

Afro-ish

Cultural Trauma, Man on Ground and the political
economy of globalization

presentation

1. Background to the film
2. Xenophobia: everyone is a foreigner...
3. Key themes
4. Concluding reflections

Introductory notes

“African films are presented as being ‘African’ because they reflect African conditions” (Mhando 2000:3)

Man on Ground tells the story of Ade and Femi, two expatriate Nigerian brothers. Ade is a successful banker in London, while Femi, once a political dissident in his home country, has had to escape to South Africa, live in refugee tenements and work menial jobs.



Politics of migration?

Film inspired by a photograph of Ernesto Nhamuave burning to death during the 2008 xenophobic riots in South Africa

It formed part of a campaign against xenophobia, spearheaded by Omotoso, entitled *Man on Ground: We Are From Here*.

Politics of migration and immigration global problem - Brexit?!



The foreigner is the other, the guest, the immigrant...who 'turn up' at our front door and 'traumatize.' They traumatize, first, because we don't know what to do with them. Do we give them asylum, 'home' and welcome them? If so, how? Or do we...return them to the place from which they were expelled? Second, they traumatize us through their stories Whenever the question of the foreigner is posed, it has to be inverted into ethics. How can we go on living after witnessing trauma?

issue

Many African countries have a history of stereotypes, labelling and attacks on black foreigners

Where does the logic of “Homo sacer”, “outsiders”, “aliens” or kwerekwere come from?

Samnjoh argues that black foreigners are the weakest link

Economic and political causes

Media reflects and affects xenophobia

Afro-ish?

The relationship of migrants with both their countries of origin and their receiving/host/adopted states, is impacted by the ways in which the world-views of institutions and organisations shape perceptions of international migration and migrants.

Afro-ish denotes the tension for Ade of being both “from here” and “over there”



. . . one can speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from traumatized persons. Sometimes the tissues of community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of mind and body . . . but even when that does not happen, traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, ethos – a group culture, almost – that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma, that is, has a social dimension.

”

–Kai Erikson

“To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victim, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers, and family. For the larger society, the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered.”

– *Judith Herman*

“trauma fiction”

a dialogue between artist and society and

a vehicle to promote peace and diversity, gels with Whitehead’s notion of trauma fiction as fiction that encode an ethical impetus for readers to “mediate” traumatic stories.

Witness to trauma

Trauma theory readjusts the relationship between reader and text, so that reading is restored as an ethical practice.

Here the text is able to speak and implicitly becomes “witness” to trauma.

Collins cautions that a postcolonial encounter with a so-called “testifying text” should carefully negotiate the meeting of text (which presumably engages with political realities) and audience responses, taking care to ensure that reading does not become an act of appropriation which reinscribes the marginalized positioning of those histories

Question

This then begs the question, also in light of Omotoso's own framing of his text, can the text bear witness to trauma and would such a notion of reading enable us to recognise the political concerns *Man on Ground's* engagement with the politics of diversity, the political economy of globalisation and cultural trauma engages?

Issues

“Those are our free houses. A truck must park outside your shack, it must load your belongings and drive you to your new house, with your own keys” (28mins).

“People are increasing. Too many foreigners. They’re not from here. Those houses belong to South Africans, not foreigners...”

“It’s our right to stand for our rights. We must stand for ourselves. The councillor must tell us today how he is going to fix this”.

Vusi suggested burning tyres “till someone dies”

opportunities

The Johannesburg Business Roundtable hassles foreign shop owners , “we want you to pack up your so-called business, which according to our rules is illegal” “we give you 7 days to pack up and go”

An immigrant, possibly another target, responds “The only person who can tell me to leave is the president” to which the local response was “what a privilege?”

Impoverishment

The film deals with the effects of a worsening political economic environment in South Africa, pitying locals and foreign for the few jobs that exists.

While other South Africans embraced the foreigners, the Councillor, Lindiwe and Zodwa, the groups represented and manipulated by Vusi have real fears and concerns which were not properly addressed e.g. housing and jobs

What is also absent from the picture are the positions of the multinational corporations who benefit from surplus labour.

Concluding Reflections 1:

Using political economy and critical theory approach we can critique how the film “deal with domination, express standpoints of the oppressed and dominated groups and argue for the advancement of a fairer society” (Fuchs 2010: 173).

The objective of critical research is to link researchable problems with “with interpretations that involve radical changes in the established order”.

Critical media aims to “produce potential for the dissolution of exploitation and oppression” (Fuchs 2010: 182)

Concluding Reflections 2:

Membership of a community endows the community with a *bios*: a life of dignity and meaning considered worthy of sacrifice (Agamben, 1998)

Cultural traumas occur when members of a collectivity feel that they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves 'indelible marks on their consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways' (Alexander 2004, 1)