my interviews concerning television series quickly turned to discussions of regional depictions of romance and sexuality. Many female interviewees noted that recent Indian television series mirror the moral sensibilities of earlier postcolonial Hindi films, especially in terms of how they address sexuality on screen. As Minou Fuglesang (1994, 165) writes of postcolonial Hindi films in Kenya, films regard sexual excitement as something ‘taken seriously, which is private and deserves emotional commitment, preferably in marriage’, with only ‘vague hints of physical desire’. Sharifa (mentioned earlier in this section) lives in a room with her three children. Speaking of available Filipino and Mexican television series, Sharifa explained:

> I don’t really watch [those shows] because they wear some kind of dresses. When you are watching it.. it is not appropriate for a child to be around and you’re watching it...the way they touch each other you don’t want to watch it with your child. And they don’t do it at a late hour. They do it around 8 to 10 o’clock. So if your child is still sitting around he would watch it and that is not appropriate.

Sharifa’s remarks are echoed in a conversation with Rafia, a mother in her mid-thirties living near the centre of town. Rafia explained of the differences between Indian and Mexican television series: ‘Yeah, there are differences. Because as for Indian people they are not showing their self. They are covering their self. They don’t like kissing. So children can watch it’. Rebecca, a mother of two in her late twenties, echoes these sentiments. Though she enjoys Mexican telenovelas, she only watches them late at night, watching Indian series most of the time for the sake of her children, as Mexican series have ‘sex, kissing and other things’. In the domestic context, many women select Indian series as they are thought to shape the moral behaviours of Tamale’s youth positively.

In the semi-private viewing contexts of women’s bedrooms, it is no longer film distributors or video centre owners who censor what is available on screen. As Werner (2006, 455) writes in the case of Senegal, ‘watching TV is becoming more and more customary for children… and might be considered…an essential vehicle of communication between mothers and children’. In recent years, Dagbamba women have become the arbiters of what is deemed morally appropriate, curating television viewership for their children. As women watch television with their children, their practices are shaped by broader societal and family pressures around the kinds of media that align with broader Dagbamba conservative cultural values. Rafia, Rebecca, and Sharifa make clear that Indian television series are appropriate in

this viewing context because of their conservative depictions of sexuality. At the same time, Indian television series sit within an extended history of moral discourse in the city, informed both by the continued circulation of Hindi films as well as the widespread erasure of Bollywood films in the market. In this light, recent Indian television series are not necessarily 'new' to Dagbamba viewers, but rather, they are a part of an extended history of Indian media in the city, that is continually shaped by Dagbamba conservative values.

Concluding Thoughts

This article charts the flow of Indian media in Northern Ghana from the postcolonial period to the present. I have examined changes between different Indian film genres and television series available in Tamale over time, shaped by India's changing socioeconomic and political climate. I have also shown how these various Indian media flows circulate in Tamale in different ways dependent on their perceived moral legitimacy for Dagbamba viewers. Film distributors, media pirates, market sellers, and now women in the domestic sphere curate the kinds of Indian media deemed appropriate within the Dagbamba context, shaping transnational media flows in the city for subsequent Dagbamba generations. In doing so, I argue that Indian media's transnational circulations in Tamale are not linear, but follow frictions and 'feedback loops' which are dependent on the ways in which Indian life depicted on screen parallels cultural and religious life in Tamale.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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[i] Tamale is the capital and commercial hub of Ghana's Northern region. Tamale sits within the Kingdom of Dagbon. The major language in Dagbon is Dagbani, which is from the Gur branch of the Niger-Congo languages. In academic scholarship, the people of Dagbon are referred to both as Dagomba or Dagbamba. I will use Dagbamba throughout.

[ii] This research draws on ethnographic and archival research conducted during five extended visits to Tamale between 2015 and 2019. Interviews were conducted in English. While the researcher has basic language comprehension in Dagbani and Twi, both the interviewer and the interviewees were fluent in English.

[iii] In Tamale, it is generally expected that citizens will dress modestly, show no physical displays of affection in public, practice their religion faithfully, and adhere to fairly strict gender roles (in which those of the same biological sex socialise separately both in and outside of the home). Individuals exist within community-based frameworks, including intergenerational family models in the home. Premarital sex, violence, and alcohol/drug use are strongly discouraged. This conservative cultural milieu is a mixture of tenets of Islam (widely practiced in the region beginning in the late nineteenth century) within an already largely conservative traditional Dagbamba culture, upheld through the chieftaincy system. For more information, see Haas (2016), MacGaffey (2013), and Yoggu (2015).

[iv] This perceived similarity echoes Northern Nigerian Hausa viewers' engagement with postcolonial Hindi cinema around the same time, that were read as being 'rooted in conservative cultural values' parallel to Hausa culture (Larkin 1997, 411).

[v] A note on language: in Tamale's cinemas and video centres, postcolonial Hindi films, and subsequently Bollywood films, were screened in Hindi language, typically without subtitles or dubbing. This parallels case studies of Hindi film viewership in other African contexts, including Tanzania (Fair 2018), Kenya (Fuglesang 1994), and Nigeria (Larkin 1997). Hindi is a language largely unspoken in Tamale, and as such, film viewers have been unable to understand the text of spoken dialogue. However, as Vincent Bouchard (2010, 104) writes in relation to African cinema spectatorship, image and sound are significant for viewers in interpreting foreign-language stories on screen. As well, themes common in Hindi films, including love across class lines and kinship duties, are easily understood for long-term viewers, despite language barriers (Fair 2018, 121; Fuglesang 1994, 168). This is echoed by Brian Larkin (1997, 412), who writes of Northern Nigerian viewers: 'after thirty years of watching Indian films, Hausa audiences are, of course, sophisticated at understanding the narrative style of the films'. Very recently, many Indian television series available via cable and satellite in Tamale are dubbed in English language. The television series *Kum Kum Bhagya* was dubbed in the southern Ghanaian language Twi, however there has yet to be an Indian television series dubbed in Dagbani.

[vi]Adamu (2007, 77) similarly writes of Hausa viewers watching Hindi films: 'the Islamicate environment in Northern Nigeria created a preference for Eastern-flavoured visual entertainment due to perceived similarities between Muslim Eastern cultures and Hausa Muslim cultures'.

[vii] The late 1980s and early 1990s was a period of significant change in terms of video production in Tamale. A Dagbani language film industry emerged that has flourished to date. Many viewers who engage with Hindi films also engage with Dagbani language films. Both are available in the market and in shops located throughout the city. It is interesting to note that some Tamale-based filmmakers, such as Ahmed Adam, are well-known for capitalising on the popularity of Hindi films in the region, adapting aspects of these films within Dagbani language films as well.
[viii] In Tamale, radio is another significant media form. Many listen to Dagbani language radio, and in fact, there are several Hindi film song radio shows in Tamale, such as at Zaa Radio and Justice FM, that examine Hindi film plots through conversations and discussions in Dagbani language.
[ix] In Tamale, many Indian television series are referred to by their Hindi names, while others have been nicknamed with English titles or with reference to a main character's name. In this article, I provide both the original television series title name as well as the local title if applicable.
[x] Names of participants have been changed to ensure confidentiality.
[xi] When visiting Tamale in 2019, I continued to visit Memuna and her family to watch television series in her room. Of course, the series popular in 2019 were different from 2016 (Memuna was now watching *Tu Aashiqui* and *Meri Aashiqui Tum Se Hi*), but the viewing situation was the same, with her nieces, sisters, aunts, and mother watched the latest show communally in-between cooking and prayers.