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AUTEURISM IN DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING: THE MAKING OF THE GAGUS: THE NIGERIAN KITCHEN

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the field of Film and Television

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Film and Television) in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Signed

Shepherd Mpofu

17th June 2009

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Dedication

To my MOTHER

Abstract

This thesis is a reflexive analysis of the documentary film, *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* with specific reference to auteurism in documentary filmmaking. The study centres on the auteur theory and other documentary film theories. This project is related to my personal experiences in making the documentary film. The theory is married to the process in order to reveal the filmmaker's subjectivity in terms of putting the filmmaker's signature on the film. The thesis also addresses issues related to ethical challenges that are encountered in the making of the documentary film. The shaping of the film and thesis is drawn from a vast source of material from authoritative figures, for example, inter alia, Bill Nichols, Stella Bruzzi, Alexandre Astruc, Jay Ruby, Carl Plantinga and Sarris Korchberg. The research concludes by way of looking and critiquing my approach in the making of the documentary film, finding out if I managed to mark the film with my subjective voice beyond my intentions. Lastly, the thesis looks at the extent to which I unconsciously shape the film and mediate the issues raised therein.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with the theory of auteurism in relation to the process of documentary filmmaking. It is a discussion that is intimately intertwined with the process of making my documentary film, *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*. The aim of this essay is to interrogate the theoretical process underlying the making of the documentary film *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* in relation to contemporary documentary and the auteur theories. The main idea is to specifically address the issues of authorial control and construction of reality in the age of self-reflexivity.

The questions that will be put to test in this paper are:

i. how I manage to employ the auteur theory concerning and making the film,

ii. the extent to which I manage to implement my intended goals, cinematically, in making the film,

iii. to what extent have I clearly articulated my 'voice' as a filmmaker. This will examine the extent to which my work is marked by my subjectivity beyond/inspite of my intentions. This includes looking at conscious and unconscious traces of my mediation.

This treatise, consequently, also addresses my role as a filmmaker in trying to interpret and or create reality and influencing the same while adhering to some ethical standards of documentary filmmaking. I will argue that my authorial influence will be informed by the employment of *mise-en-scène* that is part of some of the aspects

discussed under the auteur theory and includes shooting style, the interior meaning and subjectivity in terms of the approach I put into crafting the documentary film.

At the end of the film and in terms of analysis, I want to interrogate the extent to which I am successful in asserting my voice as a filmmaker and whether it is a feasible goal given my limited experience in the field.

***The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*-Synopsis**

The documentary, *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* is about foreignness and a myriad of issues that come with it. It specifically looks at the meaning of West African food to Nigerians and in the process establishes the restaurant, famously called the 'Nigerian Kitchen,' as a main space where Nigerians meet, eat and interact.

During the course of the documentary, the life of the kitchen is explored and this revolves around the cooking, cleaning and eating rituals that tend to characterise the day in the life cycle of the kitchen and eating space.

The documentary opens with a sunrise and cuts to a long shot that helps locate the kitchen. Thus, the documentary establishes Johannesburg through Mandela Bridge and then Braamfontein as shown through a pan from the bridge into Braamfontein and finally a long establishing shot of the kitchen. We are then introduced to Peter, the owner and main character of the Nigerian Kitchen, walking from home to his station of occupation, his restaurant. Inside the restaurant, he introduces the whole concept of food. At this point in time, we start to have a relationship with Peter as an authority in the space and the documentary in general. The first scene also introduces the

viewer to the Nigerians and their business ethos. Different sound-bites from Peter, Noney, Alex, Ukpong tell the viewer that a Nigerian is always aggressive since he is willing to "go out and grab what we want" and Noney adds that there is a certain culture they adopt in whatever they do. Their expression is decidedly aggressive, showing their fearlessness in adventure and a sense of self-belief.

This section gives the Nigerians an opportunity to express their perception of the kitchen and it is revealed that it is not only an eating space, but, according to Ukpong it is "home" while for Alex it is "a place where we get our food…we were brought up with… a place where we meet…argue…talk." In establishing the space, we also establish the central role of the kitchen. It acts as a sanctuary from the outside madding world and as a meeting point for the Nigerians and other people of West African extract.

During the daily rituals we tend to engage with the space and its meaning to the different kinds of people—the workers, owner and the customers. As alluded to earlier, it is a place of safety where the patrons have a chance to find a sanctuary away from the hostile outside world of Johannesburg, while for workers it seems to be an institution of oppression and exploitation. One of the workers, Sanelisiwe, complains that the money they earn as labourers is not enough. She says they are prepared to leave anytime when they get better paying jobs.

As the documentary progresses, we see Ukpong coming into the kitchen with his South African friend Sanele for lunch. During their meal, we observe and listen as they talk about women. Later Sanele tells us that he now has a "different" perception

about Nigerians. He says Ukpong is "like a brother to me," which clearly shows the spirit of harmony, brotherhood and tolerance.

In the second scene, soon after the meal with Ukpong, Sanele, while standing at the rooftop in the evening realises that there is lightning flashing in the sky. He comments that "It's about to rain" and wishes that "…this lightning would strike one of these Nigerian guys…" This brings a twist to the documentary. When we see him eating with Ukpong, he sings a different tune. In this instance we realise the general anger South Africans have for "…these people" who, according to Sanele, come "…from the North to the South to build some sort of an empire…not realising that they are letting…[us]…down." He further alleges that Nigerians are the ones who mastermind crime, run drug cartels and live luxurious lives at the expense of "our people."

Nigerians, through Noney express their disgust with the way they are being treated in South Africa. Noney claims, "we have faced a lot of intimidation, hatred… a lot." They are fully aware of the projected accusations, like selling drugs, stealing South Africans' jobs, and "their women."

As if to accentuate Noney's allegations of facing "a lot," two youthful South Africans disturb the interview, when one apparently drunken man asks to "appear on TV." A war of words ensues between Noney and the two men. The youth threateningly points a finger at Noney asking him to "speak nicely" with them. As if to show some form arrogance and aggression, he uses a local language, IsiZulu while realising Noney's shortcomings in the language.

This encounter leads to one of the perennial themes that characterise any foreigner's life in South Africa; xenophobia. Peter, the Nigerian kitchen owner, says he does not believe in the whole concept of xenophobia while Sanele argues that everyone "has it in him" and that South Africans and Nigerians "hate each other."

While Nigerians view the kitchen as a "meeting point" as per Alex's perceptions and "home away from home" according to Ukpong, one wonders what would happen in case of closure. The driving theme of this documentary is the meaning of the kitchen and food as a space and institution while the effects of its closure and xenophobia are underlying themes. The fears of the repercussions of the closure are raised when one of the subjects, Noney, loses his bar under unclear circumstances.

The story develops to a point where Noney laments that even though Nigerians have dreams and aspirations, at times it is difficult to realise them as one can lose whatever they would have legally accumulated and all they do is resign to fate, conceding such losses so as to protect their lives. He further expounds on this using his experience when his liquor shop was closed under unclear circumstances, which one can only relate to racism and or xenophobia. Noney's experience prompts one to interrogate the meaning of the closure of the restaurant. Besides hunger, one of the subjects, Ukpong believes that it will help prove that there is indeed racism and xenophobia as there is no reason why the kitchen should be closed. Meanwhile, one of the workers at the restaurant does not really care as they earn peanuts. For her, closure means looking for another job somewhere else.

The film ends with a sunset and night; a hope for a new beginning.

Understanding the Documentary Film in Relation to *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*

As a point of departure, I have to define and contextualise my own understanding of the documentary film I am working on. This is in relation to *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*. The understanding of a documentary in the context of this research report is that it [the documentary] has a socio-political message and intention and this separates it from other kinds of current affairs programming, such as news, inserts, etcetera, which strive towards a rhetoric of objectivity. This derives from my personal interest in politics and the media and the relationship between politics and mediation. In addition, I use the auteur theory in conjunction with other documentary theories to shape and reflexively interrogate the process of making my documentary film; *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*.

Therefore, in this paper, the approach of the documentary is to make style as important as the message. The factors that therefore shape this work are prioritising aesthetics over politics, while at the same time appreciating that negotiating the two factors will have an impact on persuading and influencing audiences.

While appreciating that there are many schools of thought on the schema of the documentary film, my appreciation is not different from Grierson's assertion that documentary films are a "creative treatment of actuality" (quoted in Plantinga, 1997: 10). Largely, what I set to do and not do is not the same as what actually happens in processes of filming or editing. As filmmakers, we are unconscious in the way and manner in which we shape things or even what we bring out in others, that is, our

social actors and even our viewers. I can assert that I did not seek to re-enact some action sequences or manipulate the environment or subjects that I was filming, that is, creatively treat or approach actuality on the ground. Only the use of lighting to create a humane face of the 'Nigerian kitchen' and that editing subjects can be argued as indicators of a manipulation of reality. Therefore, my creativity lay only in terms of *mise-en-scène* and editing, where I sought to make some characters become objects of sympathy or non-sympathy, appealing or non-appealing. In addition, thematically, through editing the raw footage, I foreground the sub-theme of xenophobia.

Grierson's assertion proves valid when one analyses such great works as Flaherty's *Nanook of the North (1922).* In Flaherty's film, inauthenticity prevails, as there are reconstructions and re-enactments employed to explain or help highlight or shoot certain aspects. Plantinga (1997: 10) asserts that:

> the profilmic event in Flaherty is usually arranged and/or staged for the camera. In *Nanook of the North* (1922), for example, Flaherty had the Eskimos engage in a Walrus hunt with harpoons, a practice they had abandoned when the white men introduced the rifles.

However, in my documentary film there are no re-enactments and manipulation of the environment, besides lighting, that aids in the telling of the story, whether thematically or technically. What Flaherty captures is the truth but not reality. It is true that the Eskimos used to hunt the walrus with harpoons but what we see on screen is not the real people doing their real everyday rituals. However, I will tend to partly borrow from Nichols's definition of the documentary where he defines it thus: "'representing reality' including reporting, engaging in dialogue with, investigating, observing, interpreting and reflecting on" issues, (1997: 143).

On another note, preservation of veracity in documentary film was advocated for by artists such as Robert Drew and Richard Leacock (quoted in Plantinga 1997: 35), who argued that filmmakers should not interview the subjects, "never ask someone to repeat an action, never add music or special effects." *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* partly borrows from this in the manner in which it is structured, but not holistically.

Even though there is an intention and illusion of preservation of reality in *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*, one cannot think of any major documentaries which can lay claim to the fact that they have not been produced through the route of 'creative treatment of actuality.' In my documentary I try to maintain veracity through applying some semblance of a puritanical approach in terms of non re-enactments and using actual characters and non-actors, while at the same time creatively treating actuality through editing where I tell my story in a coherent way. This is because the profilmic event offers me, as a filmmaker, raw material that lacks coherence and clamours for order in order to make sense.

In *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen,* I disregard part of Drew and Leacock's suggestions, as, in a way, rigidly employing them may kill my artistic expression. As discussed later, music and other effects are used to help engage the audience, move the story forward and direct the pacing. Thus, this puritanical approach may prove tyrannical to the art of documentary filmmaking, depriving it of some facets of the craft.

However, more often than not, there are many concerns raised in relation to the verisimilitude of the final product. Filmmaking is a form of self-expression for the directors; hence, the relationship between the director and the people represented in the films may compromise the reality of the documentary - especially when one takes the approach used in the production of *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*.

Making *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*

This is only my second documentary film dealing with issues of foreignness in my Masters film degree. In the same breath, I can claim to be particularly well positioned as a Zimbabwean to be making documentaries about, and mediating on the issues of the politics of foreignness in South Africa.

The auteur theory is also a relevant theory to tackle especially in documentary filmmaking. This is based on the need to link the theory to documentary even though its background is in the fiction genre. The auteur theory recognises that the director, in a fiction film, shapes the fiction in as subjective a manner as he or she may wish. In the documentary film, the same applies even though there are governing principles of truthfulness and ethics. Thus shaping a documentary film is a subjective undertaking as is the case in fiction, but the governing rules are more tyrannical than those that govern fiction film.

The main reasons for making this film and the research paper is to first gauge if, through the construction of *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen,* I can employ the auteur theory in documentary given the fact that, as earlier highlighted, when it was propounded it mainly concerned itself with fiction film. This allows me to evaluate to

what extent one can manipulate the documentary as a personal project and at the same time retain some form of respectability in as far as the issues of veracity are concerned.

Subjectivity, which includes bias, selection and emotional attachment by the author to her/his subject matter, is one of the hallmarks of art and indeed filmmaking. There are many reasons why a filmmaker may choose a certain subject or issue to tackle in a film. This ranges from fascination to familiarity to a certain topic or issue. In addition, one may make a film based on the need to experiment. In this project I have two intentions; to make a film on a subject matter that interests me and to marry two seemingly unrelated modes in documentary filmmaking to shape my documentary while also employing components of the auteur theory to shape the film.

Some critical and central arguments postulated by Roland Barthes (1977), Andrew Sarris (1979), Stella Bruzzi (2000), Bill Nichols (1999) and other scholars in relation to the auteur theory make the subject worthwhile to interrogate, moreso, through the use of a documentary film and reflecting on it. This research project, however, remains focused on the theoretically pertinent question of auteurism in the making of *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*, and the issues of verisimilitude of the documentary film's being, taking into consideration arguments by the puritanical school of thought. When these issues are probed, one finally notices the subjectivity, variation, multiplicity and contradictory nature of truths. This is mainly because documentary, despite all its pretensions, cannot capture the real world. The camera cannot capture the historic world as it would unravel in its absence.

Shaping the Documentary Film and Reflexivity

This part of the research is divided into two. The first part concerns itself with the auteur theory and the second part addresses the issues of immigration of foreigners into South Africa. This will later help explore the underlying text of the film; xenophobia.

In order to shape this research project, it is imperative to discuss the writings on the auteurism theory at length. Most of the literature referred and available is relatively old even though the theory itself is relevant in the current epoch.

Susan Hayward asserts that the theory dates back to the 1920s. It was used to refer to the "author of the script and film maker as one and the same" (Hayward, 1997: 20) The debate was later resuscitated by the *Cahiers du Cinema*—a publication started by Andre Bazin, who was to be later known as the father of auteurism, in 1951. The publication of the article *A Certain Tendency in French Cinema* (1954) by François Truffaut helped shape the theory or concept of auteurism as it was known before Sarris's coining of the term "auteur theory" (1962: 662). Truffaut (in Sarris 1962: 662) referred to the "*politique des auteurs*" in the paper meaning the "aesthetics of venerating directors." The premise of the essay is that the director uses the film as an arena for personal and subjective expression of his or her ideas. The main target of the theory was fiction film, albeit the concept can still be applicable to documentary film.

The auteur concept gained currency as a theory in the 1960s when Andrew Sarris invented the term "auteur theory." He postulated that over a certain number of films, a director should "exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his

signature" (quoted in Mast et. al.1979: 662). This relates to the formation of the canon of what was then called the great directors. According to Sarris, for a director to prove his mantle as an auteur he had to boast of technical competencies, personal style on the texture of the film and the interior meaning. It therefore becomes important to define and differentiate directors through the technical and other aesthetical values even before seeing the credits of the film. Hayward (1997: 13) further accentuates this when she asserts:

> [T]hey [*Cahiers du Cinema* group] argued that just because American directors had little or no say over any of the production process bar the staging of the shots, this did not mean they could not attain the auteur status. Style, as in mise-en-scène, could also demarcate an auteur… the term auteur … now refer(s) either to the director's discernible style through *mise-en-scène* or to filmmaking practices where the director's signature was as much in evidence on the script/scenario as it was on the film's product itself.

Hayward's contribution to my research is that directing the documentary entails the employment of technical aspects and these, as is the case in *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*, are lighting, mixture of static and panning shots, tripod and hand held mode of shooting and the use of two modes of documentary film. By paying loyalty to these and other aspects that create the interior meaning. I try to use the auteur theory to shape my documentary film so that I imprint my subjectivity, voice and personality on it.

There is a myriad of ideas from a number of diverse schools of thought. Of much interest is the argument proffered by Alexander Astruc's assertions that film should be seen as a language and mode of self-expression and:

> by language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may

> be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. This is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of the camera stylo (1968: 12-23)

Kochberg's argument that "many makers of documentary…have a recognizable aesthetic voice in their work, where truths are mediated through their artistic obsessions in film after film" (2002: 48-9), further illuminates and highlights Astruc's take on auteurism theory. I therefore wish to be evaluated though the manner I set out to do my film and also the end product of the whole process, that is, *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen.* In addition, Kochberg's argument is central to the premise of this research as it captures the fact that truth and facts are mediated as opposed to Morton and Leacock's 'rigorous' approaches which lead to a filmmaker to operate under the puritanical "shackles of the genre" (Owen, 2006: 7). This suggests that the filmmakers should "never talk to the subject, never ask someone to repeat an action, never…intervene…add music" (Holland, 2000: 157). The observational approach approximates this purity but the mere fact that we see what the camera chooses for us therefore means that one cannot capture the historical world in its purest form.

This contradicts with my intentions and indeed with Bill Nichols's argument that auteur in documentary film needs to have a voice and not be a slave to simplistic assertions of "empiricism." He further argues that:

> [F]ar too many contemporary filmmakers have lost their voice. Politically, they forfeit their own voice for that of others (usually characters recruited to the film and interviewed)…the world and its truth exist; they need not only to be dusted off and reported… very few…admit that filmmaking is a form of discourse fabricating its effects, impressions and point of view. (Nichols, 1999: 50)

This argument shows that in the production of *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* I will have to manipulate some aspects artistically, for example, using lighting to create a certain mood, or a compelling appearance or arguments and empathy with the subjects. The argument still holds that there is a certain amount of control proffered by the auteur in the production process. Therefore, subjectivity, (since the whole filmmaking process is a language and mode of self-expression) is part of the hallmarks of documentary film. This does not affect the veracity of the documentary, largely. Grierson's definition of the documentary effectively portrays an act of artistically representing history and has some undertones of manipulation (Plantinga, 1997: 10). This will contribute to my documentary in that at times reality is creatively dealt with. For example, the impression is that the shooting and all the action sequences take place in the same day while the fact is that it is not so.

Closely linked to the above is the assertion by Barnouw, (in Bruzzi 2000: 4) that objectivity cannot be claimed in documentary filmmaking as the:

> claim to be objective…renounce[s] an interpretative role…[t]he documentarist…makes endless choices. He [sic] selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lens, juxtapositions, sounds, words. Each selection is an expression of his [sic] point of view, whether aware of it or not…

Bruzzi (2000: 4) further argues that a "documentary film will never be reality nor will it erase or invalidate that reality by being representational." This stems from the argument that what viewers see is the subjective selection of the filmmaker and not all that there is in the historical world. Therefore, this assertion helps to shape my work in the light of the arguments that seek to puritanically approach and preserve the veracity of the documentary for it to pass as reality.

Errol Morris, in Bruzzi (2000: 5-6) further advocates the auteur theory in line with the work I am doing when he argues thus:

> There is no reason why documentaries can't be as personal as fiction filmmaking and bear the imprint of those who made them. Truth isn't guaranteed by style or expression. It isn't guaranteed by anything.

Michael Moore suits this description when one takes him as an auteur who is the star director in some of his films. He superbly foregrounds his personal point of view and convincingly so. The same may also apply, in some cases, to South African filmmaker, Rehad Desai who is some kind of a star director personalising the whole film to a larger extent. What you hear from the star director is the use of the words "I," or "my people" and their appearance is dominant on the screen. The film then tends to centre around them as they seek to move the story further. In *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen,* I do not take an active role as a director. My voice is subdued but I still have a 'voice' in the film. I try to take into cognisance Rabiger's advice that there needs to be a balance in the role of the director as an auteur *vis-à-vis* the role of the subjects.

He advises thus:

> [S]tamp your world with too much of your viewpoint, and you imply a deficiency in the personalities and events you filmed. However withdraw your own values from the tale, and the point of telling vanishes. (Rabiger, 2004: 2)

This helps me in terms of moderating my approach in the production of *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*. Two basic modes of representation are use dint the film. These are interactive and observation modes. These are further elucidated in *Chapter Two*.

The observation mode, as defined by Nichols, "stress[es] the non-intervention of the filmmaker…ced[ing] 'control' over events that occur in front of the camera more than any other [out of six] mode" (2001: 99). In *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*, narration and voice over are not used. This allows me to 'limit' the level of control and my own point of view. These are expressed through the choice of characters, aesthetics and editing employed. Largely, this helps me to give the viewers access to a seemingly "unmediated and unfettered access to the world" of the film.

The interactive mode is used when I interact and interview the subjects. In this instance, I appear on camera while asking questions and in other instances I do not appear on camera. Only my voice is heard. Interaction is also pointedly shown when the subjects look at me instead of the camera. Thus, a third person, besides the viewer and camera is created in the way the subjects address the viewer. (See ***Appendix*** 1).

The underlying texts of the documentary are xenophobia and projection. Xenophobia is generally defined as the "hatred or fear of foreigners" (Della 1996: 1065). The Collins COBUILD English dictionary (1987: 1944) defines xenophobia thus; "a strong and unreasonable dislike or fear of people from other countries" It is therefore imperative to understand that when South Africa gained its independence in 1994, it was viewed as a progressive and democratic country founded on a sound constitution.

Xenophobia is therefore an "attitudinal phenomenon that is irrational and unreasonable, and therefore deeply rooted in the psyche of the persons who exhibit it," (Adekoke, 1999: 49) This question is pertinent to this research and film as the film is partly about how the South African community generally feels about the

foreigners, especially Nigerians. Hussein Solomon argues, "South Africans as a whole are becoming more xenophobic in their attitudes towards migrants generally and illegal immigrants in particular" (Hussein, 2003: 91). This can also be related to the May 2008 violence related to xenophobia in which more than 50 people; most of them foreigners were left dead. In addition, shops belonging to foreigners were looted throughout the country. These attacks were attributed to the fact that foreigners were 'stealing' locals' jobs, houses and women. Previously there have been such attacks, for example, in March 1990 near Giyani, Mozambicans were victims (300 huts burnt), in October 1994 in Hout Bay, in late December 1994 and January 1995. In 2000 "three foreign traders were – a Mozambican and a Senegalese-chased through the carriages of a train by a mob of locals shouting racist slogans…one fell off and the others were electrocuted by the overhead cables," (Hussein, 2003: 98). In 2006, about 32 Somalis were killed in xenophobic related attacks in the Eastern Cape province.

The film is anchored on and assumes an understanding of the foreign 'invasion' of South African society by aliens who undoubtedly contribute to certain social ills, even though at times South Africans prefer to accuse foreigners in a projective way.

Working Methods: A Conceptual framework

This essay on *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* is anchored on the theory of the auteur in documentary filmmaking. The theory is outlined in most academic sources cited under the later in this chapter. These help me assess if I manage to subjectively control my film using the auteur theory aspects. My arguments in the production of the film and this essay are hinged on those advanced by, among others, Stella Bruzzi (2000), Bill Nichols (1999), Carl Plantinga (1997) and Jay Ruby (2005) who argue

that one cannot maintain the puritanical state in the representation of the historical world through the production of a documentary film. This qualifies my documentary as a work where reality is clearly and creatively dealt with.

Writing in the literary world, Barthes (1977: 208-213) argues that there is a point in the consumption of a text, where the author dies and the reader of the text becomes a 'god' with the pleasure to create meaning out of the text. This theory, the death of an auteur, clashes with my work and other scholastic arguments. These arguments foreground an ideology that to a larger extent meaning of the text largely lies with the author, while at the same time appreciating that meaning creation is a negotiation.

In order to succeed in defining and making myself as an author of this film using the theory of the auteur, there is need to use some of the *mise-en-scène* in a definitive manner. *Mise-en-scène*, as discussed in *Chapter Three*, includes such things as the use of lighting, different shot sizes, different angles, movement of the camera and even the choice of the subject matter. These are used to create specific meanings.

Bill Nichols's categorisation of documentary film modes help shape *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* in many ways. I chose to use two modes. These are the observational and the interactive modes. These seemingly contrasting modes are used in harmony to create a 'hybrid' of a documentary.

Observational mode was born out of discontentment with what was seen as a moralising quality of the expository mode. This mode is also known as *the cinema veritê* or direct cinema. The observational mode gives the viewers a sense of having

access to an unmediated and unfettered world. For example, in my documentary project this mode is employed when Sanele and Ukpong are walking towards the restaurant and when they are inside, eating and talking. See ***Appendix** 2.* Here they speak to each other and not the camera. In addition, the observational mode is used when the restaurant workers are cleaning and cooking. See ***Appendix** 3.*

In this instance, the filmmaker tries to be unobtrusive, while capturing 'real life' unfolding in a purest possible form. In this instance, there is no need for voice over, re-enactments or interviews. The shooting involved long takes, which Nichols argues are the "exhaustive depiction of the everyday" (Nichols, 1991: 41). Time is however is compressed through the subjective selection of material and shots by the filmmaker through editing.

The interactive mode gives away the veil of illusory presence of the filmmaker, which means that there is no deliberate intention of subduing the filmmaker's presence. In this instance the filmmaker need not:

> [Be] only a cinematic eye, recording eye…he or she should be more fully approximate the human sensorium: looking, listening and speaking. The filmmaker's voice could be heard as readily as any other…on the spot, in face-to-face encounter with others. (ibid: 41)

In the mode, "images of testimony or verbal exchange and images of demonstration" (ibid: 4) are stressed. The film's argument is hinged on the comments and arguments foregrounded by the social actors. The interactive mode revolves around the interview whose rules of engagement are confession and interrogation where power relations are clearly defined. The hierarchical set up of the mode is such that the filmmaker assumes the role and stature of a more superior being who asks and interrogates while

the interviewee is a witness testifying. Thus, the positioning of the filmmaker as the owner of the project, as one who determines what questions to ask and the social actors as the interrogated parties creates an unequal relationship. By virtue of this, the filmmaker therefore becomes an all-powerful entity. Full reciprocity or equality of participants is found lacking in this relationship.

Conclusion

This chapter has comprehensively captures the core of the research and the film: linking the reflexive essay with the film. In addition, issues that lead to social actors speaking about certain things, for example, issues of crime, drugs, xenophobia etcetera are addressed especially under literature review. The chapter also helps set basis and act as a foundation to the preceding chapters as what is discussed in this chapter is further developed and given more clout.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAKING OF THE FILM *THE GAGUS: THE NIGERIAN KITCHEN.*

As a point of departure in this chapter, it is paramount to highlight the fact that as a filmmaker, authoring the documentary *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* has not been an objective undertaking. The very act of choosing themes, social actors, location and the mode of shooting and selection of shots for the final documentary clearly points to my subjectivity. Reflexively, authoring a documentary is therefore a politically subjective journey. This chapter seeks to highlight, define and look at how I subjectively deal with the issues I raise in the film. Jay Ruby (2005: 35) argues that reflexivity allows the filmmaker to engage the viewers at all levels of production as posited in Johannes Fabbian's simplified model shown below:

PRODUCER→PROCESS→PRODUCT

The model shows the stages of production that are always followed when one is making a film. Thus the producer originates the idea and does the product (processing) and finally comes up with a final product. Unlike the propositions made by Fabian in the model, filmmakers only present to the viewers the final component, which is the film. This applies to my film, *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* especially when one also considers the modes used. The modes do not allow the viewer to engage with the fact that there is a filmmaker mediating. According to Ruby, popular rhetoric dictates that documentaries are produced by people who want to appear "unbiased, neutral and objective," (2005: 35) to the viewers. Once armed

with the knowledge of the three processes of the model, Ruby contends, the audiences then come to a position where they can engage with the text in a "sophisticated way" where "critical understanding of the product" will be possible.

In the same vein, revealing the producer to the viewer may be seen as overly subjective, narcissistic and counterproductive (2005: 35). However, in the documentary film, I do appear on screen especially during interviews. This assists in different aspects. Firstly, there are instances where the characters are looking away from the camera and one may wonder or be interested who the third person being addressed is. Secondly, this helps where I ask questions and the need to be seen as the interviewer and not give an impression that the subjects are addressing issues without moderation. Thus when I am interviewing Sanele at the roof top at first we are both in shot and later he is the only one in shot looking, as it appears on camera, aside. The fact is that he will be looking at me. To motivate my presence, we both appear in shot so as to make our positioning clear.

Ruby further argues that there is not much importance in terms of exposing the audiences to the three aspects of making a film as engaging with the process can lead to the audiences being exposed to the clumsy facets of backstage and at the end their suspension of disbelief will be dissipated. If, for example, I were to expose to the viewer how some speeches or interviews were cut and rearranged in the process of mediation or how some social actors were coached before the shoot, it would have made it easier for them to spot these forms of manipulation, as it were, and, in the process, they lose their suspension of disbelief. However, when this is done well, it gives the audiences a chance to appreciate the fact that there is a relationship between

the filmmaker, process and the final product, where all the three exist as a coherent whole. Thus seeing the filmmaker actively participating in the film through voice overs and interaction gives viewers an impression, connection and belief of the presence of the filmmaker.

In *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*, I make sure I use reflexivity in a manner that contributes to the story, with an understanding that:

> to be reflexive is not only to be self-aware, but to be sufficiently self-aware to know what aspects of self are necessary to reveal so that an audience is able to understand both the process employed and the resultant product and to know that the revelation itself is purposive, intentional and not merely narcissistic or accidentally revealing. (Ruby, 2005: 35)

This is addressed later in this chapter when I address the issues of my appearance on the screen in comparison with other documentaries where directors become the main characters through appearance and voice over. This differs, in a way; for example, from the way Michael Moore appears as the star director and takes control through appearance and voice in his documentaries like *Bowling for Columbine (2002), Fahrenheit 9/11(2004)* and *Roger and Me (1989).* In all these documentaries Moore appears on screen manifesting himself, with success, as the protagonist and star on a personal quest to prove or achieve something. In *Bowling for Columbine (2002)* he is on a journey to fight against the lack of gun control in America, in *Roger and Me (1989)* he is on a quest to 'fight' for the workers of a car plant that is about to be closed. In *Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004)* he embarks on a journey to decampaign American President Bush, who was seeking a re-election in 2004 and tries to expose his weakness in issues like the Iraq invasion and his relationship with terrorist Osama bin Laden and his family. This, however, does not mean his appearance is not effective.

The approach to main themes in *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* is simply ideological in all intents. Besides authoring a documentary to fall in line with some theoretical concepts of auteurism, the subject matter and content are both politically and ideologically inclined. They are solely the filmmaker's. I lack the objectivity of seeing shots on the surface but deliberately see what is beyond the image on the screen. Thus, every aspect of the shot communicates something. For example, the choice and use of the shot of South African youths who disturb our shooting is not merely viewed as a disturbance. There are many political connotations and ideological insinuation embedded in the use of such shots. As a filmmaker I drive the point of xenophobia home, insinuate lack of manners, drunkenness, lack of self-control, hatred of the foreigner, which in turn is hatred of self because the foreigner exposes the local's lack of self-worth.

My auteur approach is such that I mix two modes of documentary filmmaking and, in addition, indulge in aesthetic construction of the documentary in order to define and assert my subjective voice as an author of the documentary. Authoring this documentary cannot be claimed to be a solitary effort undertaken by the auteur. It is arguable that my subjects or social actors, having agreed to be part of the whole project, helped, in a way, to author the documentary. Agreement to participate meant two main things. That is either they had their own objectives or agendas they wanted to articulate for the consumption of the viewers or it was simply for the camera, the feeling of role-playing or acting.

Subjective authoring of the documentary-Producer and the Process

When I saw the Nigerian Kitchen for the first time, I noticed that it was a space of free self-expression which one rarely sees in the streets of Johannesburg or anywhere else. The kitchen was some sort of an island where Nigerians and other people of West African extraction existed happily. The friendship and relationships transcended the matters of food. My attitude and some knowledge about South Africans being xenophobic led me to thinking about a film that interrogates the two aspects of the space as a sanctuary where foreigners congregate to hide from the madding crowd outside and the space as an eating-place where native Nigerian food was prepared.

My approach was to make a documentary that will expose the two issues of the kitchen as a home and food as a uniting factor and xenophobia as a destabilising factor. Other aspects were technical and artistic, that is form and content. The two are inseparable - for example, the use of lighting, editing, use of different modes, shooting at different times of day and choice of the interviewees.

I had planned my documentary in such a way that there will be as natural an environment of the kitchen life as is possible. However, when I realised that the inside of the kitchen was not so bright I decided to use lighting. This helped me not create a negative impression about the kitchen as a dingy space. In addition, it made the social actors look as humane as possible. This approach may be in defiance of some puritanical theorists who postulate that there should not be any use of artificial lighting in documentaries so as to maintain veracity and purity. In the same score, I wanted to assert my own voice in terms of the way I would implement the intention of ‘positive’ appearance. By positive appearance I mean the appearance on camera that

is not narcissistic and the purpose of such appearance does not highlight anything. (**See Appendix 4a and 4b**).

The choice of my social actors came after a long search, research, and rigorous screening/selection. Peter is the main character and the most authoritative of them all since he is the host of different Nigerians and West African of different lifestyles. He creates a home for them where he feeds them. This is at a monetary cost though. Peter exudes the spirit of adventure and "going out to get what we want," of the Nigerians. In addition, he is a paragon of success. Even though he is meant to be a protagonist, he fails to live up to this expectation as there is no 'life' in his character. He is, in no way, in a position to make the film dramatic through twists and turns.

Another important character in the documentary is Noney. He loses his liquor selling business. He had a white neighbour who ran the same business and his neighbour could not stand competition hence he colluded with a policeman who manages the liquor outlets around the area where the two bars were, and they managed to close Noney's bar. The much-travelled Noney gives the documentary a dimension that allows us into the Nigerian way of life and its struggles; it is not all rosy for foreigners here in South Africa. Noney's testimony also exposes the general attitude local South Africans, black and white, have for foreigners. This much to the satisfaction and belief of the filmmaker since the general feeling that comes out of the characters is that of intolerance of the foreign nationals.

In addition, Noney gives away the belief that a Nigerian who fails in South Africa or wherever they go will not return home empty handed, as this will be a sign of failure

and emasculation contrary to popular belief. Noney is prepared to give up on the bar business fearing for his life but at the same time he promises that "we made the money we are *gonna* make it again."

Noney's role in the film also helps to highlight the fact that Nigerians are conscious of the stereotyped images, projection and accusations that South African level against them. These accusations include running drug cartels, brothels, stealing South African's women and contributing to general crime.

Sanele, a South African college student, brings in the South African face of the documentary. I found that his thoughts and approach to the issue of Nigerians and other foreigners were enough to give the documentary the shape I wanted, especially on issues of xenophobia and projection from a South Africa's perspective. Sanele also gives the documentary a turning point where he, while inside the restaurant, says he had a negative perception about Nigerians and Ukpong has made him think twice. Later, he turns around, contradicting himself and says he hates the Nigerians because they contribute to crime in South Africa. This twist, though unplanned gives the documentary the drama that was not envisaged during the pre-production stages. This part of the documentary text marks my subjectivity beyond my intentions.

Ukpong, a student at the University of the Witwatersrand shows a clear awareness of the role a global citizen has to play in the world while at the same time holding a view that Nigerians have the will power to achieve and will always succeed in whatever they do. Noney and Peter also exude this 'superiority complex'.

Alex is one character who shows determination and makes one understand what it means to be a foreigner. For him it all has to do with being a ‘man’ and therefore trying to find ways of surviving and coping. He is a typical ‘hustler’ who sells Nigerian movies from his car and he dreams big despite his current position.

The above characterisations explain why I chose these social actors for the documentary. They helped portray Nigerianness and South Africannes in ways adequate and satisfactory for the production of this documentary.

Filming the Nigerian social actors proved to be a challenge in terms of setting up appointments and their failure to show up. The major problem was with filming inside the kitchen where Peter asked me not to film his customers as he felt they would be uncomfortable. This relegated me to filming him and his workers. However, in an interview with Ukpong and Sanele inside the restaurant, I managed to ‘steal’ some shots of the customers that later proved useful but at the same time posed ethical considerations.

The problems with failure to keep appointments also proved to be a good opportunity. The scene where the drunken youths disturb the shoot is a case in point. Noney and Alex failed to show up for interviews during the week. The shoot was set for Sunday when the kitchen was closed. Peter forgot the keys at home so we could not film while inside.

Conflicting Modes of Documentary Film Production

Bill Nichols (1991) offers some of the most useful typologies of non-fiction films. The four modes, which he describes as the "basic ways of organising" (Nichols, 19991: 32) documentary texts, are expository, observational, interactive and reflexive. My film borrows and uses two modes that, in a way clearly conflict. Thus in *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*, the recurrent modes are interactive and observational. The observational mode seemingly conflicts with the interactive as the former entails making a documentary without any contact with the profilmic or afilmic world. The later allows for interactions between the filmmaker and the profilmic or afilmic world. Using the two in one text seems contradictory at first. However, I manage to manipulate and use the two in a single documentary film. A brief description of the two selected modes is in order before I elaborate on why I chose them and how they help my aims and interrogations of the auteur theory.

The observational mode is also known as *cinema veritê* or direct cinema. The observation mode implies that the historic world is mediated in a non-interventionist way by the filmmaker. In this mode, argues Nichols "voice-over commentary, music external to the observed scene, intertitles, re-enactments, and even interviews are eschewed," (1999: 38). This puritanical approach insinuates and gives an impression of abiding to some high ethical standards. This mode gives an impression that for the filmmaker to successfully achieve veracity in whatever they want to portray in terms of filming they should not in any way alter the lives of the subjects through the camera and other technical intrusions.

When Sanele and Ukpong are eating and talking in the restaurant, the mode of representation is observational—where social actors are only seen and overheard speaking to one another and not directing their discourse to the camera. However, there is one instance that shows the presence of the camera. This is when Sanele points, with his eyes, to the camera (in a way referring to myself as a filmmaker) as one of the sources of the information he is sharing with Ukpong. (See **Appendix** 5). Observational mode is used during the cleaning and cooking session in the kitchen. (See **Appendix** 6). The filmic, that is the camera operator and the filming apparatus, manage to capture the daily life routine of the kitchen without necessarily altering the historic profilmic and afilmic event or world.

The reality effect is brought about and strengthened by the use of recurrent images. For example, the use of the curtain (See **Appendix** 7) when there is a transition from inside to outside or the use of the kitchen exterior and/or establishing shot of the kitchen when there is a transition from outside to inside the kitchen helps anchor the film in:

> to the historical facticity of time and place and certif.[ies]
> to the continuing centrality of specific locations. These refrains
> add effective texture to an argument; they stress the historical
> specificity of the observed world and the micro-changes
> that occur from day to day. (Nichols 1991: 41)

The continued presence of the shot of the kitchen in *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* locates "the site of dramatic engagement." (Nichols, 1991: 41). (See **Appendix** 8). In addition, when Noney and Alex are interviewed they are outside the kitchen, showing the emotional attachment they have to the kitchen and its centrality as a place where they hang around giving a homely feeling and appearance (See **Appendix** 9) when

Alex is interviewed outside the Kitchen. Therefore, the often-repeated actions and sites help to dissipate an impression of an "atemporal slice of selected scenes from a single moment in time" rather than create an impression, as alluded to earlier, "of narrative development, of transformation over time…" (Nichols, 1991: 41).

Using the observational mode, I manage to create an empathetic and non-judgemental position. I believe the other modes have undertones of being judgemental since the rules of engagement are such that the filmmaker is superior or wields more power than the social actors and whatever way they relate is determined by those power relations. In the observational mode the filmmaker is not given as much power as is the case in, for example, the interactive mode. In the former, the social actors are free to act as they wish and whatever they do is under and within their control. In other modes the interference of the filmmaker through voice-overs or questioning affects and influences the positioning of the social actors as powerful entities.

In the documentary, the interactive mode is interwoven with the observational mode to create a certain effect. This marriage of modes creates a seamless film in terms of the story direction. Both modes work effectively. Thus the interactive mode helps in that arguments by the central actors form the core of the film's major arguments. The interactive mode is hinged mainly on the interview technique. As a filmmaker, I show my presence in two basic ways. Firstly, I appear on screen interviewing the social actors; I speak from the camera's point of view such that when the social characters are addressing me they look into the camera, signalling my presence. Secondly, sometimes my voice totally disappears from the text - but then my conspicuous

presence as a filmmaker becomes clear since the social actors will be directly addressing the (filmmaker) camera.

The interactive mode's power to allow interviews in order to create 'debates and contradictions' helps when it exposes Sanele's contradictions. Interestingly, we observe him saying he has changed his "perceptions of these people" but later on he says he hates them as they are drug dealers and contribute to crime in South Africa. His view of them (the Nigerians) is that they do illegal deals so as to build "some sort of empires…not realising that they are letting our people down." The use of both modes helps highlight the fact that even though they are contradictory and seemingly cannot work together theoretically, they can, in a complementary way, show or expose that which the other mode cannot. For example, it is not worthwhile to interrupt the cooking or cleaning sessions through interviews. These daily rituals cannot be questioned or highlighted any further through any other available mode besides using the observational one. In order to understand the matrix of relationships about the kitchen and the relationship between the social actors and the historical world, there is need for some form of interrogation besides the observational one.

In the same vein, whatever goes on in the psyche of the social actors may not be clearly expressed outside the boundaries of the interactive mode. This mode allows us to engage with what the special actors think and how they feel. The observational mode helps to highlight issues that pertain to their space and how they live and behave. This is where and how the two modes mutually link and work together.

Conscious and Unconscious mediation in Shooting *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*:

The shooting of the documentary film, *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* cannot be said to have gone according to the 'script.' This is due that during the shooting sessions some events that proved interesting were not pre-planned and at the same time they added value to the story. However, the premise of the film remained as an exposition of the Nigerian Kitchen as a space for homely interaction where food plays a cementing role. The documentary text is also underpinned by the sub-texts or themes of xenophobia and the Nigerian approach to the world at large in terms of business shrewdness.

Aspects that reveal conscious planning, on my part in the documentary, resonate with my subjective voice and opinions. The shooting and construction of the documentary is such that it appears to capture the life in a day of the kitchen. This is signalled by the sunrise, sunset and the night as opening and closing shots. Thus, different aspects were shot over six days, at relevant times (for example if the idea is to portray the night facet of the kitchen life, the footage was shot at night) and the material was arranged accordingly even though shooting was done haphazardly.

The Auteur Theory: Personality, Technical Issues and Interior Meaning

Truffaut argued in the essay '*A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema*' that a "new film has to resemble the person who made it…through style, which impregnates the film with the personality of its director," (quoted in Stam, 2003: 84). This however, entailed directors 'impregnating' many films they made with their personality so that they can be classified as auteurs. In *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen*, I cannot

contend for the auteur title, as this is my first film. However, the employment of the auteur theory is based on the Sarris's (1979) proposal that there are three factors to recognise an auteur:

(i) technical competence,

(ii) distinguishable personality and

(iii) interior meaning. (Sarris, 1979)

Two of these three categorisations are used to shape the film and not necessarily to define myself, as an auteur. I chose the interior meaning and the technical competence, as these do not demand any previous works in order for me to be seen as an auteur. These are used partly to shape the film and to reflexively look at my successes beyond or inline with my intentions.

Technically, there are different shot sizes and angles that were employed for a different effect and meaning. Thus, the use of these created not only technical meaning but also interior meaning. In the kitchen during an interview with Peter, the angle is high. This makes him look overpowered and at the mercy of the viewer. The main reason for this was the fact that he claimed the kitchen to be clean and hygienic but when I looked at the kitchen environment, I had a different take as I felt it was not clean enough. Therefore, such use of the high angle shot is meant to demean, in a way, him and his environment. In addition, the use of the angle is meant to question his credibility as an honest businessman when his workers see the kitchen as an environment of oppression where they earn very little. These shortcomings are therefore technically expressed even though with a deeper meaning.

The other technical use of the camera is the mixing of hand-held and fixed camera support. The main uses of the hand-held technique are when the space or time does not allow. In most cases, it will be due to time and the need to capture action promptly without asking the social actor to repeat their action. In most cases, some of the actions were not contrived. Hand-held camera is used on many different occasions. The most notable are when the social actors are walking on the streets, for example Peter, Ukpong, Noney and Sanele. Moreover, the hand-held technique is employed in the kitchen with the interview with Peter and for the shots of food preparation and movement from the kitchen to the selling point. The use of the hand-held camera helps in giving the viewer a sense of reality and immediacy.

Fixed camera technique is used mainly for interviews and other shots where one can take time to set up the camera to capture the action without the danger or possibility of missing interesting moments in that shot. For example, when the women are cleaning I used static and fixed camera because the action took time, hence could be captured without any need to hasten. In addition, a fixed camera is used when shooting interviews. The angle employed in the cases of interviews is decidedly eye-level and this shows the treatment I give the social characters. While recognising an interview as an imbalanced relationship in terms of power relations, I found it important to treat the social actors as equals and the use of eye-level shots helps in that regard. Moreover, this discourages the viewers from judging them and permits the audiences to make up their own minds on what is being discussed.

As a filmmaker, I chose my questions so that the answers I get might be in-line with my subjective intentions. In most cases, what I asked Sanele was a product of some

observations of South Africans' attitude towards foreigners. In addition the questions I asked the Nigerians were meant to elicit their views about South Africans and the most popular view being that they are lazy to work and lack good manners (as seen in the two youths who 'disturb' my shoot) and that they are not educated. These help highlight the intentions I had, to create the foreigner in good light and the local in bad. This was so mainly because as a foreigner myself I sympathise with foreigners rather than locals.

Editing, subjectivity and self-expression

Editing the documentary, *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* was a mode of self-expression that made my intentions and subjectivity clear. Thus, the portrayal of foreign as good and local as bad came out and can be noticed in the text. Through editing, I managed to advance the interior meaning, capture and portray the 'South Africans' and 'Nigerians.' There is a deliberate use of certain shots that, for fair representation may not have been used. For example, the two youths who disrupt the shooting portray South Africans in the documentary in a negative light. Moreover, shooting Sanele was meant to give a sinister sense of who he is and how he feels. When one contrasts the times of shooting, Sanele is shot at night while Nigerians during day light. This highlights the badness in Sanele, emphasising his anger, rage and thoughts. No sympathy is given to him by the filmmaker and expectedly, by the viewers. Nigerians are the victims of xenophobia and they are objects of pity and sympathy hence in light.

Even though unplanned, their behaviour and unconscious participation in the shoot assists in making a point and qualifying what the Nigerians have to say in the documentary. This also helps qualify the inclinations and 'negative' approach the

filmmaker takes in portraying the South Africans. The documentary filmmaker's intentions have been to tell most of the story from the Nigerians' point of view. That is why no major steps are taken in order to quiz them on the way they treat their workers, especially in Peter's case.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the making of the film. Of importance has been the fact that I managed to assert my voice and implement my intentions. The film as a text is symbolic of subjectivity in documentary filmmaking and as such, it exemplifies my lack of objectivity. As a filmmaker, I can safely claim that I managed to express my intentions, ideas and opinions. I discuss, in the last chapter issues of ethics in relation to he making of the documentary and conclude whether I have managed to successfully assert my voice while at the same time gauging my subjectivity in relation to the arguments for and against 'manipulation' in documentary filmmaking. I can say that despite failures in some aspects, filming the documentary was a success. Thus where the planned and conscious intentions of mediation failed the unplanned and unconscious intentions came to the rescue. For instance, shooting interviews outside the kitchen proved worthwhile for the reasons given in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

ULTIMATELY I AM AN OUTSIDER: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES IN MAKING *THE GAGUS: THE NIGERIAN KITCHEN*.

One cannot claim to make a documentary film without grappling with ethical considerations of one kind or another. Most of the challenges that I faced were not during shooting per se, but editing. Calvin Pryluck posits that "ethical assumptions have aesthetic consequences and aesthetic assumptions have ethical consequences." (1988: 256) In documentary filmmaking, just like in medicine or law, there needs to be a consideration of ethics because there is a risk of exposing oneself or the subjects to danger, [1]moreso when one mediates a culture or cultures that are foreign to them.

In representing others, we, as filmmakers assume a relatively superior stature and role. We tend to believe that our subjectivity world view should be they way the world sees things. Jay Ruby (1991: 50-67) asserts that the area of representation should always consider the other, that is, the represented:

> [Q]uestions of voice, authority, and authorship have become a serious concern among documentary filmmakers and anthropologists. Who can represent someone else, with what intention, in what "language," and in what environment is a conundrum that characterizes the postmodern era.

Whether consent is given or not, the mere act of representation assumes a certain amount of danger or risk to the people we, as documentary filmmakers, film.

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[1] For example, in the films *The Things I Cannot Change (1966)* and *September 5 at Saint-Henri* (1980) debased and humiliated the poor social actors as neighbours mocked them and one family had to pull its children out of schools. See also Pryluck, (1988: 255).

Ultimately, we can irretrievably damage their dignity, pride, humanity and they lose respect for themselves and from the people they would have interacted with before and after the film has been made public. In the context of South Africa the ethical considerations are more complex and problematic as life and livelihood is at stake. In the backdrop of xenophobia, one may hazard to say that Nigerians' lives may be in danger as people may react negatively to their expressions of discomfort and attacks on South Africans as 'lazy'.

Ruby argues that a filmmaker owes his/her subjects a certain obligation—a duty of care:

> [A]s the acknowledged author of a film, the documentarian assumes responsibility for whatever meaning exists in the image, and therefore is obligated to discover ways to make people aware of point of view, ideology, author biography, and anything else deemed relevant to an understanding of the film, that is, to become reflexive. (1991: 50-67)

I will attempt to try to pose to myself, in a reflexive manner, some ethical considerations that I think may come out after the whole project has been done in addition to the production process.

Getting permission from the male social actors was not a major problem, unlike the women who clean at the kitchen. Permission was never sought. This is dealt with later in this chapter. Permission was sought, however, to film the Nigerian social actors. This needed an explanation of what the project was all about and how, if anything, it would affect their lives. The premise of selling them the idea was that it was an academic project not meant for television or any broadcast medium anywhere. The central idea of the project, I told them, was to capture the matrices of foreignness and

how Nigerians manage to make ends meet in a foreign land and how they interact in the face of adversity-in the form of locals, the police, laws and so on. The whole idea of filming was, in a way, a subtly coercive tool that the social actors could not resist.

Some schools of thought argue that documentary filmmaking borrows its ethics from journalism and visual anthropology. This, in a way, allows for the treading of the middle ground, as there is no bible for documentary film ethics. In the making of my film, I safely occupy this ground. In the documentary I wanted to represent two cultures or worlds that I did not know much about. All I knew was that there is bad blood between the foreigner and the local and the accusations traded between the two are nothing new. This was not made explicit to the social actors. For example, Sanele may have withdrawn arguing that he cannot be used as a paragon of 'South Africanness' considering the negative light I wanted to portray the South Africans with while taking the sides of the foreigner. However, I did not influence him to say whatever he said and hence ethically, one may claim that as a filmmaker I did not breach any ethical 'contract'. The understanding was that the social actors did participate out of their own volition. Sanele's anti-Nigerian comments may be explained by two things. The first being that he knew I was Zimbabwean and a neighbour who could communicate in his language, IsiZulu, effectively. This, I think positions myself as a better foreigner than any Nigerian. The second issue might be that when he claims to understand and be friends with Nigerians, he does so because of Ukpong's presence and that he is within the confines of their space, the kitchen.

When filming inside the kitchen, I sought permission to film the daily rituals from Peter and never from the women who cleaned and cooked. It was an ethical case in

the edit since they never consented. By merely being workers and having got permission from their employer, I assumed that there was no further need for permission. In any case, they willingly participated in interviews and the whole filming process. This gave me an impression of consent while at the same time appreciating the fact that there was a "subtly coerciveness of the film crew's presence" (Pryluck, 1988: 257).

The decision to use the footage shot, even without consent, was that there was nothing one could put a finger on and claim that it humiliated the social actors. In addition, their wilful participation in the documentary interviews is symbolic of their consent to being filmed. This, however, creates ethical dilemmas when I think how they would have reacted were they told that they are participating in a project that seeks to project certain biases.

Some documentary filmmakers have argued that it is important to let the social actors participate in the production of the film. This goes as far as to include the editing stages. This collaboration means the director has to give up and forego his 'director's ego.' I did not have such a need or temptation to show my social actors the rushes and my journey in the edit. This, I suspect would have entailed getting rid of some footage which maybe the social actors would not have agreed on or liked. Moreover, in terms of juxtapositions, the characters may have had misgivings. All the same, it is an ethical dilemma to edit material in order to tell a story.

In the editing process, I felt there was a temptation for me to ask the social actors to collaborate and say if they liked the way some material had been arranged, and give

their input. This included the selection of certain sentence lines and juxtaposing with the next social actor, even in non-sequential manner or in a manner that insinuates an argument between characters. For example, the opening sequence has what one may call the Nigerian business credo. However, is the abuse of the workers part of that? Nevertheless, the way I edited it as a filmmaker insinuates exactly that about Nigerians. Thus the co-operatively produced film, with a possibility and experience to view the world with the eyes of the social actors, though worth experimenting, as a new approach dissimilar to the dominant practice, did not appeal to me as it would have led to many or some disaffections. To me, as a filmmaker I decided to make do with and stick to the traditional role of imaging the world alone. After all, Pryluck argues that even the renditions of cultures and lifestyles we think we know…are filled with pitfalls…Ultimately we are all outsiders in the lives of others," (1988: 257).

In editing, some material helped to advance the story and create dramatic twists and turns. For example Sanele's assertions that his perceptions about Nigerians later changes when he accuses them of a plethora of criminal activities and finally he stands by the xenophobic tendencies that South Africans are accused of. As a filmmaker, my intentions are to tell a story and not, as it were, correct some 'mistakes' that social actors may make. Even though one may posit that as a filmmaker one has to 'script' properly what the social actors do or say, in cases like Sanele's turn and contradiction it rather proves interesting than an ethical challenge. Ethically, one may not know what Sanele meant when he said his perceptions about Nigerians had changed and then, later on, that "we hate each other," and his continuous reference to them as "these people" means he has a negative perception about them.

Another dilemma with documentary is how one asserts one's voice or succumbs to unplanned action sequences that are captured on camera and may prove interesting. These may also pose ethical dilemmas. The issue of two drunken youths is a case in point. They interrupted the shoot while at the same time presenting themselves as 'fodder' to the camera and filmmaker. One wonders what will they say were they to see their intoxicated images on film and at the same time negatively 'parading' themselves to the world. The mere fact that they came and asked to appear "on television" means that they 'consented' participating in the documentary. Even though that this is an academic film that will not be screened anywhere else, the dilemma still remains even though it may be temporarily be solved by issues of targeted audiences in this case.

My argument for use of the selected material is that the story I want to tell is a socially valid one and the historic world I represent exists. This therefore, in a way, insinuates that there is a need for the world to know, especially when one looks at the eruptions of violence premised on xenophobic hatred that have bedevilled South Africa over the years. Coverage of such issues, I contend, creates awareness, understanding and advances knowledge of the other about the other. This is mainly through self-expression in the interviews.

EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

The making of the documentary film, *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* has been challenging since it is my first film where I address issues that affect and obtain in cultures that I do not belong to. It is a challenging enough exercise for one to

represent their culture. It is extremely challenging for one to represent foreign cultures. In this documentary film, I deliberately took a subjective stance. Some factors influenced this.

One thing is the sheer determination with which Nigerians believe in themselves and work hard to achieve their goals. Another factor is the widely appreciated fact that being Nigerian in a foreign land is some sort of a swear word, where one will be associated with drugs, scams of many sorts, human trafficking and prostitution. In addition, in representing this issue of foreignness one has to appreciate what the hosts think of the immigrants. Mediating the clashes between two cultures is difficult. One may claim that because I am a Southern African, I know a lot about the South African attitudes. To the contrary, I know a bit and my representation is thus not perfect even though I may be expected to know a lot by virtue of being closer to South Africa and being able to communicate in some local languages.

Documentary supposedly represents the historical and profilmic world in its fullness. My foreignness to both proved a handicap. In addition, fifteen minutes is not enough to capture a plethora of issues that anchor the overarching themes of the documentary. Even if the documentary was made to be feature length, issues to do with completeness would be raised. After all, it seems documentary is all but incomplete, uncertain, full of recollections and impression.

In the making of the documentary, I realised that issues of representation are not merely those of compiling, cutting and shaping the material to tell a story, convey experiences of the historical world or mediating knowledge. The whole process of

representation is a dilemma. After the production there are questions that I still grapple with. For example, if documentary is reality, where is the integrity of the whole process of documentary veracity when an individual subjectively mediates? This question is rooted in the fact that, as Eric Barnouw argues in Bruzzi (2004: 4), filmmakers claim objectivity while it is an open secret that documentary filmmakers have access and make use of "endless choices" where they select "topics, people, vistas, lens, juxtapositions, sounds, words. Each selection is an expression of his point of view, whether he is aware of it or not."

Viewers may not be armed with a mentality and analytic tools to understand that documentary, as Bruzzi argues, is a "negotiation between reality on one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other," (Bruzzi, 2004: 4). Thus, what one may see as bad blood between Nigerians and South Africans, may not be the full story. One can draw a cue from the way South Africans reacted to the spate of violent attacks on foreigners in May 2008. It became clear that a majority of locals condemned the xenophobic and violent attacks. What one sees in my documentary cannot be conclusively said to portray South Africans' relationship to foreigners.

What one sees are two kinds of truth, the raw material and the edited version which is from the filmmaker's point of view. Extraction and juxtaposing material generates a coherent whole, a conflict where the raw materials fail to maintain their truthfulness and veracity as solitary, untempered entities. The conflict comes about from editing and the need by the director to tell a story. This whole debate becomes, as Giannetti argues in Louw, an issue of "content and form, and you can't do one without the other" (2006: 114).

In the production of the documentary text, one of the experiences is that at times shooting does not go according to plans. There may be conscious and unconscious shots that may look interesting during the filming phases. This may derail the storyline or enhance it.

Conclusion

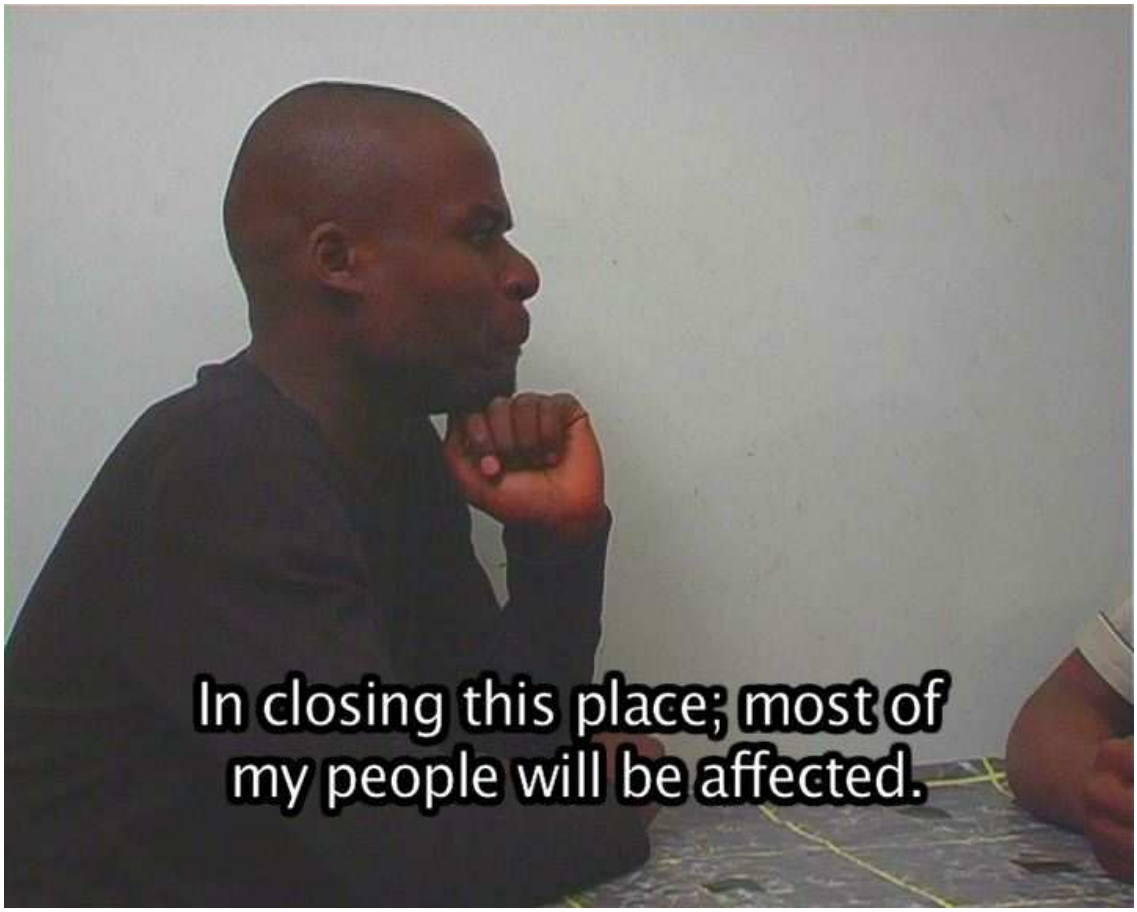
In this research project, I have managed to interrogate the making of *The Gagus: The Nigerian Kitchen* using the auteur theory. The whole process interrogated my voice as a filmmaker, subjectivity and competence to apply some aspects of the auteur theory on a 'first' film as a director. What one notices at the end is that through representation reality is compromised because the craft is hinged on subjective selection of material in order to tell a story. However, part of the story is enhanced in editing where, after shooting some material finds its way through the project even though it was not planned from the onset. These are some of the unconscious aspects of authoring a documentary that I came across.

In the documentary I have found and stamped my subjective voice even though I cannot influence the way viewers read the documentary. My approach and inclinations are very clear. I create three layers in terms of characterisation. The workers, the Nigerians and the South Africans. The relationships are clearly exposed and if anything, one may be expected to sympathise and explore the predicament of the workers and to some extent the Nigerians who are persecuted by the South Africans. The project also has an overarching theme that explores the issue of food and the role it plays in cementing the Western African relationships. Food also creates

a superficial storyline and through-line that allows me to visit the overarching, more abstract ideas of xenophobia and immigrant experiences. This exploration helps me to explore some underlying themes of racism and xenophobia. It is through editing and rearrangement of material that I manage to juxtapose material and come up with a story while, at the same time engaging with ethical considerations.

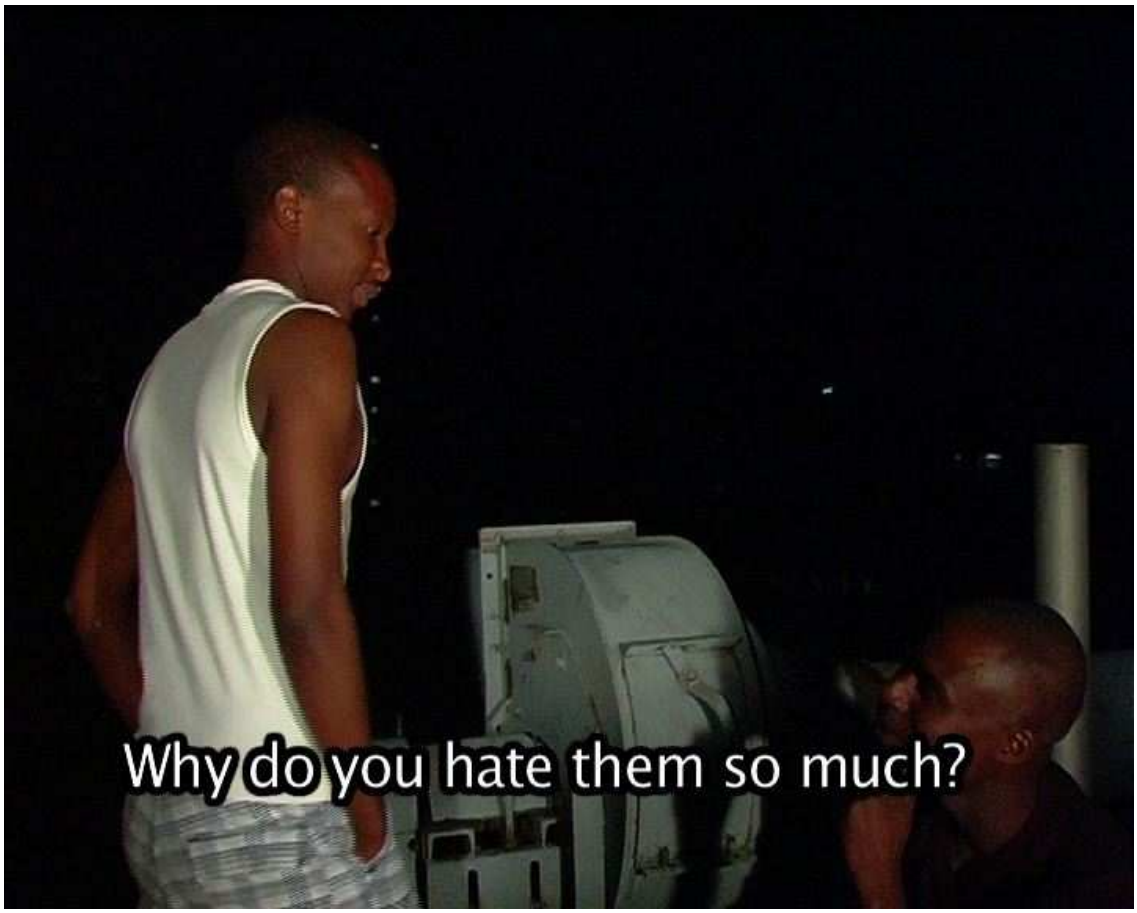
APPENDICES

Appendix 1a



Appearances of the filmmaker on the screen-this shows what I call 'purposeful' appearance.

APPENDIX 1b



Another example of my ‘purposeful’ appearance on screen as a filmmaker.

APPENDIX 11

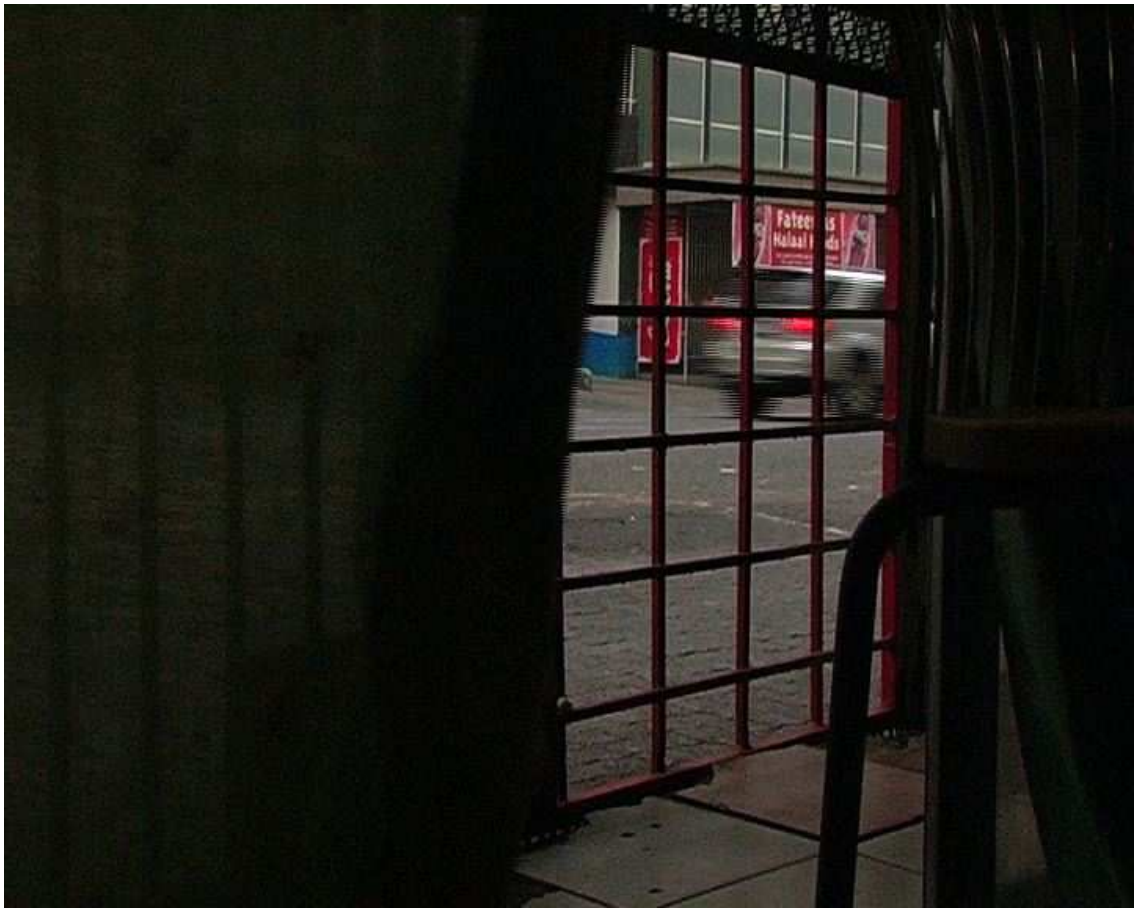


Observation mode: Sanele and Ukpong are observed interacting in the kitchen. The filmmaker had no interference on this discourse.

APPENDIX III



APPENDIX IV



Curtain used many times to show the interior-to-exterior transitions.

APPENDIX V



Alex during an interview outside the Gagus.

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