

ARTS AND INDUSTRY IN IMAGE LAUNDERING: NATIONAL FILM INSTITUTE IN FOCUS

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Abstract

Artistes, like other business people across the globe, are now open to series of opportunities to market their arts. This has led to high competitiveness for art creators; craft, performing and visual arts. Consumers now have tremendous choice. Artisans, craft entrepreneurs, visual artists and all the intermediaries in the supply chain must constantly strive to improve the quality of their products and services, the production processes, their brand identity and the effectiveness of their marketing strategies, if they wish to improve their business performance, productivity and competitiveness and win the hearts and minds of customers. The creative industry is becoming bigger and more competitive and thus has now arguably become a means of national rebranding, especially image laundering. For this paper, focus is on National Film Institute (NFI) and how image laundering is affective of the institution.

Keywords: Creative, Arts, Image, Laundering

Introduction

The indigenous film industry in Nigeria, globally acknowledged as Nollywood, has phenomenally grown in volume and quality. It is now the second largest industry, according to UNESCO (2010). Globally, Nollywood ranks second after India's Bollywood, which boasts of a similar history of film development (2013: 2 & 14), since 1903. Nigeria's film industry feat is coming on the heels of the more than one century of public exhibition of motion picture in Nigeria and about four decades of academic interest in the study of film.

This paper aims to harness the documentary evidence of the creative energies that are derived from the abundant heritage and legacies handed down to the present generation, as witnessed in our video-films, propelled by social and cultural desires, which ultimately gave birth to Nollywood, one of the most significant African interventions in global film and media. Theatre, from its origin in ritual, has always been about relationships. First, between man and the forces beyond him, and then

later, with the attention of the ritual element, it goes on to the relationship between man and his fellow man. This is why the study of man in society is the preoccupation of the Creative Arts, represented by the Theatre and Film, based on the entertainment, educational and cultural contents. The implication is that the training that NFI provides is to equip students with a sound knowledge and prepare them with the necessary creative and technical skills to help develop a viable entertainment industry, now globally known as the Creative Industries.

At the end of the student's years of training at the NFI, s/he is expected to have a competent grasp of the theoretical underpinning of Film Arts, involving the general principle on which the whole practice is based. Being essentially a creative art, the expectation is that the students admitted and trained at the NFI should possess the intellectual independence, imaginative ability, self-expression, and the professional skills to function better in the industry in particular and the society at large. As a process, filmmaking faces specific circumstances anchored in the economic, social and cultural status of the national audio-visual culture, underpinned by the country's legal framework governing audio-visual works (4).

However, the curricula of many universities running programmes in film studies have not adequately responded to the critical role of the university in meeting the ideal quality of films. This is where the NFI comes in. A key strength of artisans and visual artists lies in their creativity and craftsmanship in expressing it. This gives their output a distinct traditional, cultural or symbolic flavour, which arouses the interest and matches the emotional needs and aesthetic tastes of discerning customers in specialized niches of domestic and export markets.

Perceived Image of Nigeria

Every nation has a perceived image and for Nigeria, the last two decades has been controversial hence the 'bad image/identity' given the nation. Ojo and Aghedo contend that:

To a large extent, Nigeria exemplifies the paradox of the postcolonial state in Africa, where the relevance of the state diminishes every day. Nigerians carry on as if the state does not exist; they build their own houses, provide their own private security, build their own roads, and sink their own boreholes (Amuwo, 2009; Lewis, 1996; Ihonvbere, 1994). These internal contradictions of the Nigerian state with scanty means for survival lead to despondency and low morale. The army of unemployed youths takes advantage of the opportunity for rebellion

and violence against the state and other anti-social behavior such as armed robbery, cultism, and a growing kidnapping enterprise (Osumah & Aghedo, 2010; Onovo, 2009; Awah, 2009). Hence, for both rulers and ruled, disorder is more than a “political instrument” that highlights the criminalisation of the state and in ways that allow the formal means of governance to run side by side with the informal (Bayart, *et al.*, 1999). By assessing these formal and informal means, this paper makes a modest contribution to the existing literature on the subject matter and in understanding the laundering of the image of the nation in relation to its value system. (Ojo and Aghedo, 2013: 87)

Nation-branding differs from product-branding because the parameters for the former are far more intricate and they take considerable time to manifest. Such parameters include domestic social, economic, and political well-being. Therefore, re-branding a nation without proper governance is like putting the cart in front of the “social transformation” horse (Albert, 2009: 432 qtd. In Ojo and Aghedo). The corporate reputation which re-branding engenders often enhances, regains, transfers, and/or recreates the corporate brand equity (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006 qtd. In Ojo and Aghedo). It is often driven by internal and/or external factors. Nevertheless, it is not a magic formula, because to distil the vastness of a country's national identity into something relevant and communicable to distinct audiences is often very challenging. Whether in nations, organizations, or individuals, reputation can be observed from behavioral patterns (Bryant, 2005).

Not every fibre of social life in Nigeria is up for image laundering or re-branding. Not only has the nation achieved some enviable feats, but some Nigerians at individual level have reached the pinnacle of their professions at the international level. One strategy of the re-branding effort has been to showcase these stories of significant successes. Nigerians are said to have good survival instincts, to love life, and to be good followers and imitators, be it for good or bad. The name, Nigeria is well known worldwide, notably, for its prowess in soccer, having won the Under 17 World Cup in 1985, 1993, and 2007. The country also won the under-23 Olympic Soccer Gold in 1996. Soccer has become a unifying force that cuts across ethnicity and religion. Nigeria has contributed enormously to global football development (Ojo and Aghedo, 2013).

Nigeria's contributions to United Nations peacekeeping initiatives and the subsequent decorations of Nigerian officers for meritorious service are arguably second to none. The country's peacekeepers have been sent to Bosnia-Herzegovina,

Chad, Lebanon, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, and other global hotspots (Okolie, 2010). Between 1960 and 2010, the country committed over 250,000 men and women to support UN peacekeeping operations, losing 2,000 troops in the process and expending \$10 billion in spite of its lean resources (Okolie, 2010). This has made Nigeria the fourth largest contributor of troops to the United Nations since 1960. As a result, the United Nations has designated the country as a training centre for international peacekeeping troops (Ojo and Aghedo, 2013).

Furthermore, a Nigerian, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, served at the top of the World Bank hierarchy as vice president. Today, she is the Director General of the World Trade Organisation, WTO. Several Nigerians, both at home and in the diaspora, are excelling in their various professions which led to the establishment of Nigerian Diaspora Commission, NIDCOM, in order to "... provide for the engagement of Nigerians in Diaspora in the policies, projects and participation in the development of Nigeria for the purpose of utilizing the human capital and material resources of Nigerians in Diaspora towards the overall socio-economic, cultural and political development of Nigeria" (Nigeria in Diaspora Establishment Act, 2017:1).

There are more sources of inspiration and re-branding. The stories of Wole Soyinka, who became the first black African Nobel Laureate for Literature in 1986; late Chinua Achebe, another literary icon and author of the legendary novel *Things Fall Apart*, whose protagonist Okonkwo has become a household name in most parts of the world; Booker Prize winner Ben Okri; the recent rave of the literary world Adichie Ngozi Chimamanda; former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations, Emeka Anyoku; businessman, Adebayo Ogunlesi, who recently acquired London Gatwick Airport; Victor Oladokun of the Christian Broadcasting Network; and the US-based computer wizard, Philip Emeagwali, to name but a few. These are all well-known. These achievers show that Nigeria is not all a gory picture of crime and violence but also of creativity, skills, and enduring legacies of universal acclaim (Ojo and Aghedo, 2013).

Laundering the Image of the Nation: NFI in Focus

Image laundering is a very difficult job, especially, when the product is already labelled bad in the market. I saw this on a social media platform recently, and it caught my attention immediately, though author is unknown to me. There are things that help to launder the image of the nation. However, these things are not visible to many; only to selected privileged ones. This again, is where the NFI comes in. Being the foremost institute for film, NFI has a responsibility to launder this image accordingly as against propaganda of imperialists. How can the Institute do this?

Encourage the exposure of students to current trends and happenings in the motion picture industry globally.

The maiden edition of the Nigerian International Students Film Festival, (NISFFEST), with the theme “Nurturing the 21st Century Filmmaker” was held in 2006. Where are those filmmakers? In 2013, a similar festival, the Uni-Jos/Lag/NFI World Bank STEP-B International Students Film Festival, was organized under the auspices of the World Bank STEP-B Centre of Excellence on Multimedia Technology and Cinematography, (CoEMMCine), with the partnership of the Universities of Lagos and Jos. The dividends from that collaboration are however lying waste. These were Students-specific Film Festivals which can be re-packaged and strengthened to become a platform for interaction and exchange of ideas and exposure of our talents to global prominence, and be ambassadors of image-laundering by the NFI.

There is urgent need to work to make the NFI more visible

This can be achieved through attendance at local and international gatherings, markets and festivals in order to build on the successes already recorded at home and abroad by students and alumni of the Institute. Students and their resource persons should also be the major beneficiaries of this.

Encourage the organization of Film Weeks and Film Screenings

This can be done in collaboration with embassies of friendly nations in Nigeria as a veritable platform of exchanging educational and cultural information and exposure of the students to other cultures.

NFI is presently affiliated to the Department of Theatre and Film Arts of the University of Jos. This means that it is accredited by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). In tandem with the school's mission statement; “Capacity Building and Skills development in the Nigerian Motion Picture Industry”, the Institute is capable of setting achievable targets of taking the Nation to the highest standard of global attainment in character development and professional excellence. This can be accomplished through the Degree programme (affiliated with the University of Jos) but which can over time, become independent; the Diploma programme, Certificate and In-Plant programmes, and the University/Polytechnic Outreaches (which are almost moribund!), with contemporary Curricula to launder the image of the nation through the annual film festival, churning out excellent directors and production of excellent works. There is need for revival and reinvigoration where necessary.

It appears as if the gradual but glorious rise of the National Film Institute was truncated at the turn of the second half of the last decade. A lot of developmental initiatives and strides put in place were allowed to fizzle out. It therefore becomes imperative for the NFI to be repositioned within the shortest time available.

Finishing school: NFI of the Future!

The National Film Institute, (NFI), is on the trajectory of development and growth, both in infrastructural and human resources/intellectual capacity. It can actually be upgraded to the status of a finishing school for all institutions offering courses in Film Arts/Studies across the country, where their students/graduates will come and spend between 6 to 9 months of intensive post-graduate training to prepare them for professional practice. This can be achieved with the co-operation and collaboration of the appropriate stakeholders and all and sundry, to bequeath to posterity, the NFI of the Future!

Academic Imperative

Promotion of a dynamic and responsive curriculum/syllabus to enhance training reflective of the contemporary needs of the industry.

- In achieving this, the curriculum/syllabus should be overhauled and broadened to include such components that constitute the new media and emerging trends, to prepare the industry for the challenges ahead; a five-year span should normally be maintained for the review of the curriculum/syllabus, in accordance with global best practices;
- The curriculum/syllabus will have to respond to and cover social, cultural, economic, political and technological issues which affect filmmakers directly or indirectly and the development of the new Nigeria of our dream;
- The growing need for alumni of educational institutions to give back to their alma mater cannot be over-emphasized. This should be encouraged by institutionalizing the Alumni Relations Unit under a new Advancement and Linkages Directorate.
- Infrastructural development should be pursued within the ambit of the law establishing the Institute and the privileges available to it under the TETFund.

Conclusion

As scholars and administrators in the academia, it is our collective quest for capacity building and professionalism in the Nigerian motion picture industry of the 21st century that will augur well for image laundering. This is possible to achieve through

astute management of human and capital resources coupled with effective administration, and the expansion of the curriculum base. The paramount objective is to bequeath an innovative and sound legacy to generations yet unborn, for the sustainable development of the motion picture industry in Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

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