

Environmental Threats and Media Control Measures in 93 Days

Mary Emmanuel Emah

Department of Performing Arts, Faculty of Arts
Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria
marytonyomoregie@gmail.com

Church Akpan

Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Social Science
Akwa Ibom State University
Nigeria

Nkirika Jacinta Akaenye

Department of Performing Arts, Faculty of Arts
Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria

Monica Udoette

Department of English, Faculty of Arts,
Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examines the socio-cultural imperatives of eco-critical conceptualization of the film 93 Days. The analysis is premised on Ecocriticism and Symbolic Interactionism as the theoretical foundations. As a movie that dwells on contemporary socio-cultural experience and captured on the Nollywood artistic platform, the film portrays the Ebola outbreak as well as the creative measures deployed to inform the public about the threat, stimulate collective consciousness and advocate cooperation of Nigerian society in the bid to manage the situation towards the final eliminating of the outbreak. The study adopts qualitative approach in its explorations in which the Film was purposefully reviewed and contextualised. Findings show that well-orchestrated spectacles in film, apt stimulation of public empathy, visual pontificating of dire situation and use of shots to magnify emotions could retune public perception and mind-set as utility for calming nerves and anxiety that characterised the moment of the disaster such as is portrayed in 93 Days. The paper concludes that film embodies imaginative power that allows the audience understand its content and context in given socio-cultural environment with usefulness in educating and reliving society of such disasters as Ebola outbreak. The paper aptly illustrates the fact that film remains an integral medium and tool for creating environmental awareness in times of disaster.

Keywords: Control-measures, Ebola, Ecocriticism, Film Media, 93 Days

Introduction

Film constitutes a critical medium for public entertainment, social sensitisation and human development in most of contemporary society. The role of the media in the contemporary society has increased as human challenges increase, and a more attractive factor is the attempt to bend media usage towards managing environmental threats, hence initiating ways and means of dealing with disaster and sundry environmental crisis when it occurs. Orienting or re-orienting values debated in society have been through utterance and substantial imprint in media through political communication. For one certain role, Ifeanyi Nwokeocha expresses that a way to utilize the media as a tool for coordinating a political course of this magnitude is “the transmission of symbols via the major media such as radio, TV, newspapers, films, magazines and books” (342). In the view of Nnanake Ekeke and Dora Ekeke, the media, especially film, has turned from a mere instrument of entertainment to the social realities presently prevalent in all facets of the society where issues bordering on social, economic, religious and other aspects of life have become major global concern, calling for a proactive response to re-position the society through social orientation “... to bring about a better society” (128). In all ramifications, the media is turning more to the concerns of man in his immediate socio-cultural environment today.

In recent times, the threats of deadly diseases have been surfacing in many nations. Remarkably, the structure of a society can encourage the spread of a sickness from an endemic one to a pandemic type or the otherwise. One of such societal circumstance that may engender the spread of a disease is the human attitudes towards an outbreak. For one thing, when it does not affect us directly, we feel it is meant to attack others. Such attitude alone aids sickness to metamorphous from a tiny glow to a massive beam. In the real sense of it. Richard Farmer and David Miller state that:

It involves a temporary increase in the incidence of a disease, usually circumscribed both in its location and in respect of the group affected. Rarely it may be pandemic.... The pattern of an epidemic depends on the biological properties of the agent, whether or not the environment is favourable to its survival or transmission, and on the immunity of the host population. (125)

If the threat of a disease could be aided by the environmental outlook in a society, the means of countering it may equally depend on the level of media utilization in that society. This is where film comes in. Africans for instance, has been constantly fingered among diseases-prone continents in the world. The case of Human Immune Virus (HIV) which erupted and spread as a pandemic between 2005 to 2012 was detected in 1976 in Democratic Republic of Congo, and it killed up to 36 million people (mphonline.org). Another of such, still in Africa is Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) traced to Zaire around 1976 (wikipedia.org). Such communicable diseases require both pictorial and graphic orientation to guide people escape their grasp, hence the role of contemporary film in Nigeria.

Film has emerged and gained advantage as an entertainment tool but in the current

dispensation, Adaku Idachaba states that “film is related to literature (which) it physicalizes the dream world of the writer, (and) translates it into a liveable world that you can see and feel” (95). As a literary factor, it is made to focus on human conditions meant to relate mankind to the real outlook of his milieu and his being as a social animal influenced by his environment. On the translation of liveable dream, film abridges imagination with reality as lived than conceptualized. Above all, filmmaking has begun redirecting its concern to the environmental threats. Better still, every good film encodes given social problem and speculates some measures for managing if not curtailing the unwanted circumstance in the society through pictures set in motion. This paper interrogates *93 Days* as a model for media mitigation for man in the society.

Theoretical Framework

The need to intensify the focus of human arts to the concern of the immediate environment is quite necessary presently. For the fact that many socio-ideological movement such as Marxism, Symbolic Interactionism, Theatre of the Oppressed and Structuralism, are quite suitable as parameters for placing the discussion of film as veritable tool of control in the society. Such situation points at the utility of films in tackling human problem especially environmental disaster that often subjects mankind to his many attitudes and manners as a determinant for survival. Based on the above assumption, this paper bases its theoretical underpinning on two theories, which are Ecocriticism or “Green Studies” and Symbolic Interactionism.

Ecocriticism is an aspect of literature that focuses on humankind, his attitude, and the impact of his activities in response to situations, considering other organisms that exist with man. It further stretches to periscope situations arising from the relationship man shares with his immediate environment and the techniques in arts that have been adopted towards to grappling with the situations. According to Alok Mishra, Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It was proposed by the pioneer or the father of this theory in USA, Cheryl Glotfelty... The study of nature as presented in the pieces of literature is what has been the playground of the people concerned with this rather new movement in literary theories... Glotfelty urged the scholars to use this term to refer to the belt of studies which was previously popular as the study of green writing. (19).

The origin of the theory is claimed to emanate from Cheryl Glotfelty and the target was on engaging ecological situations in the creative works towards informing the conscious society of the dangers of ecological abuses to the healthy existence of mankind on the planet Earth. In poetry such as J. P. Clark's “Here nothing Works”, much has been written to show how man operates in his society and how his actions support or deter the progress of other lives existing within. In drama, on the other hand, in a play like Uwemedimo Atakpo's *Watering the Hard Ground*, there are artistic portrayals of ecological degradation orchestrated by the government to stifle the aliveness of the Niger Delta ecology. In films such as Ofime's *Blood and Oil* and Dimeji Ajibola's *Shanty Town*, the devaluation of humankind, sexual abuse, blood spill and a total destructive nature are portrayed. That means, “ecocriticism periscopes those natural eruptions that may upset the cosmic balance thereby causing unexplained dissonance in the order of the society” (Emah, Akpan and Jacob 241).

Ecocriticism therefore could be seen as a discipline that draws artistic activities to the life around people in their environment, and it focuses on the way people temper with the non-human nature in terms of the resources of the earth but without recourse to their role in enhancing the symbiosis of existence of living and the non-living organisms on earth.

On the other hand, Herbert Mead's conception of human interaction and meaning shared in the society becomes noticeable in his idea of symbolic interactionism. Symbols interactionism reflects that virtually every activity man indulges in sends a signal that is decipherable and interpretable from a specific code system in the society. The use of words, gestures and paralanguage down to synergies like drama are conceived as signals sent in codes. The ensembling of dancers and film to showcase a dimension of human conception of living is a coded information could be meant to be deciphered based on the context it is used. According to Philip Sutton, "...symbolic interactionism often focuses on face-to-face interaction and the context of everyday life" (25). This implies that "interactionists maintain that people interpret other's actions, words, and gestures first and then respond based on their interpretation" (Blumber 76). Such is the situation in watching a film. Each gesture, a piece of costume, a geometry of makeup on a performers face, the interplay of dialogue, colour representation, and the themes synergized in a film are galaxies of codes send out to be deciphered by the audience; and the response of the audience is necessary to complete the interactive process. This is because life activities are expressed as interaction deduced as representations or unravelling of symbols.

A symbol, however, is a representational code. According to Mead, "a symbol stands for something else. Non-verbal gestures or forms of communication are also symbolic... Human beings live in a richly symbolic universe- Symbolic interaction directs our attention to the details of interpersonal interaction and how that detail is used to make what others say and do" (Hutton 25). The focus of the theory therefore widens the scope of human activities deployed as instruments of communication in terms of the various signs made to filter through human attitudes and the reactions of people in which humankind and the society are deduced in a medium such as film. As Michael Haralambos, Martin Holborn and Robin Heald put it, "symbolic interactionists try to explain human behaviour and human society by examining the ways in which people interpret the action of others, develop a self-concept or self-image, and act in terms of meaning" (856). The action, gestures, and activities to survive human beings do as they live on have a significant interactive signal which meanings are generated.

The relevance of these theories to this work is that ecocriticism shifts the focus of literary/creative works to the human environment. That implies that the outbreak of a pandemic can be encouraged or discouraged based on environmental circumstance. Meanwhile, Symbolic interaction emphasizes the portrayal of a social malady or condition on a film as a way of informing the public and at the same time generating information from the interplays of interaction and reactions to aid in combating the malaise.

Environmental Threats in the Society

Threats of human extinct have been erupting in various forms in the society in a long history of human civilisation and development. Some of such threats occur as a natural course; some are human-driven activities anchored on the quest for a better life which unguided moments result to damages and loss. Some of the threats are purposely carried out by people or a group of them to achieve certain aims, while some are infections or contaminations from diet, cosmetics, contacts or unprecedented mishaps. Ronald Mitchell sees a threat to be a "strange unnerving and risky eruptions from another terrain or society which stir tremor to a people by defiling the balance structure the environment". (502) When a threat to human lives arises from unknown locale and penetrates a society, there is usually much panic that ends up unnerving people as a threat to the society.

Another threat in the society especially Nigeria, is health related issues. Being that the nation has a larger population compared to other African countries; a minor sickness ends up flaring to an endemic or even a pandemic type, making it serious health threat to the environment. According to Akan Tom, Stephen Utre and Idongesit Ebong, environmental threat "could be accentuated due to rapidly increasing population pressures, which often lead to inconsiderable or poorly planned development in natural hazard-prone areas... for the determination of effective remedial action to diminish impact". (105) When many people live together but the environment is not planned to encourage hygienic cultures, allowing unnecessary increase of unguided vectors, a threat may explode in the form of a sickness that unseats everyone. According to Vincent Olusakin, "the implication of high temperature is enormous; it results in extreme weather condition, threatening natural habitat... it leads to change in agricultural yields, species extinction and increase in disease carrying vectors". (169). A disease is a threat in the human surrounding.

Another aspect of environmental threat is violence. Violence may spring from a minor domestic squabble to public flashpoints. Aggressiveness is usually a reactionary factor. There is usually a cause which a dimension of violence arises from. According to Christiana Blessed, John Bosco Ekanem and Asukwo Oko, "poverty may therefore be said to be a major factor in violence in Nigeria. In this regard, violence begets violence. Besides, extreme poverty in developing countries such as Nigeria means hunger, illiteracy, bad health conditions, and short life span" (83). This justifies the basis of the hunger-anger threat: 'a hungry man is an angry man' (Kunhiyop 16). In a society where the menace of hunger, illiteracy, wrong plan for health security and hazard prevention are not prioritized, intermittent environmental threats can erupt. However, the tactful disclosure of the nature of a threat can lead to the curtailment of the disastrous part in the society.

93 Days in Perspective

93 Days is a Nollywood film endorsed by the National Film and Video Censors Board in Nigeria to be circulated for home and public use in 2014. The film was written and directed by Steve Gukas. The subject matter is the outbreak of Ebola in Nigeria. The

themes include Combating an Outbreak Requires a Collective Commitment, Patriotism and Professionalism can Salvage a Nation, Outbreaks Can Affect anyone, Social Circumstance and Human Attitudes Can Influence the Thrust of a Disease.

It is pointing to state that the arrival of a diplomat, Patrick Sawyer from Liberia is ominous. He is infected by a deadly disease called Ebola. Being that Ebola is not a popular ailment in Nigeria, many health workers unknowingly who touch him and contract the sickness. The death of Sawyer culminates the curiosity that Ebola has penetrated the nation and from the laboratory, Sawyer is confirmed and declared Ebola victim. However, much pressure is mounted by Dr. Adadebo to focus on the endemic disease by, first, conducting a test on the health workers. Gradually, it is convinced that Ebola has sneaked into the country and attack human lives beginning with health workers.

Many doctors who have touched Sawyer had already contracted the sickness unknowingly and many others who never touched Sawyer have had a contact or more with the health workers. Ebola begins to spread from physical contact and gets worse from ignorance. Above all, there is no conducive center to quarantine the teeming victims of Ebola. The government on their part sees such information as another unrealistic cock-and-bull story to temper with the already sealed budget. No initiative is handy to tackle the sickness, no center to camp the victims; and no facilities to handle the escalating pandemonium of the pandemic in the country.

Doctor Ada is affected, Dr. Ola is affected, Evelyn and others are affected. The only option is an abandoned local locale in Yaba which European Ebola expert, Dr. John is in control. The doctors are brought in for quarantine. Though unsafe, they are guaranteed that if they would fight back personally their temperature may fall, indication a victory. Many of them die and tension erupts at the health center. Dr. Adedebo busies to see that Ebola is nipped, and neither instinct nor curiosity makes her recall she had touched Sawyer. She is down and is brought to Yaba for test. Everyone suspends his travail to pray for Adedebo recovery. She is everyone's beloved. On the other hand, Doctor Ada has recovered; there is hope. Doctor Emma has seen his temperature falling; another hope. As health workers volunteer to bring more victims to quarantine, hope of curtailing Ebola rises; as many people have begun recovering, the faith that Ebola is defeated gets strengthened; and as everyone prayers tilts towards the recovery of Dr. Adedebo, her funeral is announced. The tragic death of Doctor Adedebo unnerves the medical experts, and everyman takes a step to regain his life, his surrounding and the system to re-live as death that has been pervading the environment. This is made bolder, clearer and real from the angle of the moving pictures as an instrument to create awareness, generate public concern and motivate collective consciousness for environmental control in the film, *93 Days*.

Media Control Measures through Film

Every society is peopled by humans, and most of the challenges people face stems from ignorance of the vast population. At least, simple exchange of words and ideas may raise a focus to face and, may be, fish out a hitch to nip. Better still dialoguing on

community-basis can become a source of collective awareness of the progress or retrogression of the society. Dialoguing through the film synergy through the composition of characters, sound, utterances, costume, light, props and milieu is an aspect of media interceding and control of the environment in the society. In the use of films to mediate, Uwem Akpan writes that “its focus is the grassroots level which permits a plurality of developmental goals to be realized, as well as giving communities the self-determination they need” (210). For one fact, “life's events repeat themselves over and over again”. (Barranger 165). The media then, streamlines the past to blend the people in order to constantly serve humankind. According to Gideon Isika, “media serve the function of providing information in the society on a wide-ranging issue of concern. This information is what helps the people in the society to ensure the existence of the society, and life in it”. (223)

Beyond the generality of media, film has its peculiar features that affect the human psyche easily. For instance, film uses sound accompanied by pictures to create reality. With the combination of sound and pictures, fine-tuned to reflect real life, the film audience easily identifies their nature, challenges, perfection, weakness and the way out of their travails in life. Using a film to control an outbreak is quite apt because the web for information dissemination is made realizable through the interplay of pictorials and sound. This shows a more effective communication that stimulates consciousness and action. According to Stephen Kenechukwu,

The combination of sound, visual and realism makes film a veritable medium of communication. The technological basis of film is photographic chemistry... The film medium seems to possess magical powers of capturing and holding rapt attention of viewers and exerts tremendous influence on their behaviour pattern. (2)

This has made film to function as an instrument to churn out “a constant series of updates in technology... influencing human cultures, making mutations, variations, changes, and some aspect of hybridization to occur in human activities boundlessly” (Akpan, Udofia and Edem 632). Above all, Anietie Udofia, Uwemedimo Atakpo and David Udoinwang identify semiotics from the standpoint of Charles Sanders Peirce's idea of the iconic, indexical and the symbolic in a film as the code for exerting control over ideas that evoke referents implied in a film. To them, “another symbolic constituent of a film is semiotics..., a science of signs embodying the cultural ideas and codes they are represented to make communication flow in a film” (45). In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's averment, icons, indexes and symbols in a film “make us see the bond between subject and world, between subject and others” (3). It is worth nothing that a film can be used to expose, mediate and control the spread of a pandemic threat in the society.

Control Measure in *93 Days*

A film is a replete of ideas woven in spectacles to embellish the subject matter in which the premise is anchored. In *93 Days*, many factors are deployed as control measures to safeguard the environment from Ebola threat. These measures include: pictORIZATION

of subject-matter, stimulation of collective consciousness and simulation of human reality through actions, criticism of adverse socio-political activity, creation of public empathy, exposure of human natures, and pontificating specificity and fact associated with depicted reality.

Pictorization of Subject Matter as a Control Measure



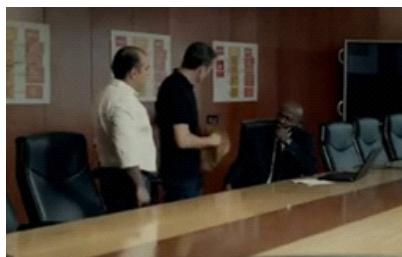
93Day is filled with numerous embellished moving pictures. Through the designation of pictorial, the subject matter “outbreak of Ebola” is established. With the use of pictorials, awareness is created when people are aware of a situation, they begin to adjust. This is realizable in the film, *93 Days*.

Control through Collective Consciousness Stimulation



The consciousness to fight Ebola is spurred in *93Days* through the disclosure of a general threat portrayed in the film to have had the power to kill anyone. This mind-set makes everyone to be alert and begins to think how to keep oneself safe, secure and alive. With the disclosure of the consequence of stubbornness through a frightening spectacle in the movie, collective alertness and the desire to fight back is raised.

Control through Adverse Policies Criticism



The use of spectacles in film allows for pictures and evidence of anti-cultural, antisocial and extremely dangerous socio-political culture to be exposed. One of such is the red-tape reclassification of Nigerian's attitude in public offices. The outbreak of Ebola is disclosed to the Commissioner of Health but the Commissioner only begins to feel that the health-worker who intimates him is trying to nudge some money from him. He himself begins to fidget for an outlet to make money from it. He needs to pass through protocol of which the governor, the house of assembly, the minister of health, the presidency and the two houses of legislature must endorse for the health programme to kick-start. To follow these rigours, one needs to fill forms; yet Ebola is fast increase increasing. Apart from the retinue of offices to knock and present a proposal to be read by the boss when he returns from, may be, a foreign trip, he needs to make his personal gains from this "God's given opportunity". As an endowed society corrupted by leaders, anything is an opportunity to embezzle funds, even death. *93Days* portrays this retrogressive attitude in the Nigerian administrative practice. This in a way is to play-down on government's inaction and politicizations that were supposed to be treated with utmost urgency and sincerity of purpose. This portrays a measure of environmental control in *93 Days*.

Exposure of Human Nature



There is a human nature that is exposed in *93 Days*. However, health professionals do sometimes still lose their guard to distractions and in the consequence result in major setbacks at duty post as if they were mere amateurs. Some get absorbed in the euphoria of the work and forget to take care of themselves. A similar case is noted in Dr. Adedebo who is engulfed with caring for people at the detriment of her life. The circumstances of her death signal some serious lessons that serve to intensify measures to control what could be seen as extreme indulgence that takes professionalism to the level of inattentiveness to human nature. By understanding that no man is perfect, one has come to term with the fallible nature of man which indicates that one should be controlled by yet another professional etiquette from the media, despite professional knowhow as a matter of safety control.

Pontification of Specificity and Fact as a Measure of Control



Furthermore, film can use shots to establish claims, and also serve to intensify the situation, embolden same for emphasis oratorical power that the actor deploys by pontificating the direness or seriousness of the situation through statement. Such is realizable in the shot orchestration of *93Days* within which close ups of emphatic scenes that can sink a message of fear, mind churning tremors and tension into the minds of the audience are pontificated. Making the shots to be emphatic and specific is a control measure in the film.

Conclusion

The evaluation of *93 Days* as so far analysed in this work reflects the way film can be used to manage human disaster. The substance of the analysis in this work hinges on the angle of the audience who make meaning from the film pictorials and shorts that have impact on the sensitivity, minds and emotions or feeling of the consumers of the film. The production technics and actions in film should be grounded on the need to leave lasting impact or impression on the mind of the audience. If such is done purposefully and intentionally, it can serve to instil feelings on the audience, arouse attention, teach or educate the intended audience since film carries that element of immediacy. The importance of immediacy as phenomenon in a dramatic art is the interconnection of feelings with the presence of the object displayed at the moment of the actions that has the potentiality to arrest attention, control human decision over the subject matter. When a good expose is made from some fine-tuned pictorials and is streamlined in varying shots typical of the film medium, people can draw their stance to forge ahead in progressive feats or retrace their steps from actions that do not bring progress to humanity. This is the perspective against which measures of controlling fear, mediating threats and stemming disaster in the human environment could be factored into film production. There film analysed in this work critically grounded on this conviction.

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