NIGERIAN FILMMAKERS OBLIGATIONS TO THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the question of filmmakers and their responsibility to the society within the context of the Nigerian film industry. The paper argues that filmmakers have social obligations to the society because of the impact of films on society, the audience for whom the films are made. Situated in the situational ethical theory, the paper further asserts that the way filmmakers understand these obligations can find expression in the types of films that they produce with impacts whether intended or not. Flowing from this, the paper recommends that Nigerian filmmakers must always interrogate the motive behind the films that they make which is capable of bequeathing to the society a new culture. Also, as filmmakers, they must produce films with a conscious awareness that film production carries a social and moral obligation, and this should find expression in film contents so as not to cause harm to society.

Keywords: Nigerian Filmmakers, Cultural Industries, Kannywood, Nollywood, & Art

Introduction

Films also have significant influence on the way others see us, and hence on the way they relate to us. We cannot but be concerned about what they are saying, what attitudes they are promoting, and what image of us they are projecting precisely because they have deservedly won ovation everywhere, the Nollywood films have come to assume an authority over our values and our lives, such that what people see in them comes to be taken not as just as fictional projection of our imaginative consciousness, but as true, authentic mirror of what we really are as a veritable market of what our society represents, and much worse of the ideals that we inspire, or must aspire towards. Osofisan, a dramatist in the 6th Lagos International Forum on cinema, video & motion picture in Africa as cited in (Ebewo, 2011, p. 5-6)

This paper sets out to discuss Nigerian filmmakers' obligations to the society for whom they make films. This is important because film production in today's contemporary society has transcends the production and representation of images to being an ideologically and culturally loaded medium with impact on its audience because it is not value free. Also, film is an interaction between a filmmaker and the audience for whom the film is produced. This being the case, then, we must be concern about the type of interactions that is taking place and its impact on society.

Nigerian filmmakers through the films they make according to Osofian in the above quotation have influence on how others see us. There is therefore the need to bring to the plane of discussion Nigerian filmmakers and their obligation to the society in making films that do not cause harm to society. It is based on the above premise that this paper is hinged on.

Film right from its beginning was tied to impact because filmmakers demonstrated their power over the audience then, and continue to do so even now. From day one when the people's curiosity was pricked after hearing that the Lumiere Brothers (Auguste and Louise) will be showing a moving picture, and converged at the Grand Café on the night of December 28, 1895 in Paris, paid some money to be allowed in to satisfy their curiosity, film demonstrated its impact.

The title of the film was, "Workers Leaving the Factory." It showed workers, mostly women leaving the factory. Also, there was a big Dog, a Horse-driven carriage, and a few men on Bicycles (Media Film Professor, 2011).

According to Baran (2009), the visual images were so great that the people felt as if they were going to be crushed. They ran for cover and there was pandemonium in the Grand Café. This was a film with no sound, or music and none of the fades in or fades out because there was no film culture, and as such people did not understand the language of film. Yet, the fear was real. According to Helmath Karasek, a German Journalist as cited in Spaull (2104, p. 2), this film, "had a particularly lasting impact, caused fear, terror, and even panic." Since then, the impact of film has not been less, but more. This was the beginning of impact of film, and also it marked the entrepreneurial beginning of film.

Each film genre has a purpose, and filmmakers must be able to identify their purpose, and by extension, their obligations to the society. How filmmakers understand the social obligations that they have to the society has effect on film content, and these

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contents have impact on the society. The issue of filmmaker's responsibilities has always centered around documentary or non-fiction particularly on the relationship between the document maker and his subject. This paper therefore intends to extend the argument to other genres of film because none of the genres bears less impact on society.

Conceptual Clarification

Who Is a Film-Maker According to Collins dictionary.com, "A film-maker is someone involved in making films, in particular a director, or producer." https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/film-maker. A Film-maker therefore bears the responsibility of filmmaking as they are in charge of the entire production. Within the context of this paper, a film-maker refers to a director or producer.

Producer

The producer in any film production coordinates the entire filmmaking process, as well as serve as the driving force behind the production. He or she leads the entire film making process. Film production is not possible without the producer who conceives or is involved right from the conceptualization stage of the film to managing of the entire production team. The producer ensures that whatever is needed for production in terms of finances, scripts and other logistics among others things needed are made available, and endures that the entire team works within the set parameters in terms of the budget available for the film.

Director

The director refers to the person who is in charge of shoots, and the arrangement of these shoots in a way that tells a meaningful story. He or she ensures that the script is actualized by ensuring that the proper structure in terms of the cast is properly selected, and that the characters interpret the script correctly.

Literature Review

Literature reviewed revealed various thoughts on ethical, moral and social obligations of filmmakers particularly in non-fiction or documentary films. Even at that level according to Pluck (1996) in his paper, "Whose life is it anyway? Ethical responsibility in documentary filmmaking", filmmaker's responsibility as it relates to ethical consideration has always been discussed in relation to exploitation of the subject and invasion of privacy. Spall (2014) on the other hand in his paper on "A Filmmaker's Responsibility" in which he sought to explore if filmmakers have responsibility to the society, argues that film unlike other art forms such as photography or painting uses both pictures and audio in engaging the audience with greater impact which raises a question of filmmaker's responsibility to the society. Similarly, he further argues that advancement in technology has democratized the filmmaking process as a result of which most people are now filmmakers, and with films now on YouTube among other platforms, the question of filmmaker's responsibility if any to society is more pertinent than before.

Spall (2014) stated that as advancement in technology has taken filmmaking to a whole new level that it is difficult to differentiate between what is real and what is not. This type of power he further argues should come with a responsibility to society.

Maccarone (2010) concurs within the context of documentary filmmaking in her paper, "Ethical responsibilities to subjects and documentary filmmaking" in which she stated that documentary filmmakers have ethical responsibilities to their subjects within the film, and outside the film. Documentary or non-fiction filmmakers have been discussing the issue of filmmaker's moral responsibility and ethics. While citing two famous documentary filmmakers (Errol Morris and Werner Herzooy), Spaull (2014), argues that the issue of moral and ethical responsibility raises a question on whether films has desensitise society of the horrors in the society, just like as they explore the issue of impact as it relates to violent films because film has the capacity to normalise the behaviour or acts depicted in films.

In contrast, Kubrak (2020) in a researched paper titled, "Impact of films: Changes in Young People's Attitudes after Watching a Movie" stated that the question regarding the impact of film in psychological Science has remained an open question. Using specific experimental research, 70 participants (40 Undergraduate and 30 Postgraduate students) were exposed to some selected movies after which they were tested. Analysis of the combined groups did not show any significant change in attitude. However, analysis of each group revealed a significant change in attitude in the Postgraduate group compared to the undergraduate group. Also, findings of the study revealed that watching one film did not cause a change in the respondents, while for the changes that were observed after viewing the movies, it was not sustained over a long period of time after watching the films.

The above study suggests that there may be some other causative factors other than the films as it relates to the influence of the media on human behaviour. These view point has for long been a subject of debate in mass media s seen in theories of minimal effects and theories of strong effects.

What this implies is that there would seems to be a difficulty in in attributing change in attitude to films in view of the interconnectedness of other factors such as educational background, and personal experiences among others which may affect viewer's perception and intermingle with what is watched in films.

Nonetheless, Mastro, Behm-Morawitz & Kopacz (2008) noted that films have impact on gender and ethnic stereotypes. Consequently, filmmakers should bear some responsibility for their content. In line with this, Adeleke (200) in his paper, "Culture, Art and Film in African Society", Adeleke (2003), opined that filmmakers have obligations to their societies, even though within the context of Africa, and in Nigeria to be specific, film content as represented by the Yoruba film industry would seems to point to otherwise.

Films usually depicts the society as argued by non-documentary film makers, but in contemporary society, society depicts what is shown in film. According to Spuall (2014), some negative behaviors with great consequences have been perpetrated and attributed to films watched such as the Columbine shootings in 1999 attributed to the film, the "Natural Born Killers" directed by Oliver Stone. In an interview with Oliver Stone, he was asked why did he make this film and his argument was that he was depicting what was happening in his society forgetting that film should not be all about depicting the society, but also leading and guiding the society.

Other art forms such as video games have not been left out, many murders committed have been attributed to video games as a result of which the deceased family sued the creators of the games with the argument that the killers were impacted by their video games, even though others continue to argue otherwise. This raises so many questions such as whether such crimes could have been avoided if the producers had thought of their responsibility to the society and considered the content critically.

Even though it can be argued that these links have not been conclusively proved, but there are various studies that have revealed the different effect of films on viewers (Igrartus & Frutos, 2017 &Hanewinkel, Sargent & Isensee, 2012) Therefore, Spaull (2014), opined that filmmakers should bear responsibility to society, and this responsibility must come from within the filmmaker. And it may be argued that the filmmaker is not the moral navigator of the society, but then, I will argue that the filmmaker is like a Navigator, and he must navigate the line of moral responsibility as film can impact negatively on society depending on the direction taken by the filmmaker

Admittedly, film is a capital-intensive venture driven by commercial motive and filmmakers will tell you this. In a focus group discussion with women executive producers in Kannywood in November, 2010, I asked a question on filmmakers bearing responsibility for their content as film made by women did not seems to depart from the same narratives as films made by men. One of the participants then responded that they produce films to sell. In other words, they care more about what will appeal to the viewers. even if it be to their own detriment as opposed to what may be considered to be right for the society. This raises a moral question on the ethical foundation of the industry. And it argued that, that the environment in which the film is being produced is a commercially driven environment. It is a capitalist environment, but then, at what expense? I therefore argue that considering the impact of film and within the framework of the various arguments whether minimal, or strong effects, filmmakers should guide society for public good.

Theoretical Framework
This paper is situated within the framework of ethical theories as filmmakers have ethical obligations to the society. The paper found situation or situational ethics as propounded by Joseph Fletcher (1905-1991) who was a Priest, of specific relevance to the argument on film maker's obligations to society. According to this model, circumstances should determine the decision to be made in any situation. He argues that the motive behind every action should be love (Rosenthal,2019)

A film revolves around narratives and to narrate these stories brings to the fore filmmakers and ethics. The filmmaker is faced with ethical challenges in filmmaking as a result of which he makes decisions. These decisions which will impact on the content, and by extension the audience should be situated within a specific context. Joseph Fletcher championed contextualizing issues of ethics. (Ebikaboere, 2012). It is against this backdrop that situation ethics has provided an appropriate framework for the paper.

Nigerian Filmmaker obligation to Society

There is no film that is made in an ideological vacuum. It is therefore important for a filmmaker to always ask himself or herself what are my reasons for making this film? What do I want to achieve by the content of this film? Filmmakers

produce films that can reshape our opinion and remold our behavior because film has the capacity to do so. If this is the case, as it is, then, the producers of content of such medium must bear social obligations to the society for whom they make such films.

This is the reason why we must discuss Nigerian filmmaker's obligation to the society, but not without examining the issue from the point of view of the filmmaker. Film as a cultural production just like all other creative industries products such as music among others have been commodified. This is not divorced from the entrepreneurial beginning of film at the Grand Café in Paris in 1895. People paid money to watch film. There was no film culture to model it after. According to Baran (2009), the industry and the people grow up with the film culture simultaneously. So, film as filmmakers will argue is a business and like in all businesses, people want to recoup their capital and then, make profit. Thus, some filmmakers argue that we are in business to make money. So, whatever sells, that will they make irrespective of its impact on society.

However, filmmakers must know that though film started as a novelty, an entertainment and as a show business, it has now transcended this and has assumed several dimensions (Nkana, 2006). Indeed, early African filmmakers like Ousmane Sembene of Senegal, the Dean of African cinema, Omourou Ganda, and Safi Fayel of Senegal understood this. They saw film as a political instrument for reclaiming the image of Africa, but the later filmmakers without professional training in filmmaking came into the industry with the commercial mindset to make money. According to Gebre-Egziabher (2006, p.2) early filmmakers in Africa saw themselves as social and political activists…"One of the dimensions that film has assumed which should interest filmmakers is that film has become a political and psychological tool for influencing others. The American dream for example gained popularity through the popular culture of film among others. The global audience internalised the message of the American dream promising a fresh start and economic prosperity, and is only been questioned by even the Americans after the recession. According to Del Carpio (2014, p.1), the American dream "is a central component of the American culture, and image: its frequent exploration in popular culture means the concept is familiar to domestic and global audiences"

The theme has been a major feature in popular culture in words and in films such as the "The Great Sopranos which is a TV series and Hollywood films such as "In Pursuit of Happiness" (Gabrielson, 2009)

Similarly, film should be a mean of reflecting the people's self-consciousness and self-expression. Cultural invasion today is not done through physical invasion, but though the use of technology (Ehanaora, 1989). We may as well ask if Nigerian filmmakers have lived up to their obligations to the society? My answer would be that while some of them have tried to do so, there is still much to be done. There are films with negative reoccurring such as the concentration on the depiction of the occult world which does not reflect our cultural value as a people. The repetitiveness of such negativity acts in most films as Enemaku observed as cited in (Ebewo, 2011) puts a mark against the ethical structure of the industry and this call for a retrospection of the ethical foundation of the industry.

Another concern is the negative portrayal of women in Nigerian film industry as weak, and perpetuating sex roles stereotypes. They are also presented as manipulative, wicked mother in laws (Okunna, 1996; 2002). In the film Mr. and Mrs. (2012), and also lay (2012), women were presented negatively. They were presented as being promiscuous, weak and as sex object

According to Johnson (2004, p.192) "…Film has been used and abused by many directors with regards to the promotion of immorality (what feminist critics call the male gaze) …film is not just a cultural element; It also creates a new culture. Therefore, directors must be careful about what foreign cultural elements they are bringing into their film. If they do not want to destroy their own culture and people. Film has the power to do this, and has been doing so. If the gaze is not created from the view point of the culture that produces the film, the director should know that his film is in the process of giving his society a new culture and should ask himself if that is what he wishes to do"

So, what do you want to bequeath to your society as a filmmaker? This obligation in my opinion is beyond the money that you are going to make as a filmmaker. It is a moral burden that you must bear. It is a social responsibility that you must bear as a filmmaker. How a filmmaker is able to navigate this moral line has impact on the film content. Also, how the filmmakers perceive their position in the society is important because it will find expression in films.

According to Adeleke (2013, p. 54), "Our Filmmakers would seem to have forgotten that performing arts like any other forms of arts, usually reveal the character of a given culture". He decries the types of character depicted in Nigerian films with specific reference to Yoruba film…They (Filmmakers) have wrongly imbibed an unwholesome culture from other Societies-America, Japan, China and India without synthensing the rationale for the production of such feature films by these societies".

Similarly, Ogunyemi (1996) as cited in Adeleke (2013, p,53) stated that some filmmakers have bastardised the culture of the people with specific reference to the Yoruba film industry. According to him, "Our culture is not just juju or

incantations. It involves our religion, belief system, dressing, greeting, demeanor, courtesies, etc. It's not just dressing shabbily and going about the bush chanting incantations etc…"

We have largely left our culture unpropagated to propagate the culture of others without deculturalising it to the context of our society. Without doing this, how can filmmaker produce films that protect, and at the same time promote our culture? How can our films be relevant in fueling development in our society as encapsulated in the Nigerian National Policy on Film? This is only possible if filmmakers understand that they have obligations to the society and government provides the necessary support to the industry.

It is in the light of the above Opubor's (1979) as cited in Adeleke (2013, p.54) stated that: ... if Black and African people are to intervene successfully in the protection of accurate images of their heritage in the media of the world, they must use the technology of the media in a way that is compatible with their ethos.

Similarly, filmmakers face ethical dilemmas, but these dilemmas should propel them to ask the relevant questions, and know where to draw the line in producing film for the society. Take for instance you are producing a film that revolves around a theft and your scripts outlines a step by step guide on how to steal which was dramatized. Thereafter, a viewer decided to commit a theft based on what he has seen in the film. Do you as a filmmaker feel responsible in anyway? Where do you draw the line as a filmmaker because of your obligation to the society? Are there scenes that the filmmaker could have omitted? These are ethical questions that the filmmaker must confront and it is the obligations that they have to the society.

Furthermore, some filmmakers would argue that our film simply reflects what is happening in the society which is true particularly as it relates to non-fictions film or direct cinema. Films should reflect the society, and it should reflect society, but where does a filmmaker draw the line between what to show and what not to show because of his responsibility to the society? Again, film should not just depict society only, but film should lead society. When film depicts happenings, fiction or otherwise, it normalizes such depictions for society. Thierry Jardine in 2001 for example killed Alisson Cambier, a school girl by stabbing her 30 times with two large knives as he saw in the film "Scream" produced in 1996. He admitted to the police that he copied the crime from the said film. Also, a Boy of 16 years of age who murdered his Mother admitted that he copied from the same film (Surutte, 2002; Barns, 2016)

Similarly, Micheal Hernandes killed his friend by stabbing more 40 times as a result of which he was sentenced to life imprisonment. He admitted to copying the crimes from the film, American Psycho and the silence of the lamb. While the Natural Born Killer produced in 1994 produced copycat crimes. Sarah Edmond and Ben Durras imitated what they saw in this film by killing and boasting about it to their friends. The columbine High school murder killings named their massacre as NBK which is the acronym for Natural Born Killers. There was also the Heath High School shooting ascribed to the same film (Barns, 2016)

Film is an opinion shaping and character molding medium which has the capacity to shape our opinions regarding issues. Also, it can mold and remold our character. This is what directors of film must take into cognizance when producing films.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper concludes that though Nigerian filmmakers have tried to express their obligations to the society as expressed in some of their film content, but there are still more films with reoccurring negative themes that puts into question the ethical foundation of the industry. This, the paper further concludes is not unconnected with the way and manner in which they understand their obligations to the society. Film can lead the Nigerian society by playing a significant role in healing the Nigerian society divided along ethnic and religious lines. Diversity is certainly not the problem of Nigeria. There are societies more diverse than Nigeria, but they have been more successful in managing their diversity. The cultural industry with film at its forefront can play an important role in addressing these problems, and thus play a critical role in national unity.

 Thus, this paper recommends to filmmakers that their obligations to society must be at the forefront of their mind, guiding production beyond commercial motive because film holds the seeds of regeneration with consequences whether intended or not. Similarly, this paper also recommends to the Nigerian government the need for further positive intervention in the film industry as a cultural industry because no society can achieve development without paying adequate attention to its cultural industries. The significance of the film industry in Nigeria should transcend elections times, and be viewed as a tool for national integration and development. Government should therefore provide the industry needs in terms of institutional, structural, and financial support.

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