

ANALYTICAL DISCOURSE EXAMINING LOCAL FUNDING MODELS TO REVIVE THE FLAGGING AFRICAN FILM INDUSTRY USING THE NAMIBIAN CASE STUDY

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Abstract:-

The dearth of colonial imperialism and the birth and emergence of new nation's leading to postcolonial era, left the African film industry with a major obstacle related to funding. For the African film industry to grow, it requires a substantive investments initially by governments and a working funding model as these are some of the major challenges to developing a sustainable film industry.

Key words:- *Cultural imperialism, native culture, imperial culture, funding model, creative industry.*

INTRODUCTION

The film industry in Namibia, as is the case elsewhere in Africa, was the sum of cultural imperialism which was used as a vehicle of colonization. The industry was under pressure if not forced to respond to, or even promote the values and structures of imperialism. Through the creative industry, in this case, the film industry, the west exported their imperial culture to the “native culture” with the assumption that these needed to be “civilized”.

African funding model

In most African states funding the film industry is a major obstacle. Countries receiving external funding, have their film makers forced to produce films for the European market.

At independence, most African states had nascent film industry whose film makers were unskilled and poorly prepared to compete with the well-established film industries of the west. Ironically, even this desperate attempts has not yielded results as African films do not sell well on this market. (Armes, 2006 and Haynes 2011). According to Ndiaye (2010), filmmakers in most African countries are faced with a variety of obstacles when it comes to funding films. If a film is produced, African filmmakers are then faced with a second problem, which is the distribution of the films to their audiences. “The problem of distributing audio-visual products is arguably the primary blockage in the film and television value chain in the region” (Joffe & Jacklin, 2001, p. 13).

Most of the films produced in Africa do not reach the African market and do not make returns on investment. Market liberalization in many sectors also affects African filmmakers and the distribution of their films. For instance, “locally produced films have to compete with the influx of imported films that are also cheaper for the movie theatres” (Bomba, 2010, p.52). This has affected the ability of local filmmakers to market their products locally and to have them shown in local film houses. In fact, often the whole infrastructure such as the content of films, production costs, expertise, and exhibition venues is not set up to serve the local market (Armes, 2006). Cultural enterprises themselves, such as film producers, do not undertake sufficient activities to develop their markets and audiences, especially within the local market, where public awareness of the arts is often lacking (However & Kamara, 2004).

Kamara further stressed the importance of developing a sustainable market that would “allow actors across the value chain of a cultural product such as film producers to earn a living on a longterm from their creative activities without the aid of donor funds” (Kamara, 2004, p. 24). In Africa two different film industries co-exist: on the one hand, a low-budget, privately funded, high volume industry supported by video sales and on the other hand, a more government supported industry that mostly produces conventional films as per western definition (Thiec, 2009). The Nigerian film industry ‘Nollywood’, leads the first model based on video productions (DVD and TV) across the continent and abroad, now also being made accessible through African movie channels provided by pay television operators such as DSTV. Regardless of the fact that the films are often referred to as technically poor quality films, Nollywood became the first notable production and distribution model on the continent (Okome, 2007, Haynes, 2011).

The Nollywood model

According to Pager (2011), the Nollywood model has thrived without the government’s financial support and a functioning copyright system. In fact, it might have been the lack of government support structures that encouraged Nollywood (Mhando, 2009; Hanyes 2011; Sanogo, 2015). This does not mean that there are no regulatory structures in place regarding film in Nigeria. The Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) established in 1979 had a great influence on changing ownership of production and distribution from foreign to Nigerian ownership after independence (Ekwuazi, 1987). Already at the onset, however, there seems to have been some confusion about the mandate of the NFC and other government agencies such as Film Division of the Ministry of Information and the Nigerian Film Distribution Company. The second crucial government agency in the sphere of regulation is the National Film and Video Censors Board which, in the latest report that was available online, published a six year review on all the films that were censored, classified and registered each year between 1994 and 2000 (National Film and Video Censors Board, 2000). The report suggested that investment in the Nigerian film industry grew from 25 million in 1994 to 3.4 billion in 1999. Ekwuazi and Nasidi proposed that processes and policies should be more streamlined and that the Nigeria Film Corporation should play a central role in advancing production of films, ownership, distribution, and audience accessibility. It would, however, appear that the so-called Nollywood films escape a system of regulation and censorship.

The spread of the Nollywood model was aided by digital technology that became a driving force in the development of filmmaking in Africa (Okome, 2007). This means that with the availability of affordable digital equipment, most African filmmakers can now tell their stories. However, Thiec (2009) argued that as much as technology brought possibilities for developing countries to tell their stories, a number of preconditions like appropriate regulatory frameworks, availability of qualified professionals, exhibition and distribution channels, to mention but a few, still appear necessary for the development of a sustainable industry in the traditional sense. It would then be prudent to further investigate under which circumstances involvement of the Nigerian government in the Nollywood industry could maximize its potential or cause its demise.

The Nollywood model seems to depend heavily on DVD sales and the fact that the country has the largest population in Africa contributes to its success. In an attempt to see how the Nollywood’s self-funded model could potentially work in Namibia, one might have to consider the country’s population of 2, 3 million that might only be able to sustain a very small number of such films. However, Bomba (2010) argued that even though Namibia has a small local audience, the

country can use its advanced technological infrastructure to reach global audiences for Namibian films. This implies that regardless of a small market for locally produced films, Namibia too could have the potential, through its advanced infrastructure, to produce films that can be distributed internationally.

The South African model

The second funding model discussed in this study is the South African model, which seemingly follows the conventional approaches of filmmaking (as per western definition). Ndiaye (2010) wrote of a phenomenon where films are shot on film cameras (or with highest definition film cameras), in more customary conditions, screened at international festivals, and often made by directors who mostly have studied in Europe or the United States. While the existence of filmmakers trained in the 'West' and the occurrence of African films being screened at international festivals might be found all over Africa, South Africa seems to lead in this group. In contrast to Nigeria, the South African government is more directly involved in the development of its film industry through the provision of development funds and the formulation of favorable policies. The South African film industry is subsidized and incentivized through government institutions such as the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and the Provincial Film Commissions (NFVF 2012). The incentives are also used to attract foreign productions to South Africa and encourage them to spend money locally. The above mentioned bodies were established to support the development of the local film industry. For instance, the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) is a statutory body that was created in terms of Act No 73 of 1997 as amended by the Cultural Laws Amendment Act 36 of 2001, with the aim to develop and promote the South African film and video industry, domestically and internationally (Botha, 2003 and NFVF, 2012). That would include the funding of local films and the development of skills in the country, with a special emphasis on previously disadvantaged groups, as well as assisting filmmakers to market their work internationally (Thiec, 2009).

Some of the objectives of the NFVF are to develop and promote the film and video industry as well as conduct research into any field of the film and video industry. It strives to support the production of high quality film concepts and screenplays, to increase training initiatives across the value chain, attract foreign film productions to South Africa, to control the negative impacts of piracy, as well as sign co-production treaties with other industries (NFVF, 2013). However, "despite the establishment of the NFVF and its significant positive initiatives such as the Film Resource Unit to develop audiences for South African films, local filmmakers are still struggling to find an audience for their work (Botha, 2008 p. 17). Furthermore, the NFVF's limited funding cannot cover the entire training, production, distribution and exhibition needs of the film industry (Thiec, 2009).

According to Botha (2008), it became necessary for South Africa to establish partnerships with other film industries after the collapse of apartheid. As a result, co-production treaties were signed with countries such as Canada, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland. Normally such treaties would include co-productions where two or more countries could share resources and skills to produce a film project. But more important is the possibility of accessing finances from the partner countries (Botha, 2008).

The National Film and Video Foundation have been compiling and publishing annual reports every year since 2007 and those reports are available online. It can be assumed that those reports enable the NFVF to determine the industry's needs such as where to allocate funds, lacking skills and evaluate the success of its projects. According to Thiec (2009), "South Africa's entertainment industry is valued at around 7.4 billion Rand, with film and television generating more than 5.8 billion Rand in economic activity each year according to the Department of Trade and Industry" (Thiec, 2009, p.84). Moreover, the NFVF report of 2013 on the economic baseline shows that the South African film Industry (SAFI) contributed 3.5 billion Rand to the country's gross domestic products (GDP) along with creating 25 175 jobs (NFVF, 2013). Nollywood generated estimated revenue of US\$800 million between 2011 and 2013 (Abraham, 2014).

The Namibian model

Besides its shared apartheid history and economic ties, Namibia seems to look at South Africa in many areas. The Namibia Film Commission Act of 2000 for instance, seems to be loosely based on the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) Act of 1997. Therefore a brief comparison between the NFC and the NFVF of South Africa was conducted. (1) The NFVF Act makes provision for raising alternative funds such as through donations from any source, interest on investments, income or special funds. The NFC Act does not allow the institution to make any profit therefore it depends on a small budget from the Ministry of Information Communication Technology. (2) The NFVF is managed by qualified experts in relevant fields, who are selected through a transparent process, while the NFC board is managed by individuals appointed by the Minister of Information Communication Technology at his/her discretion. (3) The NFVF Act makes clear provision for checks and balances while the NFC Act is quite vague on transparency, accountability, and repercussions thereof. For instance, 'members of the NFVF Council shall not be eligible for grants from the Council during their term of office' while the NFC Act is not explicit on this issue and only specifies that board members need to declare any interest they might have in writing. In practice, however, the NFC board does not reveal, in an organized form, any records of proceedings or decisions to the public or its constituency: the film industry.

Conclusion

Literature revealed that in Africa, filmmakers often struggle to fund and distribute their films. Thanks to the availability of affordable digital equipment, African filmmakers can now tell their stories. As previously stated, scholars such as Thiec (2009) argued that as much as technology provides possibilities in Africa, a number of preconditions like a funding

working model, appropriate regulatory frameworks, availability of qualified professionals, exhibition and distribution channels to mention but a few, still appear necessary for the development of a sustainable industry in the traditional sense. While Nigeria's 'Nollywood' is often criticized for its poor quality films, it has thrived without the government's financial support. In South Africa, the government, through the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), regulates and finances the production of local films. Namibia seems to follow the South African model with the establishment of the Namibia Film Commission (NFC) that emphasizes marketing Namibia as a filming destination. However, despite all the efforts to fund the development of the African film industry, local filmmakers are still struggling to find an audience for their work. Government subsidy in many African states is not enough to fully cover the different needs of the film industry.

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