

FILM MAKING AND INSURGENCY IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA: THE *BORN IN THE EVENING* EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The art of film making has turned to be a global culture. Its dynamic has continuously leveraged on the indigenous activities of any given place to produce films that are peculiar to such people. The outbreak of Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast Nigeria since 2009 has affected all human activities including film making. Major towns and cities in the region have been drastically reduced as survivals quickly resort to safe regions of the country for safety. There is mass exodus of crème of the region in other to secure their life. Schools, churches, mosques and other business activities are greatly on the decline as practice and patronage is not encouraging. Poverty, diseases, low interest in education, early marriage, and domestic negligence are paramount in the region. On the other hand, the climatic conditions of the region are not favourable to film makers unlike the weather conditions in the Southern part of the country. There seems to be total abandonment of the area by film makers as a result of the insecurity that has beclouded the area. It has become difficult to tell their stories not to talk of shooting it within the environment where this terror is being unleashed. In view of these numerous challenges, this paper approaches the problems through experimentation with *Born in the Evening*, a film about the issues of the region and shot in the region. It sees film making as one of the possible solutions to the numerous problems that have bewildered the Northeast. This paper presents film as a tool to reviving their consciousness. It also debunks the overblown notion that there is no reasonable life in the area. Beyond these, it presents practical solution to film makers who may wish to embark on a project in the Northeast.

Introduction

Film making is an audio/visual art that captures human and animal characters through the electromagnetic medium using the story telling techniques. Film has grown to be one of the dynamic popular cultures since it combines other forms of arts like singing, dancing, painting, and so on, to achieve its purpose. As a tool for change, film has been used to educate and re-orientate a people by championing new ideologies. For example, Onookome Okome believes that the Nigerian colonial masters used film as a propaganda tool in transferring their colonial ideologies to their colonies. So, films produced and acted by the British had effects on Nigerians despite the huge difference in cultural practices.

The upsurge of insurgency in the North East, Nigeria has dominated the media space since 2009. The sect known as Boko Haram which literally means “Western education is forbidden” has destroyed lives and properties, displacing people from their ancestral homes and also kidnapping many. Unfortunately, the end of it does not seem to be near as there are reports of attacks by dwellers in that region. Most attacks from the insurgency come in form of bomb blast, gun shots or abduction of their victims. Notable among the attacks are the abduction of Chibok School girls in Borno State in 2014, abduction of Dapchi School girls from Government Girls’ Science and Technical College, Yobe State in 2018, and abduction of University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID) staff that were on an inspection tour to Chad Republic. Some of these are few examples of the numerous havocs the terrorist group has carried out which has engineered fear among the dwellers of the region. The resultant effect of these activities is that businesses are closed down. It could be recalled that mobile telecommunication service provider, MTN’s mast was destroyed by this group; hence, MTN had to shut down operation in Maiduguri.

Also, in Bama, a power transmitting station was shot at by the Boko Haram group which kept the Maiduguri town in darkness for months while commercial activities were at very low pace. The border between Nigeria and Cameroon was closed by the military as a result of too much infiltration of the state by the insurgents. This obviously crippled economic activities in the region like the importation of fish from the Chard Basin which in turn affected the cost of food items in the entire region. Beyond the region, these activities had rippled effects in other states of the federation since goods and farm produce from the Northeast was on very low ebb. It is worthy of mention that before 2015, the insurgents had occupied some local government areas like Konduga, Bama, Chibok in Borno State, forcing the dwellers to move to the capital city where they now reside as internally displaced persons (IDPs). The region experienced mass exodus of foreigners who could not cope with the killings, southerners had to run for safety and even indigenes who could afford a place outside the region relocated with their families.

In the midst of these unfortunate happenings, it becomes extremely difficult to see film producers, actors or even film makers who would shoot film in this volatile region of the country. Beyond insurgency related issues, the climatic conditions in the North East are entirely different and unfriendly as against what is obtainable in the Southern part of Nigeria. It is against this background that this paper seeks to x-ray how to make films in such environment by overcoming the challenges that have confronted film production in the region. The paper equally addresses out of school as a result of insurgency. This research calls for approaches to restore the devastated region.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on *auteur theory*. The auteur theory of film directing was adopted by Cinephiles in England including Karel Reisz and Lindsay Anderson, who wrote and directed films in freer more personal style of the French "New Wave" film makers. Auteurism has directors, such as, John Cassavetes, Arthur Penn, Mike Nichols, Sidney Lumet, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas, to mention a few, in America. Global trends and technology have contributed to the growing influence of the theory around the world which has made the director to occupy the pinnacle of the film

hierarchy. This theory believes that the director is everything at every stage of film making. In other words, from the conceptualisation, screenplay, directing and producing a director is in charge. Auteur theory presents film as seen through the eye of the director since he is actively spearheading each stage of production.

The auteur theory is being used as the framework for this study because it presents a holistic engagement of the director to be in charge of both practical issues as well as research aspect of film making. If the director is in charge of every stage of production, that means he conducts the research that gives birth to the story. He also goes ahead to screen the film; after which there are reviews which present to the public and scholars critical analyses of the film. Michael Rabiger points out some basic issues concerning the auteur director thus:

Whether you write your own stories, work for someone else's script, or choose something to adapt, you will always face these central questions: how am I going to use my developing skills in the world? What kind of subjects should tackle? What can I be good at? What is my artistic identity? (16).

This presents the film with much task before, during and after a production. This theory will be applied in this paper because it gives a holistic view to study of film from start to finish. Therefore, applying a holistic approach in this paper aligns with the approach film makers should apply in making films in the Northeast. Considering the death of film makers in the region, filmmakers should be able to do many things in the business of film making to achieve such a project.

Statement of the Problem

The story of the killing and destruction in the North East as a result of the activities of insurgency is not totally explored. Beyond the activities of NGOs who help victims of insurgency, there is need for film makers to make films about the Northeast having in mind to tackle terrorism and its effects in the region using the medium of film. Considering the havoc caused by the insurgency in the northeast, Nigerian film makers are highly discouraged to neither tell the story of insurgency nor shoot film in the troubled region. This paper sees this as a big challenge.

Principles of Film Directing

A director whether for stage or screen is meant to follow some basic principles which encourage him/her to arrive at a balanced artistic product. The principles of film directing is not totally a deviation from the principles of stage directing which include composition, rhythm, pasteurisation, movement and pantomimic dramatisation. In film directing, the principles have been tailored to suit the video medium. In *Producing and Directing Films*, Richard Barsam recognises the principles of film directing to include space and time, principles of light and the principles of illusion of movement. These principles will be discussed in relation to the three basic stages in film production – preproduction, production and post-production.

Space and Time

Film is acted in a given space and the action must be under a specified time. Unlike the stage where space is minimised to establish make-belief and drawing an illusion of reality, film space takes place in a real live environment and has the ability to be compressed and expanded. On the other side, every action that happens in a movie takes place in time. Barsam quotes Erwin Panofsky as saying that space and time is the “dynamisation of space and the specialisation of time”, (11). This is captured under the principles of space and time, otherwise known as, the “co-impressibility” (11). The actors in a movie are seen moving within a given space as captured by the camera lens. The space could be more or less than what we see but the director decides how the available space will be put into artistic use. Barsam uses this to illustrate space and time in theatre and movies.

As a spectator in a play in the theatre, your relationship to the stage, the settings, and the actors is fixed. Your perspective of those things is determined by the location of your seat, and everything on stage seems constant because of perspective of the audience member. Settings may change between scenes, but within scenes the set remains, for the most part, in place (34). This, therefore, means that space in film is affected by the type of shot as framed by the film maker. The principles of space and time come to bear when in the composition of any shot used by the director in a film is affected by the available space.

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson assert that, “framing of the image stations us not only at a certain distance. Framing supplies a sense of being faraway or close to the *mis-en-scene* of the shot” (262). The film director employs this principle of time and space bearing in mind the central idea and image he wants to communicate to his viewers. This means that there are factors which can affect the position of actor to the camera and also the duration of shots as used in the film. Such factors could be genre of the film, production design and the specific element which the director wants to portray. For example, Bordwell and Thompson recognise the on-screen and off-screen space which talk about space beyond what the camera can see (off-screen) while the space made visible by the camera on the four sides of the frames is the onscreen space. Time and space work together to bring the illusion of believability in a film production. Hence, the duration of any shot on screen is determined by what the director wants to showcase.

Light

The principles of light believe that movies are photographic arts because images are captured by camera with the help light. Photography cannot take place effectively without light. Be it natural light or artificial light. So film thrives on the principles of light to illuminate, create mood, change colour, and add textures while creating believability. Barsam maintains that,

Lighting is responsible for the image we see on the screen, whether photographed (shot) on film or video, caught on a disk, created with a computer or, as in animation... is also responsible for significant effects in each shot or scene. It enhances depth, emotions, and mood in a shot (14).

In adhering to the principles of light as an aspect of photography Rea and Irving point out the types of lighting to include two-point lighting and three-point lighting (28). In two point lighting, two lights are used to light the subject; while in the three-point lighting, three lights are involved in lighting the subject. It is also worthy to note here that light could be hard or soft light depending on the source and the amount of shadow cast by the light.

Movement

Film, according to Barsam, is otherwise known as movie because it has to do with movement (8). It could be movement of actors or movement of other filmic elements. The principle of movement believes that movies should move or at least have an illusion of movement. This illusion could be achieved in many ways. It could be through the blinking of one shot to another or through the movement of the camera from one focal point to another. On the other hand, we see an entire movie as an uninterrupted movement in a sequence. The illusion we experience in movies is achieved by persistence of vision and the phenomenon. According to Barsam, phi phenomenon is an illusion of movement created by events that succeed each other rapidly. This is achieved when two adjacent lights flash on and off alternating and we seem to see a single light shifting back and forth (22).

The foregoing, to a large extent, buttresses the effect of movement on the movies we watch. According to Barsam, the effect created by the movement of light in a movie has a lasting impact on the memory of the viewer just as the movement of the images in film. The pace at which these filmic elements move forms another aspect of movement in movies. The increment or reduction of frames which results in either slow motion or fast motion of the images is a vital effect of the principles of movement. Bordwell and Thompson say that to enhance expressive effects film makers can change the speed of motion in the course of a shot often the change of speed helps create special effects (229).

During principal photography, the director initiates movement from both with his actors and the camera as a tool in his hand. This is what Rea and Irving recognise as part of cinematic style. Movement can come from within the frame, the motion of the frame itself, or a combination of the two. The camera can be stationary, with the action in front of the lens choreographed, or stage, to its angle (176). This indicates that the principle of movement is initiated right from the screen play to the post production stage of a movie. It encourages and enhances the viewer's interest in watching the entire movie. Hence, the moving element creates illusion of something enticing and attractive.

Synopsis of *Born in the Evening*

Born in the Evening is the story of Salatu who is born in a poor home but not without aspiration of becoming great in life. Salatu is dear to her mother who believes in her dreams but the outbreak of insurgency in Born State becomes a barrier to her dreams. The insurgents storm her village and demand the life of her father but her mother will not succumb to the threat. They kill Salatu's mother thereby shattering her dreams and aspirations. Salatu escapes from the village with her father and siblings to Maiduguri as

they have no alternative than to settle in an IDP camp. The realities of life begin to unfold as they can only survive with what they benefit from government and other volunteer organisations.

Audu, a young man who is involved in humanitarian service at the IDP camp comes across Salatu and develops interest in her. Before then, an NGO has registered her in school which is what she desire so much. Audu marries her with a promise to keep her in school; obviously the father finds a relief in the coming of Audu as son-in-law. He relieves them of some burdens. The table turns when Audu asks Salatu to suspend her education. Audu employs intimidation and harassment to make sure Salatu quits schooling. Salatu's father – Papa is already convinced that quitting school is a better option than quitting the marriage since he considers the financial relief he enjoys from Audu. Salatu is beaten mercilessly for attempting to sleep outside her matrimonial home. She loses a pregnancy and she does not have enough funds for medical care. She results to self-medication. Consequently, she has complication. Audu's girlfriend, who is coincidentally Salatu's classmate, Chichi, arrives the hospital to help. She pays the bill and calls her boyfriend – Audu to come and pick her friend. Audu appears at the hospital to discover that the girl he is coming to help is his wife.

Thematic Pre-occupation in *Born in the Evening*

The theme and subthemes in this film are intentionally chosen to address the problems caused by insurgency in the North East. Looking at the educational backwardness of the region as heightened by Boko Haram activities, it should be noted that before the outbreak of insurgency, the Northeast is educationally backward but the kidnap of school children from Chibok and Dapchi has increased the fear of the girl child to go to school. It should be recalled that the federal government under President Goodluck Jonathan built Almajiri School in other to have more children educated but the effectiveness of that project is still in question. We see a girl who is willing to be in school but insurgency, early marriage and tradition would not allow her be. Suffice it to say that education in the Northeast is most badly affected institution as a result of the kidnap of the girl child by Boko Haram. Leah Shaibu is a case in point.

Other sub-themes treated in the film include early marriage, drug abuse and domestic violence. Salatu is forced into marriage as a result of the harsh economic conditions the family finds itself. Just as what Zulu Sofola preaches in *Wedlock of the Gods*. Salatu is repeatedly abused that puts her life under threat. Another dominant issue in the Northeast is the issue of drug abuse. Many youths in the area are still indulged in drug abuse. In fact, it is more common to still see drugs being hawked with wheelbarrow on the streets in the North Eastern region. Salatu has more complications as she embarks on drug abuse.

Methodology

The method employed in making the film –*Born in the Evening* will form our basic methodology. The experiences will reveal the challenges of making film in the Northeast and how to overcome them. Also, it will reveal the effort of this paper to tell a story about the effects of insurgency in the Northeast thereby bringing an awareness of the sufferings

experienced by people leaving in the region. The experimental method is employed as used in the short film, *Born in the Evening*.

Story and Screenplay

The story was conceptualised from the effects of terrorism as experienced in the troubled region of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states. It tries to use screenplay to showcase these problems in bits. Some issues treated in the story have to come as background story. Celtex application for screenplay was used in writing the screenplay, which makes it easier for proper segmentation, analysis and production planning.

Auditions and Casting

Born in the Evening was shot in Maiduguri, Borno State. Audition was conducted in Maiduguri for three days but could not produce the needed cast for the production. The response showed that most experienced actors who are within the age bracket needed for the story have left the region since the insurgence has affected their carrier. But there are many young and promising actors who indicated interest but could not be given the roles due to little or no experience. The audition dates were extended to one week but without success. The director resorted to scanning for interested actors along the streets in order to get the best available cast to play the role. For the crew it was a more difficult job as most people who practise film making as professionals do not reside in Maiduguri. Rather, you have more of documentary film makers than fiction film makers who shoot documentary films for non-governmental organisations.

Rehearsals

There was serious need for rehearsals as most actors are green horns and needed to be acquainted with the techniques of film making. The rehearsal ended with a test shoot where the cast and crew had a test shoot to harmonise the town and gown. The test shoot availed the crew and cast to blend with each other in their various departments.

Principal Photography

The making of *Born in the Evening* exposed the cast and crew to many challenges which are peculiar to the North-eastern region. Panasonic Lumix Gh4 is used. For the sound, zoom H6 recorder with a microphone and a tripod were used. The locations were Baga Road, Bama Road, University of Maiduguri and Polo, all in Maiduguri, Borno State. The principal photography lasted for seven days, excluding other days used for establishment shots.

Challenges of Shooting Film in North-Eastern, Nigeria

Film making in the North East is quite different from Southern Nigeria as a result of some peculiar challenges. Such peculiar problems are outlined with possible solutions. Large cast and crew may cause unnecessary obstruction. As a result of the high sensitive nature of the region, using a large cast/crew will easily attract the attention of security agents. If you must shoot inside the town, it is advised to reduce scenes with large cast so

that such gathering will not constitute security threat. In recruiting crew, it is advised to use crew members who can do more than one thing to reduce the cluster of people on set.

- a) *Harsh Weather Condition.* Unlike the Southern part of Nigeria, the weather condition in the North East is harsh, hot and hazy. Rainfall is experienced between June and August while most of the months are extremely hot. It was observed during shooting that the camera tripped off under constant usage due to excessive heat. The possible solution is to have more than one camera or always get an umbrella when doing exterior shoot. Another aspect of the weather condition that is not friendly is hazy nature of the area. It was discovered that there was always a cluster of dust on the lens after a day shoot. A film maker is advised to have a lens cleaner in order to clean the lens at least after every day's shoot.
- b) *Noise.* Sound is a major filmic element as good picture without good sound will ruin a production. As a result of the military operations in the North East, there are movements of helicopters almost round the clock in Maiduguri town. This will definitely interfere with your film sound while shooting. During the shoot of *Born in the Evening*, there was a report that the shooting had to wait or even retake many shots while avoiding the military aircraft. This environmental noise is a major challenge in shooting in the North East since the combat against terrorism continues. To manage this challenge, this study recommends the use of lavalier microphones, especially for indoor scenes where the noise of the air craft is bearable. Film makers shooting in such zone should consider time waiting for these numerous air craft to pass.
- c) *Challenge of Picture Exposure.* The experience from *Born in the Evening* shows that cinematography in the North East is a bit challenging. The region is predominantly a desert thereby posing a challenge with rising and falling of the sun. The absence of trees in most areas renders the challenge of backlight-a situation where the intensity of light behind the subject is higher than the intensity of light cast on the subject. There is obvious challenge of such pictures, especially when the shoot is done under a tree in order to have control on picture exposure. The solution to this problem is to have a very effective reflector that can increase the intensity of light on the subject. Alternatively, sun gun lights can be used to highlight the faces of the actors for easy contrast.
- d) *Securing locations.* To secure a location for a shot is not very easy. It is not easy it demands financial commitment but because the people are very sceptical about the security of the area. Inasmuch as they will like to release their building or neighbourhood, there is a general atmosphere of fear as they would not know the effects of the project on them. The experience is that even most of the actors and crew members were afraid of the security situation especially as any mistaken identity could lead to arrest of cast and crew. To overcome such challenge, there

should be no stealing of location. Unlike in the South, where an individual can single-handedly release his environment for you, there should be proper information of the entire neighbourhood concerning the activities on ground.

- e) *Religious Issues*. Every film maker approaches his/her shoot as a business. Where you hire people and tell them when and how they will work for you. But in the North East, you need to shift ground for most actors and crew members. The North East is predominantly Muslims and they observe their religious rites of prayer at intervals. You must incorporate the time for some actors and crew members to have their prayers before the shoot continues. Down in the South, film makers do not consider religious differences neither do they consider religious activities when shooting. But if you must shoot in this region, high consideration must be given to religious activities. In shooting *Born in the Evening*, the crew needed to put the shoot on hold for some actors to go for prayers before the shoot continues. What that calls for is additional time when planning your shoot as this consideration would give them a sense of belonging.

Overcoming the Challenges

For the purpose of this work, overcoming the peculiar challenges in filming in the North East should be done out of the willingness to use film as a means of liberating the zone by attracting national and international attention towards developmental assistance. Film making is about creativity and the film maker can overcome these challenges with his creativity. To achieve any film project in that zone, patience is strongly advised as most people might not be acquainted with the process and the region. But one thing is obvious; the young people are very interested in participating in the process but unfortunately they have been cut out by the activities of insurgency in the area.

In terms of content, the residents of the region are very excited when your story has some cultural or social bearing to their life experiences. The story of *Born in the Evening* is a case in point. The story was developed out of the experiences of a girl who ran away from the interior village to settle as an IDP in Maiduguri. They like stories they can relate with. They give you unexpected support when they can see themselves in your story. Problems associated with the girl child have increased in the North East because of the outbreak of insurgency. Hence, it served as the background to *Born in the Evening*. The problems range from illiteracy, girl-child education, to early child marriage, among others. Having more people cluster in the town of Maiduguri has exposed the state of life in the rural areas and the suffering the people are passing through. From the research done, the people are willing to tell their story to the world but they may not have the platform. So, using their issues to tell their story will attract their interest.

Again, to film in the North East, you should do everything possible to cut down the film crew as number of crew will definitely attract unnecessary attention. The better thing to do is to hire crew that can do more than one thing in order to have a movable crew. This is where Theatre for Development (TfD) approach is advocated in film making. This means that with TfD, the film maker is not just making film for his commercial gain but also empowering the people in the area.

Summary

The art of film making anywhere in the world is a challenging one Niyi Akinmolayan says that, “it takes a village to make film”. The case of making film in the North East is more a difficult one as a result of both climatic and security challenges experienced in the area. Therefore, every activity for the ravaged area could be done as an intervention project because life is involved and telling their stories should be a means of bringing succour to them. In comparing the response of film makers to national issues like militancy/oil crisis (that led to the production of that produced *Black November*) in Niger Delta; insecurity in Aba (that led to the production of *Issakaba*); the outbreak of Ebola/HIV (that produced *73 days*); film makers have not done enough to expose the negative effects of Boko Haram activities in the region. If NGOs are able to reorganise and pitch their tent in Maiduguri, Yobe and Adamawa States not minding the volatile nature of the region, film makers should also operate and lend their voice to the effects of the insurgency even if it demands recreating such films outside the North-eastern environment. On the other hand, film as a cultural product stands to paint a better picture about the activities of insurgency. The media can only report about insurgency but they cannot re-enact the actions and effects as the film can do it.

Recommendations

The practice of film making is a strong voice for social change. This paper, therefore, recommends the following:

- a) That film makers embark on serious research of life in the affected region of Northeast just as the NGOs are doing in other to find out the emotional, economic, social and material needs of the people. This is to enable them draft a script that will reflect the needs of the affected people through content creation.
- b) That documentary film as a type of film that can capture realities of the desolations before such structures are rebuilt. The government and other agencies are making efforts to rebuild and rehabilitate villages but while this is going on, film makers can use documentary film genre to capture its realities to the viewing.
- c) That the experience of *Born in the Evening* could be a reference point while creating content of this nature.

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