

Three Dimensional Vision of a Topical Story: *The Masked Criminal* in
Historical Perspective

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Abstract

*The purpose Right from inception, film has been a suitable medium for historical narration and documentation. In other words, historical films have been made since the first years of the motion picture. By documenting historical events in films, film contributes greatly in the agenda setting theory of the media. Nigerian filmmakers have not been found wanting in putting historical facts to the services of their craft which has seen to the documentation of some historical events in Nigeria in films. Yet, much is still left undone in this regard. This paper is a reading of the film *The Masked Criminal* as a historical documentation of a recent happening in the country that will go into history. It contributes to the filmic representation of the issue of kidnapping in Nigeria is such that anyone following the news about kidnapping in Nigeria will see in it as allusion to a recent case of the kidnapping kingpin known as Evans arrested in November 2017. A content analysis of the film in line with documented evidence about the historical event is attempted while using the Agenda Setting Theory as theoretical background. There is the worry about the impression the film can create in younger members of the fan base of the lead character, Sam Dede who played the role of the Kidnapper. This worry is cleared by the fact that the film was able to tie the loose ends by ensuring that justice is done and all evils adequately punished.*

Keywords: Film, Agenda Setting Theory, Historical Documentation, Media, Allusion, Content Analysis

Introduction

In the year 1898, Boleslaw Matuszewski (1856 - 1943), a Polish cinematographer who worked with the Lumiere brothers (famous film pioneers), published a booklet titled *Une nouvelle source de l'histoire* (The New Source of History) in which he stated that film could a source for historical research and a suitable medium for historical narration as well. Perhaps, film is the commonest way the modern public is exposed to history and made to learn something serious without being too serious. Hence, there is every reason for film to actively participate in the cultural discourse about the past that we call history while entertaining. It is a statement of fact that the orthodox preservation of historical incidents is often times found lacking in human vividness. Owing to this, a humanly vivid past can be better presented in film that is true in its own way- this can be rightly termed visual history. This owes to the realization that film can do most things that written words cannot do.

The historical film usually depends on an order of events (the historical event) that exists outside the imaginative world of the film itself for its meaning and



significance. In her book *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision*, Natalie Zemon Davis came to a conclusion that the historic film is composed of a dramatic feature that has the primary plot based on actual historical events, or has an imagined plot that unfolds in a way that see actual historical events intrinsically central to the story. The historical film “acknowledges that film’s impact lies less in its empirical qualities than in its powerful capacity to influence public consciousness, mould collective memory and retrieve suppressed or marginalised histories.”¹

Two major approaches pre-dominate the study of film and history namely: the Explicit and the Implicit. The Explicit approach insists that any film can be situated historically. On the other hand, The Implicit approach sees the motion picture as a book transferred to the screen and as such is subject to the same sorts of judgments about data, verifiability, argument, evidence, and logic as used in writing history. Also, it should be pointed out that there are variants of the historical film genre. Burgoyne points out some of these saying that “like many genres, the historical film has developed several different variants, branching off into distinct subtypes such as the war film, the epic, the biographical film, the topical film, and evolving new, contemporary forms such as the metahistorical film.”² Our discussion of *The Masked Criminal*, the film selected for illustrative study here, will tilt towards the topical film subtype. The film is framed from an ongoing historical event and narrative.

Theoretical Backing: Agenda Setting Theory

It is said that the idea of Agenda Setting Theory began much earlier before it was formally introduced as a media function concept. In a work titled *Public Opinion* (1922) Walter Lippman (1889 – 1979) came up with the argument that

...people aren’t able to deal effectively with the variety and subtlety of their environments. Most people are protected from their own surroundings by elites. These elites, or media representatives, interpret the motives and beliefs of politicians.³

Summarizing Lippman’s work, Ifeanyi Ojobor posits that the media help to “put pictures in our heads”⁴ Bernard Cohen further expanded this view when he opined that “the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to

¹ Carlsten Jennie M. and McGarry Fearghal. “Introduction” *Film, History and Memory*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 1.

² Burgoyne Robert. *The Hollywood Historical Film*. Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, 2.

³ Cited in Muin, M. J. “Agenda-Setting Theory and the Role of the Media in Shaping Public Opinion for the Iraq War.” M. A. research paper, Department of Communication University of Central Missouri, 2011, 1 – 2.

⁴ Ojobor, Ifeanyi J. “Mass Communication Theories.” Chinyere Stella Okunna (ed) *Teaching Mass Communication: A Multi-Dimensional Approach*. Enugu: New Generation Books, 2002, 21.

think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about”⁵
This, “became the basis for what we now call the agenda-setting function of mass media”⁶

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw were to formally propound the Agenda Setting Theory which they extensively discussed in their work “The Agenda-Setting Function of the Media” (1972). The authors conducted their study in the Chapel Hill, North Carolina during the 1968 Presidential Elections in the USA. They interviewed registered voters and found significant relationship between public ordering of issues and media coverage. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw saw an association between mass media and society’s public opinion. This prompted them to theorize a cause-and-effect relationship between the power of the press and the public opinion in what is now known as the Agenda Setting Theory.⁷ The above position on the origin of the Agenda Setting Theory is summarised thus:

Although the idea of an agenda-setting role of the press has its origins in Walter Lippmann’s 1922 book *Public Opinion*, which begins with a chapter titled “The world outside and the pictures in our heads,” it was only in 1968 when this idea that the press constitutes the bridge between the “world outside and the pictures in our heads” was put to empirical test. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), young professors at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, used the 1968 U.S. presidential election as a case study to find out if there was a relationship between the priority issues of the mass media and the priority issues of the public.⁸

The core proposition of the agenda setting theory is that the elements prominent on the media agenda eventually become prominent over time on the public agenda. When this happens, the media succeed not only in telling us things to think about, they also succeed in telling us how to think about them. Having studied the political campaigns of 1968, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw arrived at a proposition that “people learn from the media what the important issues are”⁹

The repetition of messages about public issues in the news day after day, along with the pervasiveness of the mass media in our daily lives, constitute a major source of journalism’s influence on the audience. The incidental

⁵ Cohen, B.C. *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, 13.

⁶ Muin, Agenda-Setting Theory, 2

⁷ McCombs, Maxwell, and Shaw, Donald. “The Agenda-Setting Function of the Media”. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 36, 1972, 176 - 187.

⁸ McCombs Maxwell & Valenzuela Sebastián. “The Agenda-Setting Theory” Cuadernos de Información, núm. 20, 2007.

⁹ McCombs Maxwell, and Shaw Donald, The Agenda-Setting Function, 176.

nature of this learning, in turn, helps issues to move rather quickly from the media agenda to the public agenda.¹⁰

This theory is relevant to paper as the film medium, with its audio-visual nature, has the power to determine what occupies public discuss of a people. This is true with the film industry in Nigeria where a reigning story can "attract over a hundred films" from the filmmakers.¹¹ *The Masked Criminal*, the film under discussion here is one of such films made from a topical story.

Film and History

Beginning with D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, the historical film has been one of the most celebrated forms of cinematic expression as well as one of the most controversial. As a genre, it has maintained a high degree of cultural prominence over a period of almost a hundred years, and it has established itself as a major form in nearly every nation that produces films. But it has also consistently provoked controversy and widespread public debate about the meaning of the past, about the limits of dramatic interpretation, and about the power of film to influence popular understanding and to promote particular national myths.

The above are the exact words of Robert Burgoyne.¹² Historical events presentation has been one of the most productive areas of film making since the beginnings of the motion picture. This is to say that historical films have been made since the first years of the motion picture. André Bazin once stated this fact thus "As soon as it is formed, the skin of History peels off as film"¹³ Robert Burgoyne concurs by stating that

Historical films have served as vehicles of artistic ambition and as catalysts of public debate from the very beginnings of the art form, as D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) famously illustrates, a tendency that continues into the present day...¹⁴

Since then, historical facts have supplied filmmakers with materials to work. Many world historical events have been documented in films. Such events include wars, colonialism, slave trade, racial discrimination, genocide, sporting events, and terrorism. Nigerian filmmakers have not been found wanting in putting historical facts to the services of their craft. The earliest films in Nigeria were shots of historical events involving the country and/or prominent members of the country. Films dwelling on historical events and personalities

¹⁰ McCombs Maxwell & Valenzuela Sebastián, *The Agenda-Setting Theory*, 46.

¹¹ Shaka, Femi O. "History, genres and texts of the emergent video film industry in Nigeria." *Kiabara: Journal of humanities* 8 (1) (pp. 11-30). Port Harcourt: Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt, 2002, 11.

¹² Burgoyne Robert. *The Hollywood Historical Film*, 2.

¹³ Ibid, 1

¹⁴ Ibid

are common sights in Nollywood. One fact that emerges from all the discussions on history of film in Nigeria is that film in Nigeria is a colonial heritage which became pronounced with the 1903 film's public exhibition of a moving image at the Old Captain Clover (Glover) Memorial Hall Lagos. It is also agreed that films shown were historical events like the coronation of King Edward VII at Westminster Abbey, as well as the historic visit of the Alake of Abeokuta to England. From this point onwards, historical facts never ceased to be employed in film making in Nigeria.

By the time the feature film became prominent in Nigeria, history continued to provide film making materials. Kongi's *Harvest* (Ossia Davis, 1970) is adapted from Wole Soyinka's novel of the same title which chronicled aspects Africa's contact with the colonial masters and the attendant consequences. *Shehu Umar* (Adamu Halilu, 1976) is also an adaptation of a book with the same title written by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa about the 19th century Islamic scholar Shehu Umar. *October 1* (Kunle Afolaya, 2014) is a film about the issues before and after Nigeria's independence of October 1, 1960. *Things Fall Apart* (1986) is also a film adapted from Chinua Achebe's novel that recorded from the Igbo perspective Africa's coming in contact with the colonial masters.

The video film era has also put history to the service of film making. Okpadah and Afolabi concur in their statement that "home video helps in documenting history for future generation"¹⁵ Few instances will suffice. The *Issakaba* series (Lancelot Imasuen, 2000) documents the historical era of the Bakassi boys- an alternative policing movement that began in Aba Abia State and spread to some other states. The film also went as far as dealing with the reason for the disbandment of that movement. Part of it is the killing of Okwudili Ndigwe (alias Derico Nwamama) a notorious criminal who the Nigerian Police had asked the Bakassi boys to hand over to them. That itself is history and led to the making of several films such as *Derico and Bakassi*, *Derico the Thief and the Bakassi Boys*, *Derico the Freedom Fighter* and *The Story of Derico*.

Half of a Yellow Sun (Biyi Bandele, 2014) is based on the Nigerian/Biafran civil war of 1967 – 1970. It is a screen adaptation of the novel by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie with the same title. *Invasion 1897* (Lancelot Imasuen, 2000) dwells on the invasion of the Benin Kingdom in 1897, the accompanying looting of important artefacts and the removal of Oba Ovonranwen Nogbaisi. *Amazing Grace* (Jata Amata, 2016) is a British Nigerian film that looks at the story of the British Slave trader, John Newton, his voyage to West Africa and his inspiration to write the song *Amazing Grace* which is adjudged one of the most popular songs in the world. *Lionheart* (Genevieve Nnaji, 2018) dwells on the plane crash history of Nigeria. It shows the emotional trauma of families that lose loved ones in the tragic events of plane crashes. The film is a social commentary on plane crash in Nigeria and came not quite long from chain of plane crashes in Nigeria (Bellview, Sosoliso, Nigeria Military, ADC, Dana etc).. The film *76* (Izuu Ojukwu, 2018) is based on the events of 1976 in Nigeria especially the 1976

¹⁵ Okpadah, Stephen Ogheneruro and Afolabi, Taiwo Okunola. "Nigerian Home Videos as Panacea for National Development" *Journal of English Literature and Cultural Studies (JELCS Journal)*, Vol.2 No. 3, 2019, 21.

coup that led to the death of General Murtala Muhammed and his succession by the then Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters Lieutenant General Olusegun Obasanjo. The film also made allusions to incidents before the coup and during the General Olusegun Obasanjo's reign as a military head of state.

Films such as Jeta Amata's *Amazing Grace* archive history behind the song amazing grace as the film maker weaved the story around slavery as experienced during the colonial period. *Blood and Oil*, set in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, depicts the course for which the Niger Delta militants are fighting for.¹⁶

This paper is a reading of the film *The Masked Criminal* as a historical documentation of a recent happening in the country.

Nigerian Film Industry and the Crime Film

Arguably one of the most significant and potentially illuminating areas of criminological inquiry is the analysis of crime, media, and popular culture.¹⁷ The use of media in the above words of Dowler, Fleming and Muzzatti is naturally inclusive of the motion picture. Crime is usually appealing to the audience as entertainment and information material as most viewers accept the crime drama as reality. Hence, "Crime as entertainment has cemented a place in popular culture, reflected in all the ... media formats and beyond."¹⁸ It will be right to assert that the use of crime as material for filmmaking is as old as the motion picture itself. In 1903, Edwin S. Porter made a silent film for the Edison Manufacturing company titled *The Great Train Robbery*. In that film, a gang of outlaws held and robbed a steam locomotive. This fact is stated in other words thus:

From its very beginnings, cinema has been about crime. The first American film, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), is a story of robbery, violence, and pursuit. In the phases of experimentation and then consolidation of the cinematographic industry, a valuable source of compelling stories of criminals with which to attract the public was literature...¹⁹

Since then, the deployment of organized crime for filmmaking has continued.

The cultural representation of crime has a long history. Crime and criminal justice have been central themes in oral culture, myths, fables, literature, and the theater since antiquity. The narration of crime has continued in the cinema, which, together with television, has proved to be

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Dowler, K, Fleming, T. And Muzzatti, S. L. "Constructing Crime: Media, Crime and Popular Culture" *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Crime Justice*, 48, 2023, 837.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Spina, Ferdinando. "Crime Films" *Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 2017, 4.

perhaps its most extensive, popular, and powerful medium (Spina, 2017, p. 2).

Biographies of famous cases and famous criminals have continued for give rise to films. Again, Spina lays credence to the inevitability of crime in filmmaking saying:

Cinema, together with television, has proved to be perhaps the most extensive, popular, and powerful medium in the representation of crime. From a criminological point of view, the crime films are all those movies whose central theme is crime and its consequences. The crime films should be defined on the basis of their relationship with society. On one hand, crime films say something important about the social context that they represent and from which they have been fashioned. On the other hand, they themselves have an effect on the social context, since their representation of crime, law, justice, and punishment itself becomes culture, acquires meaning, and provides an interpretation of reality...²⁰

The Musketeers of Pig Alley (1912), *Underworld* (1927), the cycle of *Fantômas* film (1913–1914), *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), *Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler* (1922), *Sunrise* (1927), *The Doorway to Hell* (1930), *The Public Enemy* (1931), *Little Caesar* (1931), *Scarface* (1932), *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), and *High Sierra* (1941) are some of the crime films in early film history. Also, it may not be coincidence that the first talking full-length film was *Lights of New York* (1928) which is based on some crime of bootlegging.

In the Nigerian situation, the crime film has been noted as one of the most powerful film genres in country's film industry. Having saturated the filmmaking scene in Nigeria with films in the ritual and epic genres, Nollywood filmmakers seem to have been 'emboldened' as a result of which they "ventured into other genres, and this informs the attempts at producing crime/gangster films."²¹ The author goes ahead to state the rationale behind the crime/gangster genre in Nollywood:

Somehow, the failure of the policing system in Nigeria has been portrayed in different dimensions in Nigerian films that fail under the crime/gangster genre. Examples include *Sergeant Okoro*, *Issakaba*, *Police Officer*, *Executive Crime*, *Broad Daylight*, and *State of Emergency*, just to mention a few.²²

²⁰ Ibid, 1

²¹ Ayakoroma, Barclays Foubiri. *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres*. Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2014, 92.

²² Ibid, 202

Our interest in this paper is on films revolving around notorious criminals in the annals of the country. Some of such are Lawrence Anini, Ishola Oyenusi, Shino Rambo, Godogodo (Abiodun Egunjobi), Mighty Jeo (Isiaka Busari), Derico Nwamama (Okwudili Ndiwe), Gana (Terwase Akwaza), Kayode Williams, Evans (Chukwudubem Onwuamadike), Wudume (Hamisu Bala), Osisikankwu (Obioma Nwankwo), and Eric (Dike Maduka). Several films have been made from the lives and times of these persons. Such films include *Issakaba*, *Derico and Bakassi*, *Derico the Thief and the Bakassi Boys*, *Derico the Freedom Fighter*, *The Story of Derico*, *The Trade*, and *The Masked Criminal*. *The Masked Criminal* is the film herein selected for illustrative analysis.

Reading a Topical Nigerian Historical Event in *The Masked Criminal*

The Masked Criminal (G. F. Emeka Nwakaihe, 2018) is a Nollywood film that contributes to the filmic representation of the issue of kidnapping in Nigeria. The narrative of the film is such that anyone following the news about kidnapping in Nigeria will easily see the film as making allusion to a recent case of the kidnapping kingpin George Chukwudubem Onwuamadike (popularly known as Evans) who was arrested on Saturday 11th November 2017. It also captures certain revelations made about him after his arrest.

The film presents the story of the character of Ikenna (Sam Dede) who graduated from a street armed robber into the most wanted kidnapping kingpin in the country. He also graduates from collecting ransom in the local currency into collecting same in foreign currencies. He keeps a very dangerous gang at any point in time and also adopts various techniques to beat security agents. Evans so terrorized the peace of the society that the entire police force became restless. Hence, Inspector Emeka Obi (Jerry Amino) took it upon himself to have him arrested.

The story of *The Masked Criminal* opens with the character of Ikenna confronting the mother over the misfortunes in his life. The scene reveals some of the previous actions of the film thus: Ikenna's mother has left her marital home on the accusation of ill treatment from the husband. But she left Ikenna behind for the father who later re-married. Ikenna's step mother did not quite get on well with him consequent upon which he was forced out of school and out of his father's house. He was then sent out on apprenticeship for a number of years but was eventually not settled by his master. These are alluded to as the reasons for Ikenna's adoption of street life and the resultant involvement in crime. Writing about the early childhood of Evans the kidnapper, Chidinma Eze states thus:

Emerging facts about the kidnap kingpin, Chukwudubem Onwuamadike- aka Evans- who was arrested last Saturday, has revealed that his father's decision to disown him was the reason he took to crime....

While speaking to Vanguard , Evans disclosed that he was forced to drop out of school while in Junior Secondary School Class 2, when his father, Steven Onwuamadike, drove

his mother, Chinwe, away and got married to another woman.²³

Continuing about Evans' childhood, Eze states that

... his father, a businessman, asked him to join another a businessman who in spare part...

Unfortunately, after five years of serving his master, things went bad and he (Evans) was accused of stealing and sent away without a settlement... this development embarrassed his father so much that he drove him out of his house...

Evans stated that his father's actions affected him deeply and he was forced to move into his mother's house.²⁴

The film moved further to show Ikenna joining an armed robbery gang. On a tipoff from an employee of a super market, the gang goes for a successful robbery operation. The film now moves on to 10 years later when Ikenna (now played by Sam Dede) had changed his name to Elvis. His gang engages in an operation in Enugu which becomes unsuccessfully fatal. He is the only one to escape alive among all the gang members. There are historical links to these incidents in the film. For instance, facts that emerged at the arrest of Chukwudubem Onuamadike (who adopted Evans as his nickname) state that started his crime business in the South Eastern part of Nigeria especially in Abia, Enugu and Anambra states. A typical example is that in Enugu, "... other robbery gangs started seeking him. That was how he became the financier of arms and armour for the fearless and deadly armed robbery kingpin... from Nkanu... popularly called Ngwu Ekekere Omu."²⁵

The story of Chukwudubem Onuamadike (aka Evans) has it that the family members did not know what exactly was his business and source of sudden wealth. He usually tell family members that he deals on motor spare parts importation- may be because of his apprenticeship in that business. Eze Chidinma has it this way "He used to pose as a spare parts dealer from South Africa with proceeds from his crime."²⁶ This explains why his family members were not robed into his crime after his arrest. In the film *The Masked Criminal*, family members of Elvis never knew the exact business he was doing for a living. Before this character got married to his wife, he stabbed his girl friend who refused to marry him on the basis that she did not know what he was doing. Even after marriage, he still refused to let the wife know his source of wealth. Rather, he will always lie to the wife that he was into drugs in South Africa, and later that he was into importation of motor spare parts. In the film, his family members were also all left out of his crime.

²³ Eze, Chidinma. "Kidnap Kingpin Evans: Astonishing Facts About His Life of Crime," 2020, para 1-3

²⁴ Ibid, para 4-6

²⁵ Ibid, para 12

²⁶ Ibid, para 17

While Evans the Kidnapper was still an armed robber, it was said that he always had a way of escaping arrest or killing at critical moments. As a financier of arms for the Ngwu Ekekere Omu gang, he escaped arrest when members that gang were hunted down and eliminated after the police killed their boss in 2009, Evans escaped arrest. He also escaped in many other instances such as the one narrated by Eze Chidinma below:

... Evans carried out a bloody robbery operation at the university town of Nsukka, Enugu State, where he killed among others, a Divisional Police Officer and later shot the SARS Commander in Enugu in the knee while they were pursuing him along Aani/Otuocha road.

During the operation, he also burnt down Nsukka Police Station after raiding one of the banks...

Police sources said Evans participated actively in that deadly operation and later, after some of the gang members including their leader were killed, he again escaped abroad. On his return, according to sources, he veered into full time kidnapping....²⁷

This is replicated in the film *The Masked Criminal* where Elvis escaped both death and arrest on many occasions. In a scene shown as happened in Enugu, Elvis was in a four man robbery gang. When police clamped down on them, they killed three and only Elvis escaped. Also, when police attacked the gang in their second kidnapping outing, even Hatchet got shot by the police while Elvis escaped unhurt. In the attempt to kidnap the Managing Director of Greater Tomorrow Motors was thwarted by the police leading to the death of Hatchetman and some other members of the gang. Again, in their subsequent operations, members of the gang were either shot or arrested with Elvis unscratched and not caught.

In the characterization of the film *The Masked Criminal*, we see a lot of similarities with many individuals in the life and crime activities of Chukwudubem Onwuamadike. First, the major character in the film is by name Ikenna but he later to the name Elvis as his street/crime name. In real life, Chukwudubem Onwuamadike came to be later known as Evans. In the life story of Chukwudubem Onwuamadike (aka Evans), we hear of a figure by name Henry Hunchman; and in *The Masked Criminal*, we encounter a character called Hatchetman. Sudo is the name of a figure who worked with Evans while in *The Masked Criminal* we see the character of Hugo. The character of Thick in *The Masked Criminal* could be said to represent Okey, a member of Evans' gang.

In listing some of the ransoms his gang had collected in the recent past, Elvis is heard saying: "Sometime in 2015, Chief Okafor paid us \$1million in three months." This may be referring to the real life experience of Evans the Kidnapper when his gang in 2015 kidnapped one "Uche Okafor, a trader at Alaba International Market, Lagos ... and held captive for three months before

²⁷ Ibid, para 16 - 17

he was released after paying \$1m.”²⁸ Also, in the film Elvis talked about Fredrick Ubah who paid his gang a ransom of \$1million in three months. This has strong relationship with one of the victims of Evans the Kidnaper by name Francis Umeh who was kidnapped in 2016 and the family paid \$1million to secure his release. He also made mention of Tobias Unachukwu who he said paid the gang a ransom of \$1million in three months. This relates to “Elias Ukachukwu, who was kidnapped by the Evans gang in November, 2015 and paid \$1million for his release (legit.ng).

The case of Willy Udoh in the film is also related to another case in the life of Evan the kidnapper. The character of Elvis said this about the victim in the film: “Now Mr Willy Udoh, you are 35 years of age from Asaba. You import medical equipments from Hungary. You have done well for yourself and made some good bucks...” At the end, the sum of 20 million naira was paid before his release. In the life of Evan the kidnapper, legit new reports about one of his victims thus: “Mr Mbarikatta William Uboma was kidnapped... on June 16, 2012, and the sum of N20 million was collected as ransom before he was released.”

Worthy of mention here is a scene in *The Masked Criminal* that is glaring in the crime life of Evans the Kidnapper- the failed attempt at kidnapping the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Greater Tomorrow Motors. That operation met great fatality on both the side of the police and that of the Elvis gang. The police lost some personnel members while the CEO of Greater Tomorrow Motors sustained bullet wounds from the gang. The gang lost some of its members. In a discussion scene between Elvis and Loco, they duo recounted their gang members lost in that operation to be Hatchetman, Hugo and Sunshine. This is very closely related to an incident in the crime life of Evans the kidnapper- the foiled kidnapping attempt at the chairman of Young Shall Grow Motors Ltd, Chief Vincent Obinuju. Legit News reports that foiled attempt is these words:

...the chairman of Young Shall Grow Motors was attacked by the accused on Third Avenue, Festac Town, Lagos in 2013: *They engaged the chief in a gun battle, and he was shot on his left arm...*

Also, one of his escorts, Cpl. Ngozi Chijioke and his drive, Peter Nweke, were shot dead by the police; three among the kidnappers were shot down by the police while others escaped... (original emphasis).²⁹

It is also reported that a member of the Evans gang by name Arinze had been surveying and monitoring the activities and movements of Chief Obinuju; while in the film, it was a character named Aloy who did that for the gang.

²⁸ “List of Evans the kidnapper’s 19 victims, ransom they paid” www.legit.ng. (Accessed 10th June, 2020)

²⁹ Ibid

Conclusion

With the contention that the culture of reading has been eroded by the audio-visual media among the contemporary society, film is perhaps the commonest way the modern public can be effortlessly exposed to history. While entertaining, many films take part in the cultural conversation about the past that we call history. It is a statement of fact that as historical narratives, films can sometimes meaningfully articulate historical interpretations even beyond what has been written down by professional historians. This paper has examined the place of filmmaking in documenting historical events in Nigeria. The paper specifically focused on the film *The Masked Criminal* as a documentation of a recent historical event in Nigeria- the crime life of a deadly kidnapping kingpin in Nigeria named George Chukwudubem Onwuamadike (aka Evans) who was arrested on Saturday 11th November 2017.

Media effect scholars will be worried about the possible effect of this film on the younger members of the audience of the film. The concern here is the treatment of crime and the criminal justice system in the film as the treatment accorded crime in a film may have strong impact on crime labelling, motives, means and opportunities for offending as well as the controls (formal and/or informal) militating against crime. For instance, when a star with star charisma plays the role of a criminal in a film, how does this impact on the society? To this effect, Khurana, 2002 cited in Abhimanyu Sharma in these words

Major events are easier to understand when we can attribute them to the actions of prominent individuals rather than having to consider the interplay of social, economic, and other impersonal forces that shape and constrain even the most heroic individual efforts.³⁰

So it could be asked, when an actor in the calibre of Sam Dede plays such a role as Elvis the Kidnapper in *The Masked Criminal* exhibiting such high level of criminal intelligence, how can the younger audience members be affected? Crime films are cathartic as they allow the audience to live out their deviant fantasies which are normally suppressed. Rafter (2006, p. 3) opines that crime films not only reflect current attitudes and tensions in society, but also “shape the ways we think about these issues.” Yet, it is believed that viewers are likely to be attracted to media narratives containing justice-oriented themes. Hence, such people very often have natural preference for narratives that affirm rather than challenge or contradict their beliefs in justice.

“Crime dramas (films) in which characters evaluated as positive are rewarded and other characters perceived negatively are punished have been shown to elicit more favorable responses from viewers... the average viewer

³⁰ Sharma Abhimanyu. “Drama, Narrative and Charismatic Leadership: The Case of Steve Jobs” Unpublished Thesis Submitted to University of Sydney, 2008, 8.

appears to conceptualize the restoration of justice with punishment or a 'good defeats bad' narrative structure."³¹

The representations of crime and justice in media especially film may influence viewers' judgments and decisions about crime and criminal justice. In *The Masked Criminal*, majority of crimes are solved and all the criminal suspects successfully apprehended. This can to a large extent affirm viewer's belief in justice and their reproach to crime and criminality.

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