

Film: An underutilized ideological tool for cultural advancements in Nigeria

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Abstract: Taking a cursory look at humans, societies, cultures and ideologies, one would notice that silence and loud agents of change have either advance such societies or under develop them. Even as we explore these terraces for any form of change-agent, we would discover that film has been utilized by Europe and America to bring about a positive orientations towards advancing their societies. If we even look further, we would realize that this self-actualization drive, many years ago, even spurred them towards annexation, all in the bid for national peace and unity. Why has film, as an ideology, not been able to drive the multicultural ideals of Nigeria towards development in technology, education, politics and our socio-economy? This paper will look at the methods of utilizing film as tool for patriotism adopted by Europe and America towards advancing their societal goals as well as the underutilization of same tool in development of a cultural identity and patriotism for Nigeria towards popular culture that would have brought about a huge advancement in areas of technological, political and socio-economy of Nigeria aa a country even with diverse ethnicity. The research method will be based on literatures and interviews towards actualizing the purpose of this paper, to portray film as a dynamic tool that must be able to connect us via its ideology, towards our acceptance of it as well as our reactions generally as a people.

Keywords: Film, Culture, Ideology, Film Making

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INTRODUCTION

Film or motion picture as known globally, is arguably one, among the lots, of the various sectors in the world that is most visually impactful in modern society. Its psychological effects on mankind is like an octopus tentacles on an object, which brings us to the meaning of film and filmmaking. What is filmmaking? A **film** – “also called a **movie, motion picture, moving picture, picture, photoplay** or (slang) **flick**– is a work of visual art that simulates experiences and otherwise communicates ideas, stories, perceptions, feelings, beauty, or atmosphere through the use of moving images. These images are generally accompanied by sound and, more rarely, other sensory stimulations.[1]

Another definition went further to see filmmaking from a digital perspective and therefore described the term digital filmmaking to “refer to a number of different processes and techniques used in modern films, and can simply mean the use of digital cameras, or more extensive digital aspects such as characters and environments created completely within a computer.” [2]

Digital cinematography, ****in preparing our minds towards the essence of this paper, “is the process of capturing (recording) a motion picture using digital

image sensors rather than through film stock. As digital technology has improved in recent years, this practice has become dominant. Since the mid-2010s, most movies across the world are captured as well as distributed digitally.” [3]

In discussing the potency of film and how it can suede people’s behavior, the word film will be used interchangeably with motion pictures or movies for the purpose of this presentation. As we know, it has various genres that have rubbed positively on individuals, groups, which make up the heterogeneous societies, thereby making us see the world from these various perspectives.

We must know that the transformation of people, their thoughts, ideologies and even cultural norms to popular culture via the impact of films is undeniably real for all to see. This in turns depend on its usage and intents. Film, as we may know, is a revolution that has changed the world towards the objectives and goals of those who know its potency as a weapon or tool to achieve whatsoever purposes.

Europe and America exploited filmmaking to the best of their abilities to achieve their purposes politically, socially and economically in the bid to develop their societies and

build their citizens confidence towards patriotic values. The Russian filmmakers are not left out as they equally explored filmmaking to a point where various film theorists sprung to begin to see filmmaking as a definite form.

In the cause of these explorations, Socialism was entrenched more into the minds of the Russians via filmmaking, same way Adolf Hitler of Germany, Mussolini of Italy, and Britain amongst others used filmmaking as a tool of propaganda to achieve their aims and country's interest.

Etymology and Alternative Terms/Concepts

For the purpose of this paper, the name "film, flick, movie, motion picture," may be used interchangeably and therefore should not be confused to mean different thing here.

Film has been defined by many scholars and researchers as the thin layer of photochemical emulsion on a celluloid strip, solely for the purpose of a medium via recording and displaying of motion pictures. It was in common usage years' back and even now that movie making has moved from shooting on film strips to digital filmmaking as well as its processes of editing as well.

The word "flick" is a slang, a derivative of the verb flicker. It was first used and recorded in 1926. It is believed to have been used in the process of filmmaking due to the flickering appearances of films done yester-years. This is not to exclude other popular terms used by filmmakers then like, "the big screen, the silver screen, moving picture, cinema, photoplay" etc.

The Role of Films In Our Society

No doubt that many countries, since the invention of film, have exploited its technology to the best of their abilities to shape the minds of their people, cultures, ideologies in other to enable them get the desired supports and acceptances outside their immediate communities with the concept of expansionist drive to make their country's culture and ideology popular.

These countries have been able to use filmmaking to create the type of make-believe they want others to see and accept. These could be seen in the manner the British and Americans made movies. The success of colonialism in Africa was duly to the manner in which film was manipulated to twist the minds of Africans to see the White people as superior to the Blacks. Films done by filmmakers then made others to see the white people next to God.

The Americans were most successful in this mind twisting ideology which lingered on for so long in the minds of many, to the extent when the September 11th debacle struck, many saw the incident as unrealistic even though it happened. Many whispered in unbelief as they were joined by the rest of the world to wave the attack as unreal until footages of the infiltrators, the terrorists, via aircrafts hitting supposedly unreachable targets. The

gullibility of America, for the first time, was shown to the world. The silence from shock was loud. We should not forget that before now, America films have the dominant success, power and later influence via their movies over their rivals, from the conquering of the Red Indians, depicted in American movies to be heartless uncultured humans, wining of various wars with enemies, ready to die out of love and respect for the America flag, willing to go to war just to save an American, consequences and reprisals in going into war with America. These film concepts of America by their filmmakers created an inner fear in the minds of all and respect for America and Americans.[4].

No films told the rest of the world the vulnerability of America, the damages of racism, the increase in human abuses, corruption etc. The success of the usage of film as a tool for mind-persuasions by the American filmmakers, created the acceptance and popularity of vulgar America slangs, mode of dressing, food, capitalism and democracy amongst others around the globe

The Russians on the other hand, like other countries who were quick to know the power of the weapon called film, imbibed in many countries the need for communism/socialism. Accordingly, the "Russian movie production started in the Russian Empire and steadily developed during the Soviet period. Modern Russian cinema has been evolving since the 2010s, seeing an increase in governmental support and the popularity of state-sponsored and independent works among audiences." [5]

These countries including France truly exploited and explored film as a tool for propaganda and propagation of their culture and ideology to other countries. This is not to say that these fight for global dominance was through film alone as there were other modes of application, but the impart of film appeal and its make-believe via movies are incomparable.

THE CULTURAL INFLUENCE OF FILM

No film is made without a purpose, but the concern here is the deliberateness of such movie in sharpening the way of life of a people towards seeing the need to give all they have to protect their culture against external influence that may be considered inimical to their collective existence.

Again what is the meaning of culture? Culture though a bit complex and difficult in its definition, however has to do with humans, their environment and society. The word culture is laced with diverse meaning which of course led to various attempts by many to define it as well as itemizing the components that make up culture. Let us not forget that the word 'culture' comes from the Latin word 'cultura,' which relates to cult or worship, invariably referring to the result of human interaction.

Culture, however, has been defined in some ways simply, as the manner in which human beings learn, share their behavior and interact in their communities.

The first definition of culture came from a British anthropologist Edward Taylor in the 19th century and was captured in this manner: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".[6]

Humans can coexist on terms of diversity in unity, but holistically, does this concept unite same people's minds towards a single purpose of protecting the unity in diversity that binds them together with the last of their blood?

Looking at the manner in which film as a social tool is utilized, It is easier for the society to see the concerns, attitudes, flaws, and strengths in films than it is to decipher from our daily interactions. Films have been very effective in challenging the thought lines of the views of people who make up the public in any society, and thereafter influence how we deliberately interrogate ourselves towards embracing societal changes.

I remember how Chinese and Indian movies made the round here in Nigeria even though majority of them were not subtitles. We believed then that the Indians were jolly good fellows who could solve problems with just music and dance alone. This was similar thoughts by us, though with a different perspective on the Chinese whose movies were constantly reflective of fights at any slight provocation. These analogies drawn from the two movies may not be true but that was how strong an imposed opinions were on me as a teenager.

The Role of Films in Driving Cultural Patriotism

For us to have a detailed grasp of what is expected of the impacts of films on the culture and ideology of a people in any given society, we must attempt to define the 'force' that may be triggered from the subconscious to the conscious of the actions of people with same beliefs and ideologies influenced by any form of what they see or feel from their emotional perspective. Now what is patriotism?

In the book "Patriotism, Morality and Peace by Stephen Nathanson (1993, 34–35), defines patriotism as involving:

1. "Special affection for one's own country
2. A sense of personal identification with the country
3. Special concern for the well-being of the country
4. Willingness to sacrifice to promote the country's good"[7]

Looking keenly on the above listed, one can come up with the summation of Standard encyclopedia of philosophy, in an article titled "Patriotism" *First published Mon Jun 1, 2009; substantive revision Wed Dec 16, 2020, which defined it "as love of one's country, identification with it, and special concern for its well-being and that of compatriots."*[8]

Looking at the expressive manner in which Stephen Nathanson looks at patriotism, one would begin to understand the manner in which movies made in America and Europe are different from movies made in

Nigeria. Though one might want to be tempted to say here that Nigeria is still developing but the ideological stance of films made in Nigeria is very loud and very rich in Cinematography more than toeing patriotic lines.

Films all over the world have been appreciated greatly by film lovers in regards to how they creatively make people see movies differently. America have been able to make the world recognize the patriotic gestures of every American towards their national flag, fellow Americans in cultural ideology. As a people viewed through the film lenses by the collectives, every American is patriotic. This may not be true but people tend to believe what they see.

For example, the 1917 American silent war drama film "**The Birth of Patriotism**" directed by E. Magnuss Ingleton and starring Irene Hunt, Ann Forrest, and Leo Pierson has the following plot summary: "Carelessness on the part of Johnny Roberts and the growing drudgery of married life causes an estrangement between Johnny and his wife Mary. The final break comes when Johnny, sick with a fever, returns home to be accused of drunkenness by Mary. Johnny leaves his wife to seek solace in Anne, the innkeeper's daughter, and the two live happily together until the outbreak of the war. When England is threatened, Johnny enlists and is sent to the front. In the meantime, Mary, with her little baby, seeks Anne out to ask for some of her husband's money to take care of the child. A mutual understanding springs up between the two women and upon Johnny's arrival home, the self-sacrificing Anne disappears and Johnny returns to his wife and child."[9]

Most movie made by Americans then were basically war movies which hinged on the need to be patriotic and even till this century, American filmmakers still see the need to water the soil of patriotism in America and these are reflective in movies, but not limited to: Top Gun (1986), The Patriot (2000), Miracle (2004), Born On The Fourth of July (1989), Glory (1989) and so on.

The Westerners have deliberately and consciously evolved through films in imbibing patriotism in the people just like the Americans. They even went steps ahead in the application of the theorem of colonialism in Africa and other countries.

In Which We Serve is a 1942 British patriotic war film directed by Noël Coward and David Lean, who made his debut as a director. It was made during the Second World War with the assistance of the Ministry of Information.

"The film opens with the narration: 'This is the story of a ship'. In 1941 HMS *Torrin* engages German transports in a night-time action during the Battle of Crete but at dawn the destroyer comes under attack from German bombers. A critical hit forces the crew to abandon ship as it rapidly capsizes. Some of the officers and ratings manage to find a Carley float while being intermittently strafed by German planes.

"The story of the ship is told in flashback, using their memories. The first person to reveal his thoughts is Captain Kinross, who recalls the summer of 1939 when

the *Torrin* is being rushed into commission as the possibility of war becomes a near certainty.

"The *Torrin* spends a quiet Christmas in the north of Scotland during the Phoney War but in 1940 it fights its first engagement during the Battle of Narvik. During the action the ship is struck by a torpedo. The damaged *Torrin* is towed back to port, all the time being harried by dive bombers.

"Safely back in harbour, Captain Kinross tells the assembled ship's company that during the battle nearly all the crew performed as he would expect but one man did not. However he surprises everyone when he says that he let him off with a caution as he feels that, as captain, he failed to make him understand his duty.

"Returning to the present, the float survivors watch the capsized *Torrin* take on water and slowly sink. The raft is again strafed by German planes and some men are killed or wounded. Shorty Blake recalls in flashback how he met his wife-to-be, Freda, on a train while on leave. She is related to the *Torrin's* affable Chief Petty Officer Hardy. When both men return to sea, Freda moves in with Hardy's wife and mother-in-law.

"The *Torrin* participates in the Dunkirk evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force (portrayed in the film by the 5th Battalion of the Coldstream Guards). Blake gets a letter to say that Freda has given birth to his son during the Plymouth Blitz but that Hardy's wife and mother-in-law were killed. He has to tell Hardy, who is writing a letter home, the bitter news.

"The survivors on the life raft watch the *Torrin* finally sink. Captain Kinross leads a final "three cheers" for the *Torrin*. A British destroyer soon begins rescuing the men. Captain Kinross talks to the survivors and collects addresses from the dying.

"Telegrams are sent to the crew's loved ones. Kinross addresses the ship's survivors in a military depot in Alexandria in Egypt. He tells them that although they lost their ship and many friends, who now "lie together in fifteen hundred fathoms", he notes that these losses should inspire them to fight even harder in the battles to come. Captain Kinross then shakes hands with all the ratings as they leave the depot. When the last man goes, the emotionally tired captain silently acknowledges his surviving officers before walking away.

"An epilogue concludes: bigger and stronger ships are being launched to avenge the *Torrin*; Britain is an island nation with a proud, indefatigable people; Captain Kinross is now in command of a battleship. Its massive main guns fire at the enemy." [10]

Nigeria Films and Patriotism

Looking at the manner the film industry rode into Nigeria, one may begin to see where lies the missing link to using film as a driving force for patriotism. It is said that the film industry came into Nigeria in the 19th century, and also worth of mention is the movie shot during that period. The movie titled "PALAVA" is considered the first movie

to be shot in Nigeria with many cast as Nigerians and it was directed by Geoffrey Barkas in 1926 for a production company called British Instructional Films, with locations here in Nigeria.

According to Wikipedia on Colonial Nigeria, "Britain annexed Lagos in 1861 and established the Oil River Protectorate in 1884. British influence in the Niger area increased gradually over the 19th century, but Britain did not effectively occupy the area until 1885. Other European powers acknowledged Britain's dominance over the area in the 1885 Berlin Conference." [11]

The British films shot in Nigeria or occupied territories were an extension of their annexation drive and imbibing of patriotism in Nigerians, whom they tagged barbarians, towards the Queen of England. The British government and its filmmakers were never concerned about patriotism amongst Nigerians as multilingual entities, and this was sadly reflected in an interview of the director of PALAVA, who happily referred to getting his casts from "cannibal pagan tribes" and was comfortable as well as with their "blind savagery" to the project and the Queen. From the conceptualization of a film industry in Nigeria, it was clear from the manner they made films, they had a different purpose in what they intended to achieve. The films made in Nigeria then were not meant for the Nigeria audience but the Britons. The films were to debase Nigerians as a people and through film propaganda make them see anything 'white' as superior to anything 'black'. This simply means that racism, from the colonial era through their film unit was deliberately and proudly imbibed in us and that 'racist' line of thought is reflective in our collectives as favoritism, paddy-paddy, tribalism, ethnicity etc and movies in Nigeria till date are made along that line dominantly.

The Colonial film unit was never set up to make Africans utilize the tools of filmmaking like they, the colonialists, did. This is why filmmakers then and now in Africa see filmmaking from purely aesthetics perspective rather than from patriotic point of reasoning. Movies in Nigeria are beautifully made with direct exposure of the happenings within a locale, which in effect is not seen as a Nigeria issue for Nigerians anywhere in Nigeria to accept as "our own". Historical movies, documentaries and other genres of the art of filming is conceptualized from a myopic standpoint which can not be felt nationally as national interest.

Take for instance movies made in the north, west, east or south, such films only have influences within those locale, which is not acceptable by those living outside the domain where such movies are made, but therefore seen by others as not reflective of who they are as a people. However, while films made by Nigeria filmmakers in Nigeria have failed to create patriotism from a national perspective here in Nigeria, other countries seem to view the films they see from Nigeria dealing with frivolities such as rituals, religion, bribery and corruption as representing the Nigeria cultures, whereas not. Placing films on patriotism from Nigeria, Europe and America, one would

be able to differentiate between the Nigeria films devoid of patriotism and theirs which still focus on patriotism.

The question like what type of movies does Nigeria make may arise, but again are all the movies from America and Europe Centered around patriotism alone? The answer is NO, but majority of their films express patriotism as film treatment. These countries deliberately started to utilize and direct the tools of filmmaking into building a patriotic ideology and culture and because they extended same principles to luring Nigerians to accept the Queen as their ruler, made films from that standpoint. They deliberately made Nigeria to miss this film theory on patriotism on purpose. The colonialists were not head bent on helping Nigerians to know what it takes to be patriotic because of their precise plans from the onset to make Nigerians, like other black nations, to see themselves as inferior to the white people. They encouraged Nigerians to patronize viewing their films from the perspective of film appreciation, from an aesthetic viewpoint with mind twisting as the end result. Did they achieve that? The answer is YES.

Aesthetically Nigeria filmmakers have achieved a lot and these are reflective in the cinematographic concepts inherent in every movie or documentary done. Within the segmented locale that make up Nigeria, films made by filmmakers are highly appreciated but these films have not been able to develop a holistic film identity, ideology and culture that can make Nigerians deliberately over time be influenced towards seeing Nigeria as every Nigerian project and the need to guard it jealously with their lives when the need arises. One may not be far from asking the harmless question: what is Nigeria pop culture and what elements have influenced it? How does the world view Nigeria via their movies?

CONCLUSION

The strength of the effect of movies in our society today cannot be over emphasized or dare undermined. As we know, the world over, the screen has become a mind twisting tool used for any form of propaganda via entertainment and whether we like it or not, the negative impacts are far lesser than the positives. Therefore, the viewers or audiences have a duty to be critical about what are thrust before them by the filmmakers and if they sit up, it could become an indirect mode for the filmmakers to get feedback for their films and to further improve on aspects to make them achieve their purposes.

Taking a cursory look at the manner films grew in America and Europe, one would see that their governments intentionally played a great role in helping to direct the filmmakers creative minds towards seeing the need for patriotism as an ideology in build their cultural values as a people. They had film commissions occupied

with persons whose only thoughts were hinged on achieving their set goals- patriotism.

If Nigeria government can be intentional in engaging filmmakers from various parts of Nigeria to develop and build a blueprint for culture and then an ideology towards patriotism via movies, that would make Nigeria filmmakers and Nigerians to begin to see Nigeria as a collective project which would not only cut across every Nigerian but also become an export to the world. R this may be a long term project but certainly would achieve its purpose. Aesthetics alone is not enough for any filmmaker to explore, if the stories via cinematography cannot build and enhance its country's ideological culture. Film is ineffective if viewed as film for film sake.

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