

Moral Dilemmas in the Discourse of Cinema, Ethics and Society

By

Innocent Ebere Uwah

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Table Of Contents

Dedication	ix
Acknowledgments	ix
Introductory Note by Professor Rachel Muers, University of Edinburgh.....	xiii
Foreword by Professor Lesley McAra, University of Edinburgh.....	xv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Film in Society – Powers and Influence.....	9
Chapter Three: Movie Consumption and Reception	33
Chapter Four: Ethics – What is it?	43
Chapter Five: Cinema, Ethics and Society – The Debate.....	63
Chapter Six: The Locus of Ethical Judgment in Film	73
Chapter Seven: Framework of Ethical Analysis of Movies.....	91
Chapter Eight: Representation of Africa and Ethical Questions About it in Films	97
Chapter Nine: Exploring Moral Dilemmas in Movies.....	119
Chapter Ten: Film Censorship	143
Chapter Eleven: Concluding Remarks.....	149
References.....	151
Filmography.....	154
About the Author	156
Notes	157

*Dedicated to staff & students of the Department of Film and Multimedia,
University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.*

Acknowledgments

Being critical is a badge that conscious academics tend to wear in private and public discourses. It is the mindset that prompted this work on the area of ethics in cinema. “Should ethics not matter in film?” I asked, as we debated issues on Nollywood¹ movies in one of my lectures on campus. “Should everything be about making money and giving pleasure to audiences without worrying about consequent implications of representations and their modes of presentation?” I wondered at these ruminations as some argued in favour of considering film arts as creative fictions that ought not be burdened with stringent checkpoints. I therefore wish to thank my colleagues and students at University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, for pushing me to engage in further argumentations on this topic in this book. They stimulated the debate that has given birth to it, and I am eternally grateful to them. Likewise, I thank all scholars whose works I consulted in dealing with the rigorous debates shrouding intersections between cinema, ethics and society in this work.

A major part of research that went into this book was done during my stay at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities (IASH), University of Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom, in 2024, during my fellowship there. I feel greatly privileged to have been awarded the COMBE TRUST FELLOWSHIP of the Institute which enabled me further my research on the subject matter of this book. I am grateful to Professor Jolyon Mitchell, the President of St. John’s College at the University of Durham, England, for being my first contact at the University of Edinburgh before moving over on another appointment. It was also at his invitation for me to visit and participate in his President’s Dinner (formal) at St. John’s College and speak on Fairtrade in Nigeria that I met Mr. Richard Adams, the current Chair of the Board of Directors of the Fair-Trade Advocacy Office in Brussels, Belgium, with whom I am working on issues of ethical justice for marginalized farmers and producers in Nigeria. I thank him dearly.

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I would like to thank the following Distinguished intellectuals who encouraged me in this work at different points: Emeritus Prof. Pat. Brereton, my PhD supervisor at Dublin City University, Ireland, with whom I still engage in scholarly works; Prof. Hakeem Fawehinmi – the Vice Chancellor of the Nigerian British University, Asa, Abia State, Nigeria, where I serve as Dean, School of General Studies and Entrepreneurship Development in this year of my sabbatical leave from University of Port Harcourt and Rev. Fr. Dr. Romanus Enyinnia, the Parish Priest of St. Vincent De Paul Church, East Kilbride, Scotland, who welcomed and accommodated me in a brotherly manner throughout the fellowship period.

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Rev. Fr. Prof. Innocent Ebere Uwah
Department of Film and Multimedia,
University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Introductory Note

Part of Professor Uwah's work in this monograph was conducted during a research visit to the University of Edinburgh's Centre for Theology and Public Issues. It is appropriate for the Centre to host such research as we seek to understand how contemporary global publics can engage collectively with urgent moral and theological questions. Although – as my predecessor as director of the Centre, Jolyon Mitchell, has described – cinema and theology have had a fraught and complex relationship, there is no doubt that in the twenty-first century theologians and ethicists need to take cinema seriously as a space not only for communicating, but also for developing, responses to contemporary problems.¹

In a fragmenting and polarising world where there is immense competition for attention, the cinema is one of the spaces in which *shared* attention is still possible and expected. Professor Innocent Uwah's work demonstrates how this shared attention can generate and shape moral reflection, and how cinema constructs – for good or ill – a world for moral reasoning.

Focusing on the 'dilemmas' in cinematic narratives, Professor Uwah shows how cinema can function like the parables – drawing an audience into a lived situation that invites critical reflection on existentially significant values. The ethics of the cinema, as Professor Uwah explains it, is not an abstract framework imposed from outside to criticise 'real life' but rather a narrative intervention or interruption that enables the audience to think ethically in the midst of real life. Moreover, because cinema's ethical dilemmas require the representation of social and political contexts, cinema invites reflection on a shared situation – on the structures that constrain, form and

¹ See Jolyon Mitchell, 'Theology and Film', in Rachel Muers and Ashley Cocksworth, eds., *Ford's The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 4th edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2024).

deform people as ethical agents, and on the possibility of wider social change.

Cinema is, however, not just about a community or society speaking to itself – it is also a product caught up in global economic and cultural power dynamics. Professor Uwah's particular focus is the cinematic representation of Africa and African societies, and he traces how Northern colonial exploitation of Africa is repeated or interrogated in cinema across the decades. Understanding cinema's power – its 'art as a verb' – he critiques attempts to exempt cinema from categories of truth and falsehood; a cinematic fiction can still propagate untruth by, for example, obscuring the humanity of Africans. At the same time, the agency of the cinematic audience creates the possibility of critical rereadings and unexpected appropriations of cinematic products. Professor Uwah's discussion of the important live issue of film censorship takes seriously the potential of cinema, not to tell people what to think, but to shape the environment within which their ethical thinking is done.

It is to be hoped that this book will encourage more ethicists and theologians to think broadly and deeply about the range of ways in which cinema, understood in its social and political context, can take forward ethical thinking.

Prof. Rachel Muers

Dean, School of Divinity
University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Foreword

I am deeply honoured to be asked to write a foreword to this very fine book.

In 2024, Professor Innocent Ebere Uwah was a Combe Trust Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH), at the University of Edinburgh. George Combe (1788-1858) was first and foremost a Scottish lawyer but had a wide range of intellectual interests including chemistry, history, moral philosophy, prison reform, education and secularism. The Fellowship named in his honour, is intended to encourage outstanding interdisciplinary research, international scholarly collaboration, and networking activities with academics in the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University. Professor Innocent Ebere Uwah made a wonderful appointment to this fellowship and he was key member of the wider IASH community, with a project on the poetics and politics of creativity in screen representations of Africa he is able to write this wonderful book with concerns raised about ethical issues in society and cinema.

This book is of deep significance because it explores a number of challenging questions which face societies today, questions about: freedom of expression and censorship; the nature of social harms; and the relationship between identities and the power dynamics associated with representation. This book takes as its underlying problematic whether or not it is possible to posit a theory of ethics which is universally binding, concluding that love and respect are critical factors in what it means to be human.

As I write, the world is living through deeply troubled times. Professor Innocent Ebere Uwah reminds us, however, of our common humanity and the ways in which we all bear a collective responsibility to make the case for peace and justice. May grace lead us home.

Professor Lesley McAra
Director, IASH

Chapter One

Introduction

This book is written in answer to many needs. It answers the need of my students in the Department of Film and Multimedia, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, offering the course, Cinema, Ethics and Society – (FTV 805.1) and those of others interested in understanding the nature of ethical issues in audiovisual representations. It is written to give a perspective on the intersections that shroud the concepts of cinema, ethics and society and by so doing provide a critical guide to filmmaking and its consumption. Most people are aware that film and society are intertwined on several scores. Metaphorically, they are mirrors to themselves. It is like the relationship between the hen and egg. It is right to argue that the hen produces the egg as well as correct to say that the egg produces the hen. Thus, as a society gives birth to film, it is in the same vein that film can be said to reflect the society, thereby giving birth to a version of it.

Viewers of films are usually presented with perspectives that showcase societal joys and sorrows, themes, concerns, dilemmas, landscapes, architecture, lived-in (everyday) experiences and myths based on contexts and historical timelines - past, present or future. What is said about film as speaking to societal issues or giving birth to a version of it is because it can reconstruct the society just as society serves as its main source of inspiration for storylines and costumes. In other words, society shapes films by means of filmmakers following established genres, conventions, and ideological points of views that are operative in the society while films in turn shape the society by affirming or interrogating socio-cultural cultures and mannerisms through representations. This means that both do influence each other on numerous scores.

In-between the relationship guiding cinema and society is the responsibility that filmmakers undertake in packaging storylines

through series of decisions to realize their intention. It is on this pedestal that the issue of ethics is evoked in cinematic arts because the choices of filmmakers must be judged in terms of their rightness or wrongfulness. Like filmmakers, viewers of films in their role as active consumers are also expected to act as impartial judges in passing verdicts on the taste of the meal they are served in the representations. So, they are considered as people equipped with rationality to argumentatively state what is good and what is wrong in the films they consume. In this light, they too undertake the responsibility of passing ethical judgment on elements of filmic representations based on the provisions of ethical norms in the society. Hence, the issue of ethics in cinema can be located at three levels: in the actions of filmmakers who encode them, secondly; in the actions of characters in the movies who are faced with moral choices to make around social dilemmas and thirdly at the level of spectators who as active audiences are called to negotiate values by making meaning of messages in the texts through interrogation of what is depicted in terms of mode and form of address.

Ethics is a concept that deals with the rightness or wrongfulness of actions in both the world of human beings (society) that produce films and in the plastic world of film characters as (re)presented on screen through creative artistry. It deals with human choices – actions that are free and voluntary. While underpinning ethics in film arts at different levels, this is a book that guides students and scholars in grasping the meaning and implication of ethics as a subject matter in movies as well as showcasing how it is hugely ignored in most cases. This book therefore is a literary piece written to guide efforts in an authoritative manner on how to approach ethics in human contexts and in relation to social dilemmas on screen. It does not only discuss ethics as a subject area in the society but also uses film texts to underpin its challenges in human lives – i.e. social or moral dilemmas as represented on screen. In doing this, we foreground the arguments in favour of the pros and cons of ethical debates – the views of those who agree that there must be ethical implications in arts and those who think that arts are purely creative, fictitious and therefore have no need of ethical considerations

in their representations. The first place to start appreciating what we have done in this book is by being critical of the actions of filmmakers and the stories we consume – are they imbued with the kind of ideologies we agree with or those we can reject on ethical grounds?

Filmmakers operate in the society. They are rational human beings. They are free and creative. Since they are members of the society, they can decide to abide by the mores of the society or flaunt them. They are aware of the moral boundaries set by the society but may decide not to be limited by them. In this instance, they can choose to use their films to affirm values or to corrupt morals. It is based on their freedom and its application to the kind of choices they make that films are said to be differently shaped. While some may construct social commentary films filled with failures of the society, some others can engage on abstract explorations or caricatures of conventions. On this note, different filmmakers can choose to respect values such as human rights and sensibilities while some others may wish to violently violate them. This is where ethics in the choices and actions of filmmakers is at the level of intersections shrouding cinema, ethics and society.

Like the actions of filmmakers in shaping texts, so also are storylines made to give a perspective on the society through representations. What this shows is that every society thrives on narratives as a means of communication. Storytelling is an intergenerational medium which people have used for ages. It is a model of communication shaped by people with symbols. There are stories in oral culture as there are in literate contexts. Therefore, all peoples generally love and consume stories. It is an industry. It is a thriving commodity. It is an eternal brand. Storytelling is part of human culture and a veritable tool for entertainment. Stories form human beings. They educate generations. They socialize people. They shape nations. They form consciousness. They may be comments about human beings in the society or about the world; yet they are very informative. Stories can be real or fictitious and come in different forms. People consume stories in form of myths, folktales, dance and song lyrics, comic plays, news items, games, films

and more. Thus, from the context of oral culture to present day digital climate, it is arguable to say that storytelling as a medium of communication has never left humanity. Instead, it has fascinated every generation to the extent of people being in constant lookout for what is new in the world of entertainment.

People appreciate storytelling as a form of recreation and relaxation. It is a medium of message dissemination and a conduit for sharing meanings. Storytelling is the main communicative language spoken in every age through signs and symbols. It is not only a crowd pleaser, but also a pedagogical system, a reflection-model and a tool in the hands of formators (parents and teachers). So, whether one thinks about myths, lullabies, cartoons, plays or films, he or she is thinking about stories packaged in a specific genre for effective communication of information to a particular audience. In the light of all these, our interest is specifically on film as an audiovisual storytelling platform that ought to command ethical decisions.

Every film is a story. It is one aspect of the social communication media where stories are framed and consumed in such a way that cinema and society can visibly be seen to be interlinked. Like most other forms of media, it primarily has a way of bringing different aspects of the society within its confines through imaginative creativity. It is much an artform as it is an industry with human beings making decisions to stimulate pleasure in viewers. One way by which this takes place is by shaping the stories with symbols that entice and leave lasting memories on their consumers. For this reason, storylines are said to give vent to identity construction in various forms. Film, therefore, is a medium that brings everything about storytelling together and serves so many purposes for different peoples – the good, the bad and the ugly. What this implies is that every film is intentionally loaded to impress on its viewers a message which means that it is a product of stringent decisions and choices made by individuals at different points of their being made. In other words, every filmic text is a well thought out product of the creative intelligence of those who have a message in form of a story to communicate.

Being a creative piece, film is an artwork that is guided by the responsible opinions of presumably well-informed people as it takes shape through the pre-production, production and post-production stages. Saying this means that a film is a responsibility undertaken by human agents who work as a team to realize it as a delicacy to be enjoyed. The fact of this responsibility as implied by human choices is proved by the roles a film's cast and crew members play in achieving its realization. Such entails an ethical engagement since it involves choices made in freedom whether it is that of scripting of the story or directing the actions of actors on set.

Flowing from the above argument is the view that ethics must be seen to underlie the decisions of filmmakers putting a film together as well as be explored in the actions of actors around moral dilemmas in movies since it has to do with negotiation of values made at critical crossroads in the life of people or even of screen characters. Following these two strands of engagement is the judgment of viewers on screen depictions and displays vis-à-vis the provisions of moral principles in the society. On all of these, ethical criticism in film is to be considered based on analysis of the kind of ideology and aesthetics used in interlacing a storyline especially around conflicts in choices of real persons and screen characters trying to save ugly situations.

Doing ethical criticism in film therefore is not a simple matter since it is a call to judgment on creative decisions at different levels. In it, one is saddled with dealing critically with whatever is presented as a finished product – leaning both backward and forward - to look at actions taken ahead of time before a movie is put together and at the consequent implications that such actions may portend for those who consume it. By this is meant that whoever that must deal with this sort of thing ought to be versed on issues pertaining to ethical principles, film theory and criticism. He or she must be critical in examining the thematic thrust of narratives vis-à-vis the form of artistic constructions made manifest by means of mise-en-scenes and dialogues underlying the nature of ideology and philosophy behind them. The person is to be

well equipped with textual analytical skills as well as be able to unveil the metaphoric meaning of screen depictions which ordinarily may appear somewhat hidden at the surface to an uncritical viewer.

Moral and social dilemma as concepts are two sides of the same coin. As implied in this exercise, it refers to conflicts involving moral choices in relation to one as a person in the society. It is social because it has to do with personal choices vis-à-vis the wellbeing of the society and moral because such is a difficult challenge that impinges on ethical principles people tend to uphold as dear to them. Take for instance where an actress who is facing bankruptcy is called upon to act nude in a movie and be paid a huge sum of money. Even though she desires the money, she may begin to think things through because of the considerations she gives to herself as a person and the wellbeing of the society which she shares with others. First, once the offer is made, it can be said that she is in dilemma of a sort that is both moral and social – i.e. whether to perform nude for pecuniary reasons in a movie or not to do so. If she considers respect for herself and family and decides not to do it, one can say it is because it is against her moral principles. Thus, to her the offer posed a moral dilemma. Yet, if she tells herself that the society is against inordinate exposure in public and the censors' board of the country has legislations banning nudity in movies and therefore decides not to put herself into trouble by doing it and taking the money, she can be said to have faced a social dilemma in such a scenario and decides to look away in integrity. Thus, a social dilemma is so called because it involves the society while a moral dilemma is referred to because it has to do with one's ethical principles. But whether it is social or moral dilemma that one prefers to use, it is instructive to note that in the context of this exercise both are taken to point to the same reality of ontological difficulties with two opposing options to evade a problem as is often faced by individuals. So, both concepts are not far from each other since moral principles as much as they are personal are foremostly public and no person is big enough as to exist outside the social world she or he shares with others.

The story of the woman in the biblical passage of the book of Daniel Chapter 13 – 19² is a good example of a scenario that refers to what can be called either a social or moral dilemma. We will look at it shortly, but it must be underscored that similar storylines underlie most filmic texts in different other circumstances. It could be the problem of being pregnant outside of wedlock and doing the painful thinking on what to do to remedy the situation. It could also be that of disobeying one's government and saving his country's perceived enemies in a war situation rather than kill them because the fighter objects to the reasons offered by his country and government for the cause of the war. It can also be choosing between keeping one's lucrative job by covering up a crime and quitting the job to take the risk involved in fighting an age-long crime by exposing the rot in the system. It can be any difficult challenge at the crossroad of life either in real life situation or in that of a character in a film.

The narrative of Daniel Chapter 13-19 is about the story of a woman named Susanna, the daughter of Hilkiah. She is so beautiful that some elderly men desired to commit adultery with her. But her morality and holiness of life could not allow her to do so. Someday the men sneaked into the place she was to have her bath unknown to her. As soon as she has locked the bathroom door, they came out from their hiding places and presented her with two morally challenging options: either to commit adultery with them and nobody says anything to anyone about it or to disagree with them and be accused of committing adultery with a man who could not be stopped by her catchers and be stoned to death in public. The dilemmas in this scenario are that as a holy or morally upright woman she considered committing adultery with the men an abomination that ought not to happen. The other is whether it is not a more worrisome act for her to be killed shamefully by being stoned in public since she has no one to defend her against the false accusation of the elders who as watchmen of the community have more chances of being believed.

However it is said, it is not totally wrong to consider social dilemmas as the same thing as moral dilemmas because as Plato would argue the society is “man writ large”³ - this means that the citizenry reflects and represents the society. Applying it to understanding the connection between personal and social issues, it can be argued that since moral dilemmas are problems of choices faced by individuals who socialize with others in the society, such problems can as well be termed social in nature. But for the sake of clarity, the thrust of discourse here is on the moral dilemmas individuals face as they make rational decisions in critical moments of life. It is the vertebral column of heightened conflicts in most films and refer to uphill challenges most adults are confronted with occasionally in life. This will better be buttressed when we engage in film analysis of some selected texts later in this exercise to underpin ethical challenges in human affairs while interrogating the kind of choices made to resolve them.

This, therefore, is a work written with an understanding that since film speaks a universal language and ethics is an objective enterprise, there is need to implicate its principles in narratives. Even though majority of the texts analyzed here are from the stable of Nollywood - the popular Nigerian film industry. It does not imply that this is a book for Nollywood scholars only. It is rather an interdisciplinary work written to benefit scholars in different fields of life dealing with film, ethics, philosophy or societal concerns in general. It begins by underscoring the power of movies in human society and from there assesses audience's reception of it as an artform. Following this is the delineation of the concept of ethics as a branch of philosophy to establish human acts as the locus of it. It is from there that it progresses to explore the different lines of thoughts pertaining to the pros and cons of ethical debates in terms of views by those who support or oppose ethics in creative works, leading to foregrounding the reasons for censorship as a stopgap measure in checkmating the excesses of undesirable elements in audiovisual narratives.

Chapter Two

Film in Society – Powers and Influence

We talked about filmmakers and stories briefly in the introductory chapter. Yes, that is important because film is like a currency with which every generation of human-beings trade messages, meanings and values. Movies are packaged stories in electronic and digital formats. They are stories told on screen. Movies are audio-visual communications that bring to disparate audiences some impressions about aspects of social realities. Movies, which we also call films are artistic commodities. While some are stories based on true-life experiences others, are fictitious. There are feature films and documentary films as there are art cinemas and non-narrative films. But whichever form they take; movies are powerful in societies because they speak to human sensibilities – e.g. national cinemas thrive on national values while independent films are primarily made for pecuniary reasons, the same way documentaries are dedicated to reporting records of events.

Watching a film can let one gain some impressions about a place, people or country. Every film relates some form of information to its viewers on a subject matter especially if it is a nicely made product by means of its setting, genre, costumes, conventions and cultures used in encoding it. In other words, there is the possibility of gaining knowledge about social and cultural circumstances of a people through movies – even in fictions. There is also the possibility of learning about religious beliefs and practices, communal norms and values, architecture and landscapes by means of filmic representations and how stories are shaped. Andre Bazin⁴ is one theorist that believes in films speaking to realities – i.e. by representing reality as it is. Those who belong to this school of thought according to Gianetti are realists who are of the view that films “try to preserve the illusion that is unmanipulated, an objective mirror of the actual world” (2005, p.2). This position, is of

course, contrary to that of the anti-realists who consider film as a work of art that is manipulated by means of an apparatus through creativity to influence and present a spectacle to viewers. What this means is that through the art of editing what is not desired is cut off while what is needed in film is improved upon with the aid of skills and visual effects. In this way film is a representation of reality and not reality per se, they argue.

But since to be is to live in a culture, filmmaking is an expression that buttresses a people's living styles and communication cultures, and like all other arts, is engaged in shaping and expressing culture in varied circumstances – whether for the realists or the anti-realists. Film, therefore, is a marketplace of ideas, an 'areopagus' of a kind (a public square) with which human beings negotiate values in society. This is an aspect of communication that makes meanings common and by so doing educate its viewers as well as entertain them. Film, therefore, is significant to humans as a "social practice" (Turner, 2006). It is so for the simple reason that by means of film practice human beings are helped to manage boredom, feel entertained while enjoying the pleasure of storylines on screen. Films aid individuals to look at themselves in the mirror and see a version of their world. By so doing, films communicate to people by portraying their beingness-in-the-world as they help them document lifestyles, depict identity construction and underscore cultural affiliations.

Discussing film as an aspect of mass communication is acknowledging that it speaks to people as they are and wherever they are – revealing and reviewing how they look and dress, what they do as a people, how they react in circumstances of tragedy and joy – that is, their rituals and gestures, their emotions, trials and values, dancing steps, thought patterns, belief systems and philosophy. Film, therefore, is hugely significant and influential in communication matters. It is both a force and a tool for framing issues. It is also a voice and an artifact. It is a commodity and industry. Essentially film is a conduit for the extension of a people's story as well as a shaper of their consciousness. Film

practically is culture or humanity in a moving form. It exists in time and space and helps people make sense of the meaning of existence. For this reason, film is part of the creative order or the cultural industry that deals with socio-cultural and political experiences of a people. It is the best of all art forms that brings together the attributes of humankind: emotion, movement, fashion, language, architecture, religion, morals, manners, recreation, landscape, etc.

The artiness of film in form and content has to do with man and his environment ranging from storyline to soundtrack and setting. Thus, film is an audiovisual story about humanity's existence in the world. On this note, film cannot be discussed in isolation of human being's cultural and political experiences, his or her religious and social institutions, ideology and values. Yes, every film holds an ideological viewpoint within it and is arguably culturally contextualized. It is an art that is based on the experience or constructive thought patterns of its makers. Thus, every film is situated in human culture and speaks to a people's way of life either in contextualized or futuristic terms and this is true even with those of the science fiction genre.

Again, film is a voice in communication. It represents a point of view (POV) and is a language as well as a power weighed on social issues around it. Importantly it is a tool to engineer and re-engineer the society. It can arguably be called a propaganda tool as well as serve an evangelical purpose. It is a spectacle. It is a metaphor. Its powers are phenomenal. It has the capacity to seduce its viewers by means of its sound and visuals in such a way that one's opinion about life is formed as the person appears to have undergone a journey or a classroom session – whether that of self-discovery or one that reconstructs new facts about a subject matter. This is one reason why film may be said to weigh some form of spiritual power in audiences since it can bring to reality a conceptualized impression about something or give birth to a new knowledge. Films are powerful because like all other tools of communication, they can connect and socialize people. But more than that, they have the capacity to stimulate viewers to express different

kinds of emotions – cry, laugh, smile, drop an opinion or uphold it strongly. Some can make people change for life while others can make them get addicted to a habit. Discussing how influential movies are in society is something that every cineaste cannot deny as they encode storylines that people can identify with.

Even though it is correct to say that every film is a representation of some aspect of reality, the thrust of the argument in this chapter is that as an artwork, film brings together the combined efforts of many – directors, producers, cinematographers, actors, editors, etc. – in fashioning products that can socialize and entertain people. Doing this implies that a film is a product of choices made by individuals and they qualify to be subjected to some form of ethical tests vis-à-vis the provisions of moral principles. In other words, are the actions and choices of all contributors to the making of a movie ethically acceptable? This is asked because just as a film is considered powerful in the society so also are the choices of the filmmakers who package and put it together. Without the free choices and actions of filmmakers, there would be no film to look at; talk less of considering it as being powerful. But if there are individuals who by their choices and actions do bring about the reality of film, it follows that to talk about the powers of movies, one must acknowledge the unseen powers of these individuals – the movie makers. It is based on the apparent powerfulness of both filmmakers and films that the concern for adherence to ethical principles in movie production is ‘a sine-qua-non’.

Writing to prove that film is a powerful tool Ekwuazi discusses how the British colonial government in Africa at the onset of the second world war used it to “convince the colonies that they and the English had a common enemy in the Germans” (1987, p. 2). This is to say that propaganda is one factor where the power of film is made manifest. It is a system of information sharing but can as well be considered a conveyor of misinformation in some cases. A film therefore can convince one to engage in a war and present him or her with reasons of justification for such an action. It is the same thing as using a film to

preach the gospel and covert people to a religious belief. Malone includes in the list of what movies can do such things as the advertisement of products by stating that “over the years, movies have influenced fashion. Sometimes they make their mark with music or with phrases that are repeated and repeated” (2001, p. 20). Film, therefore, can generate a whole lot of social impact on viewers. It is a powerful artform in the society capable of serving many needs. Marshalling out the uses of film in society does not only help foreground its place in life but also helps underscore why ethics must guide its production and consumption practices. So, to guide knowledge on this, it is instructive to explicitly ask - what are the markers to use in foregrounding the powers of movies in the society? The underlisted are therefore ways of underpinning the influence of movies in human society before bringing ethical principles to them. They are pointers to the powers of film in human society:

Education

Education is one of the key functions of media in society in line with information and entertainment. This is why the three are the first factors being discussed in this section. The best way to grasp this is by looking at the truthfulness of what Malone says, when he argues as follows:

It depends on where we place the emphasis and what we want out of a movie. In a session about movies and values with some 16-year-old girls, the popular film of the 80s with Patrick Swayze, *Dirty Dancing*, came under discussion. What the girls like about the film was Patrick Swayze himself as a hero and the dancing. When they were questioned about the serious issues, especially when one of the characters had an abortion and Jennifer Grey as a wealthy young girl raised the money for it, many of the girls talked the serious side of the relationships and the consequences – a mixture of ‘entertainment’ and ‘education’ (2001, p. 18).

This finding from an empirical study is the kind of outcome that validates the logic of motion pictures imparting entertainment pleasure and educational values on viewers. Such an education does not need to be taken literally as what happens in institutions of learning but as a new insight gained from watching a filmic narrative. In the above discourse, the girls learn and admire the heroic virtues and dancing styles of Patrick Swayze. They also pick lessons on relationships and possible consequences of the wrong attitudes of people to life in the film. So, movies are educational in nature because they offer new ideas to audiences. They reveal aspects of the world to viewers as they share meanings and make knowledge common.

By having the capacity to educate, one can say that movies are powerful communication tools. They shape opinions and form consciousness about issues in the world based on how storylines are shaped or how objects and themes are depicted. Imagine watching a film on warfare when you have not experienced a war before, there is every indication that you will come out with some knowledge about the arsenals and weapons of warfare and be able to judge the parties at war with each other by taking sides. Think about the enormous information you get on Church history when you watch a film like *Quo Vadis* (1951, dir. by Mervyn LeRoy and Anthony Mann) – especially on the persecution of the early Christians in Rome under the reign of Emperor Nero. Such is an example of the kind of education one gets by means of the medium of film – history, politics, religion, culture, class and mannerisms.

Think again about history on film and watch the atrocities of the Rwandan genocide in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004, directed by Terry George). The information one gets from it does not only educate the viewer about Rwandan politics and history, but also helps to guide in forming impression about the geography and people of the country. Of course, arguing this way does not imply that representations are true reflections of realities. NO! Instead, it is rather stating the fact that every motion picture is equipped to present an aspect of the society to its viewers depending on the logic and ideology of its makers. So, while

some may be judged as good because of their proximate connection to historical realities, some others can be dismissed as imperfect based on their screwed version of issues or the poor quality of aesthetic value in the production. But overall, motion pictures in essence do communicate some level of education to their viewers.

Information

Information is another factor that the media generally communicate to their consumers. When people read newspapers, watch movies or listen to radio, they are expected to draw some lines of information from their narratives. The film medium specifically is very powerful in giving information about issues in society. This is true of both the feature and documentary film genres. Biopics are elucidating here – they are biographical motion pictures. They tell stories about individual lives. This same point can be extended to historical epic films that dwell on past events in the life of communities like what is seen in some Nigerian films that document the people's opposition against British rule in the country during the colonial era. Among this kind of movies is *Invasion 1897* (directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen) dealing with the British invasion and suppression of the traditional throne of the Benin kingdom (Nigeria) in 1897. *The Amazing Grace* (directed by Jeta Amata) follows in this trajectory and tells the story of the slave trade from the Nigerian perspective, mostly from the cradle of Calabar in Cross River state where most slaves were harvested in Nigeria during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era. Documentary films in particular offer perspectives on social realities in such a way that what they do is not only educational but also informational.

Information is what an investigative journalist presents to readers. He or she puts facts and figures together and gives a version of the story that informs viewers of what went on or is going on in a particular scenario or context. The film by the erstwhile vice president of America, Al Gore, titled *An Inconvenient Truth* is so graphically dedicated to climate change to the extent that it can be cited as highly informational

on the causes of global warming and ways of combatting carbon emissions. This same view of what movies do can be extended to what the award-winning documentary *Navalny* does for those interested in the poisoning and suffering of the opposition voice in Russia. It is a political communication showcasing the story of the persecution and trials of Navalny under the Russian government. In the same vein, watching any high school musical is a sure way of appreciating the culture of youngsters in high school environment. Films in this regard serve audiences like peeping holes into enclosures and by so doing give some information about a subject matter being treated – whether elite or popular cultures. Even where films are utterly fictitious like in science-fictions or horror movie categories, there are always latent information to gain from them about an aspect of the universe – hence, a film can provocatively be prophetic in speaking about extraterrestrial subjects (aliens) making war on human beings or even deal with some aspects of a culture which ordinarily is not commonly known to other sectors of the society. So, watching films and digesting the information they offer is a sure way to gain some ideas about some subjects and showcases how impactful the medium of cinema can be in entertaining audiences while shaping their opinions on issues.

Entertainment

The entertainment factor is the high point for which most audiences engage themselves in watching movies. They want to be entertained and so they go to cineplexes or bring in televisions to the confines of their homes for doing so. They allow their emotions to be momentarily aroused by following motion picture narratives as to feel pleasure and be made to laugh or fantasize. Some watch movies as a form of escapism therefore while others do so as a way of socialization. At the end, every film event is considered a suspense moment that relaxes the nerves and recreates the mind. Movie viewing helps individuals to unwind after their hectic engagement with roles in the society and it is in its kind of feel-good ritual that the motion picture experience can be said to give pleasure while entertaining viewers.

How much a film is loved by the audience is seen in its box office returns and this simply means that whatever warrants human beings to spend their money on it is a desire they consider necessary for their happiness. It is for audiences a powerful tool for activating pleasure. It is a way to enjoy themselves and relax their nerves. When a film is successful as adjudged by its audiences, it does not only garner significant returns on investments (ROI) for its makers but also attract the positive analysis of film critics who write to valorize it especially if it achieves some nominations or win awards for spectacular qualities. It is movies that give heightened excitement that can be said to attract patronage from both audiences and critics alike. Such is the target of every movie maker who devotes huge budget to making impactful productions that are rich in aesthetic and cinematographic qualities. This occurs when well-crafted representations are able to pull audiences through suspenseful moments to a level where they can experience catharsis. What this means is that audiences can express deep emotional outburst on movies based on how they feel about them. As said earlier, movies can make people feel good by releasing emotions like laughter, tears or smiles in them. Some viewers can even make verbal utterances in accompaniment of narratives or express themselves by use of gestures like clapping of hands or blushing of the face at screen actions and dialogues. In all, it is correct to argue that whatever kind of art that is capable of eliciting response from its consumers in such a way that they feel pleasure and desire to go back to it at another time is a powerful and successful one. It is for this reason that film is considered a veritable stimulus for entertainment purposes because of its impactful powers and ability to make viewers release emotional tensions or gain therapeutic purgation of stress out of the viewing experience.

Development of Ideas

It is arguable to say that most enthusiasts tend to get new ideas from movies. There are indications that inspirations for businesses, fashions, cars and mansions in audiences can be developed based on what is seen

in representations. In some cases, even the idea of how to settle scores in conflicts with friends or relatives can be inspired by lessons drawn from storylines. This means that a good film has something to offer to its audiences. Even the moral of a story that is beautifully and ideologically crafted can be a significant source of inspiration for an idea in religious or political communication. Film, therefore, is a labyrinth for gaining inspiration and developing ideas about life in the society. In this context, a film can chart a pathway to use to test and learn about love in relationships through hardships between those suffering hardship together in crisis. Similarly, by depicting heroic escapades of individuals who go extra miles to save an ugly situation, it can inspire viewers to conquer their fears and do the ridiculous by ensuring their personal survival in challenging circumstances or that of somebody they are helping to succeed. Even the idea of looking out for one another in communities where people are not closely related can be a move that is inspired by a movie parable that depicts a positive outcome in the effort of another who helps a stranger in a similar situation.

Some films are good in giving insights on how to examine manners and how to go through life challenges with others. This is to say that ideas can be generated from movies on how to tackle challenges and make choices. In one survey I conducted on audiences' reception of Nigerian movies in the Southeast of Nigeria in 2007, Nkechi, a young lady of twenty-seven years⁵ old argued on how Nollywood is a cherished medium for teaching life lessons. According to her, the films "can teach someone a lot of things about life, like how to make friends, how to live with a man or a woman, how to go about things in life and how to study, etc." Thus, ideas and lessons of life are arguably take-aways people get from movies and this does not refer to Nollywood movies alone but to every other form of audiovisual representation that holds a message or a moral to offer its viewers. It is this factor that makes most fans seek particular films to watch and recommend same to their friends. For instance, in the same survey, Kelechi, a young man of thirty years⁶ was of the view that depression, trauma or other psychological

difficulties can somehow be handled through watching motion pictures, especially those that resonate with audience's circumstances. This, he argues, made him recommend one Nollywood film to his friend at a point in time. Explicating this, he states as follows:

I have encouraged somebody to watch a film depending on the type of problem that the person had at a time. These films teach us a lot and even give us reasons why we should stick to our loved ones. Watching films really can give encouragement to people who are down with psychological difficulties. It helps them see how handling difficult situations successfully well will give them a sense of fulfillment in the future.

Like what these impressions express, the argument is that watching well-made films with great morals imbued in them can encourage people overcome shortcomings by emulating heroic characters who are able to turn things around after suffering much in life. In other words, some films can be inspirational by offering ideas, encouragement and psychological uplift over some complexities. They are powerful to the extent that they can make viewers do something radical by trying their hands on new opportunities. So, as society centered as movies generally are, most of them are laden with moral lessons capable of helping audiences negotiate ways through everyday exigencies. This is part of the reasons for arguing on the powers of the movies in this section. What follows is an explication of another kind of influence they exert on audiences – that of consolidation of worldviews or what we call cultural affirmation of norms and values.

Affirmation of Cultural Values

One of the ways children are socialized in society is by means of the media: lullabies, nursery rhymes and cartoons are all over the place on the internet and on television. The same way the media are found to serve children's needs is also how most people in the business of filmmaking use them to teach and guide viewers on conventional

values of the society and by so doing impress cultures upon them. This is understandable since most movies draw inspirations from things happening in the society – the norms. The elements of their make-ups too, such as, costumes and props are things picked up from socio-cultural contexts. Think about a Nigerian film depicting traditional marriage rites – it is expected that for such a movie to be believably acceptable, it must encode the rituals that showcase the festivities of the people in such a circumstance wherein the codes and conventions of a marriage ceremony as known in the society are correctly put in place. The same argument can be made of a film from the West that depicts espionage – it must pick from the society to show the skillful intelligence of criminal investigators, smart movements in understudying criminal suspects and the conduct of forensic analysis on objects and actions which gives some clue to what obtains in the society about crime scene and the fight against it. This is how films make impressions about cultures and stamp in viewers the values that a society upholds or abhors. In other words, a viewer can negotiate meaning in texts and by so doing affirm his or her impression about a given society and its way of life.

In arguing for cultural affirmation as one of the ways through which movies exercise powers on viewers, it is instructive to note that the rituals of a society are part and parcel of the symbolic conventions that filmmakers use to communicate meanings. What this means is that the operational symbols of cultures are used to socialize audiences and help to make them grasp meaning of messages easily. When a movie is situated on a particular locale, it follows that it will give some information about the society in some ways. It could be revelatory of an aspect of its history or story – emergence, communal war, struggles, religion, rituals, festivals or celebrations through encoded dialogue, ideology or costume and make-up designs. All these do not only immerse viewers in the cultural milieu of such a society but also help to affirm in them what they know already about it due to its believable aesthetics. Imagine having some Nigerian parents outside the country watching a Nollywood movie with their children together – such an