



2. Using the Zombie Metaphor and Apocalyptic Imageries in Films to Preach Environmentalism in Nigeria: A Semiotic Reading of C.J. Obasi's *Ojuju*

Floribert Patrick C. Endong¹

Abstract

In a bid to sensitize masses about the terrible effects of environmental degradation, many pro-environmentalism activists and storytellers tend to use strong apocalyptic imageries, thought-provoking metaphors and the fear appeal in the construction of their advocacy messages. Using such an approach often entails representing the effects of such phenomena as pollution, deforestation, poor land development and natural catastrophes with pessimistic symbols: the Armageddon, deadly pests/pandemics, abysses, hellish scenarios, chaos, and death among others. Using such strong metaphors often serves as fear appeal aimed to push for nature-friendly ideals. Following this line of thought, the Nigerian cineaste C.J. Obasi leverages the zombification metaphor and apocalyptic imageries in his zombie thriller titled *Ojuju*, to subtly decry environmental degradation in Nigerian slums and advocate environmentalism in Nigeria. Using semiotics and secondary sources, this chapter argues that although exaggerative, the zombie metaphor in *Ojuju* vividly represents the chaotic state of environmental degradation and the resultant precariousness of human life in most Nigerian slums. The chapter examines the state of environmental degradation/protection in Nigerian urban cities and shows how this condition is represented in Obasi's *Ojuju*. The chapter also explores the extent to which the zombie metaphor and the apocalyptic imageries deployed in the film are apt in representing the environmental risks prevailing in Nigerian cities.

Keywords: Zombie Metaphor, Apocalyptic Imageries, Nollywood Movies, Environmentalism, Environmental Degradation.

Works cited

Adams, B., 2018, *Zombie ecology. Thinking like a human, conversation or the 21st century*, Thinking like Human, London.

Aniefiok et al., 2016, "Petroleum industry in Nigeria: Environmental issues, national environmental legislation and implementation of international environmental law", *American Journal of Environmental Protection* 4, 1, 21-37.

Axelrod, E., 2014, The psychology of zombies: Why are zombies so infectious. In: Axelrod E.M. (ed), *Zombies, divorce and the internet: A collection of psychological disquisitions*, APSG, Inc, Dencer CO, 1-19.

Azura P., 2022, "Climate catastrophe". The role of fear appeals in climate change communication. An MA thesis submitted to the School of Geography, Environment and Earth Science, University of Wellington, Wellington.

¹ Department of Performing Arts and Cinematography, [IBAF], University of Dschang, Cameroon, e-mail: floribertendong@yahoo.com.



Cinema, Disasters and the Anthropocene
Enrico Nicosia, Lucrezia Lopez (Eds.)

Backe, H. J. & Aarseth, E., 2013, Ludic zombies: An examination of zombieism in games. *Proceedings of DiGRA 2013: De-Fragging game studies*, Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA), London, 1-16.

BBC News, 2020, "Nigeria housing: 'I live in a floating slum in Lagos'". *BBC News*, Retrieved April 29, 2022 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51677371>

Chadwick, A. E., 2015, Bridging the divide between positive and negative: The effectiveness of hope and fear appeals in climate change communication. A paper presented at Bridging Divides: Spaces of Scholarship and Practices in Environmental Communication: The Conference on Communication and Environment, Boulder, Colorado, June 11, 2015.

Cheng, M.F., 2016, "Impact of fear appeals on pro-environmental behaviour and critical determinants", *International Journal of Advertising*, 35, 74-92

Cohen, J.J., 2012, "Grey (a zombie) ecology", *In the Middle*. Retrieved April 24, 2020 from <https://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2012/06/grey-zombie-ecology.html>

Crockett, Z. & Zarracina, J., 2016, "How the zombie represents America's deepest fear", *Vox*, Retrieved April 24, 2022 from <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/10/31/13440402/zombie-political-history>

Donwell, B., 2010, "Wole Soyinka attacks BBC portrayal of Lagos 'pit of degradation'", *The Guardian*, Retrieved April 29, 2022 from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/apr/28/soyinka-bbc-lagos-documentaries-criticism>

Duke, S., 2021, Float city. Makoko: (Re)development of an aquatic home. An MA Thesis submitted to the Carleton University, Canada.

Eschner, K., 2017, "Zombie movies are never really about zombies", *Smart News*, October, 30, p. 17. Retrieved May 1, 2020 from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/zombie-movies-are-never-really-about-zombies-180965321/>

Fanon, F., 1963, *The Wretched of the earth*. (Trans. Constance Farrington). Grove Press, New York.

Fox, J. 2011, "Zombie ideas in ecology. Dynamic ecology", *OKIOS: Journal of Advanced Ecology* June 17 edition, 16-21.

Lauro, S.J., 2015, *The transatlantic zombie: Slavery, rebellion and living dead*, Rutgers University Press, London.

Made for Minds, 2016, "Nigeria's own inconvenient truth", *Made for Minds*, Retrieved April 29, 2022, from <https://www.dw.com/en/nigerias-own-inconvenient-truth/a-36468974>

Mahabir, R. et al., 2016, "The study of slums as social and physical constructs: Challenges and emerging research opportunities", *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 3, 1, 399-19.

Murphy, P. D., 2017, "Lessons from the zombie apocalypse in global popular culture: An environmental discourse approach on the walking dead", *Environmental Communication*, 12, 44-57.

Nabegu, A.B.M. & Naibbi, A.I., 2017, "Environmental regulation in Nigeria: A mini review", *International Journal of Environment Science and Natural Research*, 1, 5, 1-4.

National Bureau of Statistics & UNICEF, 2021, *Water, sanitation, hygiene: National outcome routine mapping*, Federal Republic of Nigeria & UNICEF, New York.

Nwachukwu U.M., 2010, "Solid waste generation and disposal in Nigerian cities: An empirical analysis of Onitsha metropolis", *Journal of Environmental Management and Safety* 1(1), 180-191.

Odunjo, O.O. & Okanlawon, S.A., 2014, "Urban poverty and housing inadequacies in Nigeria: Need for intervention in the core areas of cities". In: Santosa H. & Osman A. (Eds.), *WI10. Informal settlements and affordable housing*, International Council for Research and Innovation in Building and Construction, London, 1173-1196.



Cinema, Disasters and the Anthropocene
Enrico Nicosia, Lucrezia Lopez (Eds.)

- Ogbodo, G.S., 2009, “Environmental protection in Nigeria: two decades after the Koko incident”, *Annual Survey of International and Comparative Law*, 15, 1, 1-18.
- Okafor, U.P. et al., 2021, “Health implications of streams water contamination by industrial eluents in the Onitsha urban area of southeastern Nigeria”, *Journal of Water and Land Development*, 8, I-III, 105-114.
- Ovacado, 2018, Month of horror 2018: A/S/L Nigeria: *Ojuju. Avocado*, October 15, p.6.
- Perron, B., 2009, The survival horror: The extended body genre. In: Perron, B. (ed.), *Horror video games: Essays on the fusion of fear and play*, McFarland, Jefferson, N.C., 121–43.
- Sen, M., 2018, “What zombies can teach us about fighting climate change”, *Chicago Review Books*, Retrieved April 24, 2020 from <https://chireviewofbooks.com/2018/02/15/what-zombie-literature-can-teach-us-about-fighting-climate-change/>
- Shaw, C., 2013, “What zombie films tell us about climate change: There’s no one happy ending”, *The Guardian*, March 22, pp. 25-26.
- Slovic, S, Swarnalatha, R. & Sarveswaran, V., 2019, *Routledge handbook of ecocriticism and environmental communication*, Routledge, London.
- Snow J., 2020, “Zombie film Friday: *Ojuju*”, *days with the undead*, Retrieved April 30, 2022 from <https://dayswiththeundead.com/2020/03/13/zombiefilmfriday-ojuju/>
- Taylor, K., 2009, *Cruelty: Human evil and the human brain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- The Guardian, 2010, “Editorial: The BBC documentary on Lagos”, *The Guardian*, May 5, p. 3.
- Ugwa, J., 2021, *Thirst in the midst of the lagoon*, International Centre for Innovation and Research (ICIR), Lagos
- UNICEF, 2021, *Water security for all*, UNICEF, New York.
- Uroko, C., 2020, “Slum dwellers worst hit as COVID-19 exposes ‘homelessness’ in Nigeria”, *Business Day*, May 5, p.32.
- Vervaeke, J., Mastropietro, C. & Miscervic, F., 2017, *Zombies in western culture. A twenty-first century crisis*, Open Book Publishers, London.
- Vu, H. T., et al., 2021, “Social media and environmental activism : Framing the climate change on Facebook by global NGOs”, *Science Communication*, 43, 1, 91-115.
- Watson, A., 2013, “Zombie, environmental declensionism and the fate of humanity: Symbolism in the zombie metaphor 1963-2013”, A presentation delivered at the American Society for Environment History Annual Conference.
- World Health Organisation & UNICEF, 2014, *Progress on drinking water and sanitation. 2014 update*, WHO & UNICEF, New York.
- Yakubu, H.O., 2018, “Particles (soot) pollution in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria – double air pollution problem ? Understanding and tackling potential environmental public health hazard”, *Environments*, 5, 2, 1-22.