

Epidemic: Human Relationships Mutate Like Virus

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Abstract

Either war or epidemic, human beings react differently. Epidemics apocalypse T.V. shows and movies capture the human reactions and psychological aspects quite well. The fresh experience of covid-19 has a huge impact on the viewership and readership of epidemic narratives. This paper will analyze the effects of the mutating human psyche and its actions in response to some human feelings concerning the Korean Apocalypse T.V. show, *All of us are Dead*.

The making of the virus or dealing with the virus can be understood using Newton's law of action and reaction. For those who read, an Epidemic is an event, but for those who experience it, it is a process. Experience changes the human understanding of the event, but its impact can mutate the human psyche and even compel human beings to react. In the end, it is a human reaction that causes a major threat to the entire humanity.

Keywords: Action, Reaction, Psyche, Covid19 and Epidemic

The experience of Covid-19 has taught us the true meaning of the term "Epidemic" (something we have read in history). It has compelled us to think beyond the historical aspects and broken our traditional understanding of the term, for instance, the tuberculosis epidemic between 1700 and 1870 in Europe. Even in the world of literature, there are several epidemic references like Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which talks about the decimating effects of the bubonic plague known as the Black Death. And in the modern period, Albert Camus' *La Peste (the Plague)*, the narrative on the plague that impacted the coastal African city of Oran. While analyzing the human psyche and relationships during a pandemic or epidemic, such narratives play a crucial role in drawing parallels between the reel and the real. Plus, it makes a clean and sharp picture of diverse human responses.

The fresh covid-19 experience has altered our lives and choices, like our food choices (immunity boosters), our psyche, our behavioral patterns, and even our movie choices, everything has changed, and the worldwide success of the Korean zombie apocalypse show, *All of Us Dead* is one of the examples and our focus for discussion in this paper. It is a Korean Zombie Apocalypse show directed by Lee Jae-kyoo. The show takes place in the school, the story is focused on a group of high school classmates stuck in their school during the epidemic, trying to escape from violent zombies with no food, no water, and no means of communication, waiting for help from their respective families and government. And the group of high school classmates depicts the condition of diverse human responses.

The making of the virus was the consequence of human emotions, fear, and vulnerability. Newton's Third Law of Motion- the Law of action and reaction says that behind every reaction there exists equally forceful action. In other words, a reaction is always a consequence of the action which has been done.

Science teacher, Byeong-Chan is the creator of the virus; the virus is created by him in the science lab of the same school. He brought so much to the show he proves that some feelings like vulnerability, fear, and weakness can make the whole humanity vulnerable. Why did he create the virus? He made the virus because of his son's social weakness. The show (Episode 1) begins with a scene of extreme violence, the scientist's son, Jin-su is being bullied and beaten to the hospital bed. As the show progresses we get to know that this is not the first time that Jin-su is in the hospital, earlier he attempted suicide and that was when Byeong-chan got to know about his son being bullied, this whole story is the background of "action". The scientist believed that the fear turned into rage is stronger than any other feeling in the world, this stronger feeling is the reaction to the fear. And his attempt to create the virus is successful. "How?" He experimented by keeping some rats with mice and observed that mice were quiet and frozen, trembling in fear. But this fear at some point bursts out, its testosterone level shoots up, and Byeong-Chan extracted this hormone, refined it, and injected it into his son's body. He wanted his son to fight back against this system of assault. He believed that the world has swallowed his son. Hence, the creation of the virus was a reaction to the action of bullying.

The feeling of fear and vulnerability overpowers humanity and ethical consciousness. Byeong-chan's vulnerability for his son's survival brought a threat to the entirety of humanity, he has expressed his fear a lot of times in the show. He wanted his son to survive as a monster rather than die as a human. The epidemic or pandemic world has brought into light the question of survival, and the existence of the question and its uncertainty is never dying.

In the case of Covid-19, the creation of the virus is still not known but it certainly has some deeper meaning concerning the law of action and reaction. During the pandemic, the human psyche was inclined towards the question of their survival. Disease posed threat to too many lives and in reaction, people on the individual level and countries on the global level made major co-ordinations. For instance, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister offered help to the Palestinian authority, not because of humanity but because of the understanding that Jews and Palestinians cannot be separated, one infected group will lead the other to death.

In both the cases, the show and real life, there are multiple characters and diverse responses in the wake of the spreading virus. Moreover, the spreading of the virus is an interaction in itself, "man is bound in a web of biological relationships not easily comprehended" (Rosenberg 3) which implies that human beings are embedded in a certain social frame, and human beings as social being have to work in the sub-layers of the society, humans cannot be taken into isolation. The novel *La Peste* begins on a circumstantial note:

"When leaving his surgery on the morning of April 16, Dr. Bernard Rieux felt something soft under his foot. It was a dead rat lying in the middle of the landing. On the spur of the moment he kicked it to one side and, without giving it a further thought, continued on his way downstairs" (Camus 7)

Albert Camus implied the fact that big epidemics begin with such minor events. And even if such minor events grab some attention, they are ignored. The same happens in the TV show, Byeong-chan experimented on the rat, and that rat bit a schoolgirl, Hyeon-ju in the lab and that's where the transmission began. The violent tendencies of the rat were ignored by her, she didn't expect something so uncertain. Byeong-chan warned the police about Hyeon-ju's condition but they ignored all of it, from here the epidemic seemingly begins.

Multiple characters and diverse responses take us to the different areas of approaching the social response to an epidemic, which is also discussed by Slavoj Zizek in his work, *Pandemic! Covid-19*

Shakes the World where begins by discussing the five stages of human reaction from the work *On Death and Dying* by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Swiss American Psychiatrist, to terminal illness as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Through this, we can study our reactions to the covid-19 epidemic. The first stage of human reactions is proven by the oppression of the doctor, Li Wenliang, who first discovered the covid-19 epidemic and the same thing happens in the T.V show *All of us are Dead*, police ignored Byeong-chan's warnings to isolate Hyeon-ju (who was bitten by the rat). Through this we are able to study our reactions to the covid-19 epidemic. The first stage of human reactions is proven by the oppression of the doctor, Li Wenliang, who first discovered the covid-19 epidemic and the same thing happens in the T.V show *All of us are Dead*, police ignored Byeong-chan's warnings to isolate Hyeon-ju (who was bitten by the rat). The second stage of anger in Covid-19 epidemic is evident with the anger (all over China), triggered by the death of Li Wenliang whereas in *All of us are Dead*, anger is depicted with the physical violence. The third stage of bargaining might be about the false rumours or compromising with the epidemic appropriate behavior which may lead humans to the fourth stage which is depression. The consequences of your compromises may force you to be depressed. In other words, your depression might be the consequence of your bargaining. These four stages, denial, anger, bargaining and depression were different and a process to take you to the conclusion of your acceptance. Through the show, acceptance as the fifth stage can be proved when the epidemic was accepted by the military commander and they expanded martial law all over the affected city which was followed by a grave decision of bombing the entire city, Hyosan because a single zombie would have been a threat to entire Korea.

Moreover, what if there is a sixth stage called "mystery" which is unpredictable and uncertain? The mysteries and the mutating qualities of the virus are extremely unpredictable. Covid-19 still exists and will mutate in different ways that will add more to the uncertainty and meaninglessness of our lives. Even if we manage to kill the virus, it will stay, and is not truly gone. Similarly, if infected bodies are cured, or were never even infected, the virus has altered them all. We are still not aware of the long-term consequences of the virus.

Comparably, in the show, *All of us are Dead*, the creator of the virus, Byeong-Chan also gets infected and is lost among the thousands of Zombies in the city. At times he warned the policeman about the real condition but the denial from the other side made him visualize the danger of his deeds, his warnings made him part-human but the creation of the virus made him a monster for the entire humanity. Plus, the character of Namra in the show is worth discussing in the context of mystery, she is one of the students who are struggling for their survival and despite being infected with the virus she is asymptomatic throughout the show, she can control her zombie tendencies. Even more, she showed her leadership skills by taking advantage of zombie tendencies for a greater cause, like guiding her classmates to escape danger. In the last episode, she brings the mysterious suspense to the show. Her friends find her again in the school but it is shown that she is living on the other side of the world. She has mastered the control of her tendencies that we saw her battles with throughout the entirety of the season. The additional strength, damage resistance enhanced smell, vision and hearing is something she used to make herself more powerful and in the final episode when she quite casually and confidently jumps off of the roof, she used all her powers for a greater cause. Both of these characters, Namra and Byeon-chan can be discussed as part human and part monster because of their exceptional actions in the show.

Contrastingly, Gui-nam was the character who misused his immunity and took too many lives violently throughout the entire show. So, there are two kinds of immune people, bad like Gui-nam, and good like

Namra. It can be interpreted that Namra was trying to imprint good natures into the other ham-bies as naturally, they tend to turn bad after being infected. She might be teaching how to fight the urge to resist zombie tendencies and to use their powers for good. Such kinds of mysteries might also be working behind in the case covid-19. The binaries of the good and the bad during covid-19 can be drawn by comparing the doctors who were putting their life at stake to treat patients with people who sold oxygen and medicines without a license on high rates.

All these arguments depict the fact that everything which takes place on this earth has layers of its existence, nothing happens overnight, out of nowhere. In Fact, Everything that takes place will always be with us as a dark shadow, the reality of the epidemic will always posit a threat to our very survival. Epidemic life is discussed in the paper which includes human life and the life of the virus but there exists pre-sexual life of the virus too which was always there but it took the face of an epidemic when the virus got actively mutated.

And such experiences will always be able to remind us of the uncertainty and meaninglessness of our lives. Moreover, these experiences will add further to our lives which will be called past traumas. The fight between humans and the monster is pervasive, even in our regular lives but epidemics or pandemics make this fight very sharp, and barbarism works with a human face.

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