Film Industry in Mauritius: The Representation of Gender Identities in Mauritian Cinematography

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Abstract:

Fiction films reflect and reinforce the representations of gender roles within a particular society (Geena Davis Institute, 2019). Although nascent and not well structured into a proper professional industry, the local film scene is very dynamic and produces a great number of short films and a few feature films as well. In our study, we propose to analyse a large sample of these films in order to determine whether representations of gender identities are fair and balanced or subject to stereotypical treatment.

Our study uses content analysis and focus group interviews to examine the representation of gender identities and roles across multiple genres of movies through three angles, namely: hegemonic masculinity portrayed in Mauritian movies, stereotypes associated with women in Mauritian movies and the portrayal of non-binary gender diversity in Mauritian movies. In this paper, we will focus on the comparative presence and treatment of men and women in local film-making.

Methodology

A content analysis based on around 180 films produced by both amateur and professional filmmakers was carried out. The short films were obtained from the Mauritius Film Development Corporation, and the short film collection DVDs from the *Association Porteurs d'Images*. The movies analysed were divided into two categories, namely short films which were produced by amateurs and those which were professionally directed. The criteria for differentiating between the two categories were based on film budget, quality of camera work and character depth.

A focus group was also carried out and the aim was to gather knowledge to gauge to what extent Mauritian movies portray reality as it is and more specifically, how young adults assess the portrayal of gender in local movies. For the group discussion, students aged 20 to 22 from the University of Mauritius were targeted.

Findings

A thorough analysis of the film corpus indicated an unequal distribution in the gender of filmmakers and film protagonists and in the allocation of screen time, across both amateur and professional categories of films. Not only were women under-represented, they were also depicted through stereotypical roles as victims rather than assailants, except for ghosts which tended to carry sexualised female attributes such as long hair and long painted nails.

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Participants in the focus group discussion responded critically to a sample of short films which they deemed to portray predominantly patriarchy, female submissiveness and objectification of women, and thus more in line with the male gaze theory of cinema (Mulvey, 1989).

Keywords: film, media, gender, heteronormativity, stereotypes, content analysis, focus group

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