

Interrogating the Problems and Prospects of Film Directing in the Nigerian Film Industry

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Abstract

The Nigerian Film Industry, also known as Nollywood, is one of the fastest growing industries in Nigeria and the second most job-creating industry in the country, after the Agricultural sector. However, despite the influence of Nollywood on the Nigerian economy, the sector has been faced with several challenges which have hindered her from achieving her potentials in the global space. Among several fields that are in the Nollywood, the art of film directing, which occupies the leadership position in the creative process, has particularly been met with some challenges. Due to these challenges, this paper, therefore, interrogates the problems and prospects of film directing in Nigeria. The paper adopted the participant-observation and interview as methodology. It is revealed that the problems of film directing in Nigeria can basically be classified into seven categories which are; policy formulation, artistic problem, technical problem, market structure, skill and education, religion and cultural barriers, and colonial influence. The study also identified some prospects in the industry such as: the innovation of Directors Guilds on the training and retraining of budding and established directors and the introduction of film school by both private and public institutions. The study concludes that Nollywood can achieve a greater global stature if the above-mentioned problems are tackled and the identified prospects are explored. Directors Guilds should form a pressure group to advocate against piracy in the country. Lastly, the Nigerian government should endeavour to render support to the industry and create favourable policies including enabling environments for Nigerian filmmakers.

Keywords: Problems, Prospects, Film, Directing, Film Directing

Introduction

The Nigerian Film Industry, popularly known as Nollywood, is the second largest film producing industry in the world (Witt, 128). Without exaggeration, Nollywood is arguably the country's second largest job-creating industry, and its impact on the Nigerian economy, culture, education, politics, policy and legislation cannot be overemphasised.

Indeed, the art of filmmaking in Nigeria has become essential to both the entertainment industry and academic community, representing the town and gown respectively. This is so because of the economic value and sociological significance of films

on the Nigerian society, among other benefits. It is worthy of mention that the impact of filmmaking on Nigerian societies might be affected significantly without the creative input of the Film Director who is saddled with the responsibility of harnessing the artistic visions of the production crew, actors and the screenwriter in order to achieve an aesthetically satisfying film production. In light of the above, the role of the Film Director cannot be overemphasised in the film production process and as a result of this, there is need to give the director all the necessary requirements needed for him to successfully carry out his duties without any form of hindrance.

Consequently, film directing in Nigeria is facing a lot of challenges which are, in turn, affecting the quality and level of productivity of films in the country. Surprisingly, despite all the obstacles faced by the Nigerian Film Industry, Nollywood has still been able to place Nigeria on the global stage when film production is placed at the front burner. In other words, Nollywood has carved a respectable position for Nigeria on the international scene, and this is largely due to the creative ingenuity of Film Directors whose job is to painstakingly harness all the creative arms of production into a holistic and aesthetically pleasing film production.

However, despite the numerous functions that films perform in the society, the potentials of films might be restricted if not properly handled by a professional Film Director. Hence, there are increasing efforts towards ensuring that the narrative techniques in the Nigerian Film Industry are improved upon so that the films produced can technically compete with those in the global market.

It is no longer news that the contexts and contents of Nollywood films have caught the attention of many critics from different quarters, including locally and internationally. To our notice, however, only few of these critics have examined the sources or roots of the problems affecting the quality and level of productivity of Nollywood films, most of which can be traced to the art of directing. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the problems and prospects of film directing in Nigeria as this would help to identify and interrogate the weaknesses and strengths of film directing in Nollywood, which is the concern of the current study. To achieve this, the study adopts the deductive method of research, complemented with the interview tool.

Conceptual Discourse on the Art of Film Directing

Directing is the process of artistically moulding all arts of production into a unique

artistic finesse that is pleasing to the targeted audience. In film production, the significance of the art of directing cannot be overemphasised. This might be the reason why Johnson posits that:

Directing is an intellectually-tasking, theatrical stage activity, which involves the management of artistic personnel and creative devices towards a deliberate moulding of a perceived vision into its most sublime form. It is the master art of the theatre which utilises all the theatrics of theatricalities in the process of presenting a vision of life (57).

Drawing from Johnson's submission above, all ideas, concepts and storylines are just crackers until the director steps up to put life into it by bringing together all the available arts and weaving them into a finished product that is aesthetically appealing to the audience. In a related development, Edum describes film directing as an art that is:

indeed, mysterious and ambiguous because it involves the manipulation of montage (putting together the shots of the film i.e. cutting and editing) and mise-en-scene (what actually goes into a shot and how the camera shoots it) to express an idea to the audience (131).

Consequent upon the above, film directing goes beyond the director staying behind the camera and calling the shots. This is because a good director must understand all the arts of filmmaking and know how and when to manipulate them in order to tell his story. In fact, his ability to; choose or dictate the appropriate shots or camera angles to be used; frame objects using the camera; know when to track his camera and when to pan or tilt on the object within the frame; and so on, are part and parcel of what makes a professional Film Director. In corroborating this statement, Osawe asserts that:

Directing in film making is the art of managing a film project artistically to achieve a director's perception of a story. This involves coordinating services, guiding the technical crew and talents to express the director's visual and audio treatment of the story (29).

In similar opinion to Osawe's submission, Adeseke and Akinola define film directing as "the creative process of communicating the vision of the Schreiber to the audience through the management of actors, crews, composition of shots, and rational infusion of other cinematic inputs (115)." In the same vein, Obi Okoli describes a Film Director as "an artistic interpreter, an artistic creator, who makes a profound artistic impression or an artistic statement with his art (Personal Interview)." Similar to Okoli's opinion, Musa describes the Director "as a metaphor, a human being who can be well represented. He sings and he dances. He is an actor as well as an interpreter (113)." From Okoli and Musa's view of Director, one can vividly

relate because a good director operates at different level of artistic dispensation.

Problems of Film Directing in Nollywood

Film directing is one of the most important creative areas in the film industry. In fact, it is the most essential artistic area of filmmaking. The position of film directing as the core area in film production has been foregrounded by Adeseke who submits that:

Directing is the spine of theatrical production. In other words, no work or play can be successfully performed on stage or screen without some measure of directing, no matter how rudimentary from somebody whether trained in the art or not. (158)

Arguably, anything in life that attracts such level of important attention must come with challenges. Therefore, with the significance associated with the area of directing in filmmaking, it is natural for it to face a number of challenges, some of which include: Policy making, government support, artistic problems, Nollywood market structure, technical problems, unavailability of some cinematic equipment, inaccessibility of film studio, inadequate film village in Nigeria, skills and education, religious and cultural barrier as well as colonial influence. Indeed, these problems are discussed in the subsequent sub-headings

Policy Making

This is the act of legislating rules and guidelines for an organisation to achieve atarget goal. However, for film directing to thrive in Nigeria, filmmaking must be flourishing and for this to occur, favourable policies must be put in place. Consequently, this paper has identified three (3) critical areas where policy making is affecting film directing in Nigeria. These areas include:

1. Censorship Policy
 2. Copyright and Piracy Policy
 3. Government Support
1. **Censorship Policy:** Recently in Nigeria, the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) released the names of the guilds and associations who have registered with them and legislated that any film that is directed by any director who is not a member of the registered guilds and associations will not be censored. However, the primary objective of the Censors Board is to serve as an intermediary between the Government, Filmmakers and the society as seen in the six (6) core goals of NFVCB below:
 - i. To provide an enabling environment for the growth of the film industry through our

activities.

- ii. To manage the classification system to time, cost, and quality standards.
- iii. To provide policy advice and services to governments.
- iv. To enhance confidence in (and utilisation of) the NFVCB classification system among existing and potential clients.
- v. To enhance community understanding, confidence, and usage in relation to classification systems and outcomes.
- vi. To continually empower NFVCB management and staff to meet its objectives by providing the requisite internal capacity in the areas of people, training, logistical support, information, financial resources, and leadership.

Consequently, a well-designed policy from the Censors Board would positively affect the Producer and this will, in turn, enhance the directorial process in film production. In fact, the politics of grading censorship has posed itself as a threat to directors' creativity in the production process. This is because at times, this politics serves as an impediment to the director's creativity.

2. **Piracy:** Piracy has become the cankerworm that is eating up the Nigerian Film Industry. Indeed, piracy has great influence on budget and everything balls down to the art of directing because, film is now made for commercial purposes rather than merely for art's sake. Therefore, Producers are often afraid to run on the losing side, and as a result, they will rather produce films with caution and provide limited financial support for the production. The Film Director would be left with no option than to manage the resources at hand and ration available resources around his creativity. For example, where a drone shot is needed, the Film Director will have to explore other less costly alternatives which might not produce the exact picture he would have achieved with the appropriate equipment. The quality of actors and crew members provided are also affected. This is supported by Aneika and Aneita who agree that:

Nollywood for instance, and ruefully point out howlers poorly manipulated into the production to, may be, avoid cost or dodge burrowing deeper to gather better information on the use of certain gadgets. Even with that, equipment sometimes is not always sufficient to convey a director's vision to a definite target. A film made without depth in the dramatic content in which equipment themselves are not sufficient may not attract patronage, and the audience may on such turn to foreign products (films) and relegate the ones produced in their

country to the background (2).

However, if the audience resort to shift their attention to another film industry due to the lack of technicality in the production, the financial input of the production would be affected and the creative input of the director would also suffer because the director would have to manipulate the resources available to discharge his artistic responsibilities.

3. **Government Support:** For any business to thrive, there must be favourable government support. This might be in the form of direct finance or indirect finance from the government. It can also come in the form of directing commercial banks to render loan services to the affected industrial sector at the reasonable profit margins. This is supported by Alamu who opines that:

In spite of its prolific and legendary output, which has made Nollywood the second largest (after Hollywood) film industry in the world, the Nigerian government has contributed very little to the growth of this industry in terms of funding or the provision of a favourable environment. Thus far, the industry has advanced by virtue of the individual efforts of dominant Producers and marketers. Although, Nigerian films have been viewed as cultural products of the nation, the indifference of the government toward the industry has denied it the status of a foreign exchange cultural currency that enhances our country (163).

The submission of Alamu above is also in tandem with Chowdhury (2023) cited in Olu Obafemi who holds the view that:

There are many varieties of policy formulation strategies. Despite the varieties of policy formulation strategies, there are fundamental issues that should be addressed in policy formation which government are neglecting and it is having negative effect on film directing. These are: a. *raison d'état* for policy b. issue concerns who should be involved in formulating the financial policy as the bedrock of policy formulation either for the arts or other sectors (236).

Thus, if appropriate individuals are called upon for the formulation of policies that will guide the film industry, a good and right policy would be arrived at which will benefit film production. A good example is the implementation of loan and piracy policy. Relevant stakeholders should be involved, and if this is done, Producers will not be afraid to provide directors with all the necessary requirements needed in the film production process for them to discharge their duties diligently. Therefore, all these have significant impact on film production and this cannot be overemphasised.

Artistic Problems

The artistic problem is often faced by Film Directors when working on the set of any

film production. Indeed, artistic problems, as mitigating factors of the work of Film Directors in Nigeria, can be divided into four (4) areas which are discussed below:

Discipline: Discipline is the mother of success. If a person is not disciplined, he or she may lose it all. In filmmaking, discipline has always been a clarion call. Therefore, the Film Director as well as actors and other crew members must be disciplined in order to achieve their artistic goals. This perhaps justifies the position of Segun Adefila cited in Odegbare who submits that, “if any cast is not at rehearsal ground five minutes after the call-up time for rehearsal, he would not allow such cast into rehearsal, not considering the person he or she is playing” (76). Basically, the director’s job is to interpret the script, get the best possible performances from the actors, guide the camera people and oversee it all into a complete cinematographic story, using his or her own unique vision. The Director, therefore, uses his vision and makes it “his” story, even if someone else wrote it (Dean, 90).

1. **Monopolisation of Actors:** This is another industrial disaster that is unfortunately destroying the Nigerian Film Industry. This is because some marketers will recommend some artists that are not competent enough to interpret the role given to them. In fact, at times, the Film Director would be left with no option than to just take the shot like it is. This is done in the name of “superstars.” However, this problem has given birth to some artistic issues such as characterisation and character understanding. The so-called “superstars” do not have time for character study, talk more of character understanding. There is this general attitude now cultivated by this crop of actors which is seen in the fact that, after the script has been sent to them for months or weeks, they will just bump into the film location one evening and call the Continuity Manager to brief them with the story-line and walk up to Directors and other crew members to shoot their scenes under the pretence that they have another location. This has been one of the major problems facing film directing in Nigeria, and this trend has continued because those actors have been monopolised by the marketers who tagged themselves as “Executive Producers” in the Nigerian Film Industry.
2. **Time:** Time is another factor that is affecting film directing in Nigeria. A production that requires months would be shot in days. This is because the Director understands the

implications of spending an extra day at the location. Another reason is low or no budget for the production. With this, some scenes that are supposed to be shot in the day would be converted to night while night scenes would be shot during the day. Meanwhile, doing this has lasting effects on the aesthetics of the production. In fact, the Director will have to task his creative bank before being able to convert the scenes.

- 3. Location and Logistics:** This is another problem facing Film Directors in the Nigerian Film Industry. Unlike playmaking (where almost everything is done inside a theatre), in filmmaking, we move from one location to another. However, the Nigerian situation is one of the threats to film directing in Nigeria. This is because in the film shooting process, there might be noise interference, intimidation from hooligans, unsuitable locations and some other ecological threats. In fact, this researcher was at the locations of the film, *Trivial* in Oyo Town in the year 2021 where the production was disturbed by some hooligans until the Producer sought help from Oyo Police Area Command before the film shooting could go on perfectly.

Nollywood Market Structure

The Nollywood market structure is the way in which film marketing industry is structured. Film marketing structure has a great impact on film directing because this structure has great impact on film budget and film budget at times determines the quality of professional actors invited for the production, equipment hired and other technical inputs on the film. If the Producer knows that there is a ready-made market for his film, he would not mind to spend the necessary amount of money on the production. Therefore, this is another major problem that is facing film directing in Nigeria. This is due to the fact that if competent actors are not available, the Film Director will utilise the available crop of actors. More so, available equipment highly contributes to the technicality of the film. For instance, if the Film Director plans to take a panoramic shot or tracking shot and the Producer refused to budget for drone, slider, and tracker, this will definitely tell on the outcome of such movie.

Technical Problems

Filmmaking is highly demanding when it comes to technicality. This is largely because what differentiates films from ordinary recordings is the manipulation of shots, composition of light, colour and other technical elements of the production. However, technicality has

great impact on the directorial art in filmmaking. The Film Director might be described as a “god” due to his artistic duties in the film production process where almost all artistic responsibilities rest on his shoulder. However, we must always remember that he is first and foremost a man. This paper identifies three technical problems facing film directing in Nigeria as listed below.

- i. **Unavailability of some Filmmaking Equipment:** Evidently, the Nigerian Film Industry is still lagging behind in terms of technology, unlike her counterparts that are leveraging on emerging technological revolutions and trends such as VR, Glasses-free 3D, Augmented Reality, Voice Synthesis with AL, and so on. This has great influence on film aesthetics which is capable of making a Film Director the toast of his audience.
- ii. **Inaccessibility of Film Studio:** One of the major challenges facing film directing in Nigeria is the inaccessibility of film studio. Only few individuals own film studios in Nigeria. Meanwhile, there are some technical scenes that ought to be shot in the studio but when this is unavailable, the director would have no other choice than to make use of the Chroma to ease the imposition which might not be perfect.
- iii. **Inadequate Film Village in Nigeria:** The availability of Film village eases the production for the Film Director. This is because the Film Director will be able to manipulate the space contained in the film village to his taste. It will also help him to manage time since all actors would be available within the village. This will prevent the Director from improvising the scene. However, it is unfortunate that only few film villages are available in Nigeria.

Skills and Education

In human endeavour, education is as important as oxygen is to life. Film directing is a complex art that requires a vast knowledge about it. Indeed, the complexity involved in the art of filmmaking might have influenced the position of Dean who opines that:

Film Directing is the most amorphous, indefinable, and even unteachable aspect of filmmaking. Some even say it's something you either have or you don't have. Directing is simply having people skills, some “big picture” vision, and the rest is indefinable “x-factor” stuff. What a director does in film is what a Producer does in music. In music, the Producer is the director of a recording session. They oversee a project by other creative, get the most money, and get to be anonymous. It's a pretty enviable position. Basically, the director's job is to interpret the script, get the best possible performances from the actors, guide the camera people, and oversee it all into a complete

cinematographic story, using his or her own unique vision. There are a million ways to tell and show any one tale. The director uses his vision and makes it “his” story, even if someone else wrote it (90).

Consequently, if you must interpret a script, you must have a vast knowledge of the script in addition to the cultures and tradition embedded in the script. As a director, you must have a vivid understanding of a script. Maybe because of the time schedule of most directors in the industry, there are some directors who do not read the script until they get to location. If this is done, how will these actors critically analysis the script? In fact, the researcher was an Assistant Director to a Director in the production of *Excessive* where the Director had not even read the script given to him for the past three months. It took the intervention of the researcher to interpret the script for the Director. However, if the Director had proper education, he would have known that it is better to reject a project than to go to the film location unprepared.

Drawing from the above, education and directorial skills have become one of the major problems of film directing in the Nigerian Film Industry. It is in directorial education that fundamentals of directing, script analysis and interpretation would be taught. This might be responsible for Akinwale’s submission that, “Several films in Yoruba, shot by members of the Association of Nigerian Theatre Practitioners (ANTP), lack texture in content, theme and structure” (30). In a related development, Olayiwola corroborates that:

Those who straddle the video film industry in Nigeria today have no formal education in related disciplines like theater arts, film studies, broadcasting, or cinematography. Some of them have no formal education at all. They are only involved in a game of trial and error, leading to shoddy productions. Most films are poorly directed because the present practitioners think that all it takes to be a movie director in Nigeria is money and a handful of people. Armed with a camcorder, you are already in the business. Better still, wait until your face appears in a couple of home videos and you will be instantly transformed into a star director. In essence, the Actor-Producer-director practice of the early pioneers still reigns supreme in Nigeria. The rare combination of talent and training that make a good director is yet to be understood by the Nigerian industry. Present day filmmakers lack the technical knowhow needed to direct a film (59).

Religion and Cultural Barriers

Religion and culture have become great issues of concern to the creative industry especially, the film industry. Myriad of issues have been raised against filmmakers by traditional worshippers. There are some religious limitations when shooting religious scenes which the

Film Director must contend with in order to avoid any controversy. A good example is the recent quagmire between the Producer of *Gang of Lagos* (2023) and the descendants of Isale Eko, where the latter claimed that they have been misrepresented in the film.

Another problem is directing faith-based films during which Film Directors often face some obstacles. The researcher witnessed a similar scenario at the location of *Charity* (2019) where Hajia knelt down to seek forgiveness but when she has been forgiven, Alhaji was not allowed to embrace her and neither was he allowed to hug her to show that he has forgiven her.

Colonial Influence

It is a known fact that African films in general emanated from the traditions established by the colonial cinema which was used as propaganda and product advertisement. Therefore, it has been established in this study that cinematic culture is not Nigerian indigenous entertainment culture which has continued to have great impact on our cinematic narrative. For instance, there is lack of originality in African production styles in film directing unlike play directing that has myriad of African indigenous directing styles as it is observed by Adeseke and Akinola that:

African Film scholar should work with African Film Directors to propose Directing styles that would be suitable for African Films and also serve as model and yardstick for African film criticism then pave way for more African directing styles and approaches in filmmaking the way we have potpourri of Directing styles in playmaking such as Ukala's folkism, Adeoye's neo-alienation style, Ben-Abdullah step aside, Ayo Akinwale's Straight take, Owusu's cyclic presentation Style, Ola Rotimi's variegated action and pressure cooker to mention but a few (122-123).

The submission above is attested to by Ali Zakky when he states that:

As a Northern filmmaker one of the major challenge we have especially as northern Film Director is that we do not look into our own culture or direct from our own point of view we are more interested in the western directorial concept and that affect us a lot because we copycat (Personal Interview).

This submission implies that film directing in Nigeria lacks indigenous directing styles and this has great impact on our storytelling styles and patterns because "it is one thing to own the story but it is another thing to own the telling. And if you do not own the telling, your own story can be used to subvert you and propagate the parasite" (Okwori, 13).

Prospects of Film Directing in Nollywood

Despite all the challenges facing film directing in Nigeria which has been examined

above, this researcher believes that there is light at the end of the tunnel. The following are, therefore, the observed prospects of film directing in Nollywood as evident in the course of this research:

- i. **Establishment of Film Schools:** Unlike in the past where only the Nigeria Film Institute (NFI) is the only place where filmmaking can be studied in Nigeria, many Theatre Arts Departments are now studying filmmaking and this serves as one of the viable solutions to film directing in Nigeria. However, there is need for the government to provide adequate for the department to run smoothly.
- ii. **Market Digitalisation:** It is a known fact that technology is vast advancing and the film industry is also moving along. The global village has dragged film marketing into the digital world and this has led to the decentralisation of film distribution. Although this exposes films to piracy, the advent of Netflix, Amazon, Youtube and other new media platforms is significantly easing the pressure in the industry.

Establishment of Film Villages by Private Individuals: Since the Nollywood industry is privately driven, individual merchants and Producers are beginning to take the bull by the horn to establish private film villages. In addition, some State and Federal Universities in Nigeria have also established film villages such as Asaba Film Village, Kwara State University Film Village popularly known as Malete Film Village, and so on. The establishment of these film villages serve as ease to the Director in the production process because almost everything needed for the production is available in the film village.

- iii. **Government Collaboration with Guilds and Association:** Collaboration between National Film and Video Censors Board and some Guilds and Associations in the Nigerian Film Industry is yielding towards the advancement of film directing in the country. This has called for the training and retraining of Film Directors in the industry which is why we now have the establishment of associations such as Directors Guild of Nigeria (DGN) and Tampan Guild of Directors (TGD). The essence of these guilds is to know who is who in the area of film directing and to protect the interest of registered Film Directors in Nigeria.

Findings

This study reveals that the problems of film directing in Nigeria can basically be

classified into five categories which are; policy formulation, artistic problem, technical problem, market structure, skill and education. The study also brings to the fore, the fact that, among other challenges, the Nollywood market structure is highly contributing to the problems faced by film directing in Nigeria. Also, Film Directors need to be disciplined if other crew members and actors must be disciplined as this will enhance smooth directing in the film production process.

In addition to the above, it is discovered in this study that culture and religion have posed as part of the major threats to film directing in Nigeria. Furthermore, Nigerian Film Directors lack indigenous directing styles, and only few of them have their unique directing styles. However, consciously or not, majority of them often adopt eclecticism as their directing style.

The study also identifies some prospects in the Nigerian Film Industry such as: the innovation of Directors Guilds on the training and retraining of budding and established directors and the introduction of film school by both private and public institutions which is gradually enhancing the level of professionalism in film directing.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Nollywood can achieve a greater global stature if the above-mentioned problems are tactically tackled and the identified prospects are explored. Hence, this researcher believes that if the proffered solutions are followed, value would be added to Nigerian films in the global space. Therefore, this study submits that to improve the status quo of film directing in Nigeria, both filmmakers and government agencies must work together to heighten the standard of Nollywood film directing.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that Nigerian Film Directors should form pressure group and engage some government agencies and NGOs to advocate against film piracy and enlighten the society on the danger of piracy on the survival of the Nigerian film industry and Nigerian economy at large. Filmmakers should also setup task force to implement copyright and piracy law.

This study recommends that Nigerian government should propose a more stringent penalty for perpetrators of film piracy to encourage indigenous film Producers in Nigeria. By

so doing, this will encourage the Producers to allocate reasonable budget for the production of their films and discourage individuals who want to consider film piracy as a means of income generation.

This paper also recommends that the Nollywood market structure needs to be revisited and it needs the help of government policies to decentralise the market for the benefit of budding film Producers. In addition to the above, this study also recommends that anytime a Nigerian Film Director is shooting outside his own indigenous culture, he should always request for an Assistant Director who comes from, or understands the indigenous setting of the film so as to avoid *cultural hara-kiri* or *tradition assassination*. The study also recommends that film guilds and associations should engage on the training of budding directors and retraining of both budding and established Directors for better directorial output in the Nigerian Film Industry.

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