



THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS: PORTRAYAL OF CAUSES OF RESTIVENESS IN NIGERIAN HOME VIDEO FILMS

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Abstract

The film medium is for entertainment, information and education. Like every other art form, it functions as a mirror of the society, exposing the good, bad, and ugly happenings in different strata and regions of a given recountry. Youth restiveness is eating dip into the fabric of the Nigerian community, especially in the Niger Delta region. This is because of the failure on the part of the government to implement policies that will beter the lots of youths of the region. As aresult, many home videos have been produced by film makers to highlight the plight of the people of the Niger Delta as a result of oil spill, leading to militant responce by the youth, having achieved litile peacefully. *Black November* is one of such films. Careful analysis of the film reveals that the Niger Delta youth are agitating for freedom, from bad governance, diseases and death caused by pollution from oil spills and neglect by successive governments both at the center and region. After careful analysis of the film, the study concludes that though the Niger Delta youth are right in their agitation, but that they should adopt the approach of *Ebieres*, - a constructed approach of dialogue and good conscience to express and communicate their grievances to the government.

Keywords: Film, Home Video, Niger Delta, Restiveness, Youth.

Introduction

Individuals, groups, communities, and the world in general, are complex units that are difficult to define. The reason is that each individual, group or body, has different traits, plans, agenda, aspirations, and goals. These may be propelled by political, economic, religious, or social needs. Nigeria as a nation embodies these complexities and so becomes difficult to define and analysed. Despite her resources, there has been rising cases of insecurity which have become everyday occurrence in present day Nigeria. This has made the country more complex and difficult to live in. The reason is not farfetched. Youths everywhere, including those of the Niger Delta, are experiencing dire poverty, unemployment, and other social-economic and political challenges in their daily lives. Emma and Aghar (2010), assert that the reason why there is so much restiveness

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is that “the people of the Niger Delta ,especially the youths are not satisfied with the level of interest given to the improvement of their area considering the damages caused on their land by oil spillage” (400).

The youth in Nigeria cry for improved conditions of living that have gone unheard by successive governments from independence to date. The question the youths now ask is: where is our place in the distribution of the common wealth? Unfortunately, in their hunt for a piece of this wealth, they get aggressive, rob, maim and kidnap. In the Niger Delta, foreigners (oil workers especially) are prime targets and they are exchanged for huge sums ,especially after government negotiations (Jumbo, 2016).

The result poses several challenges to the Nigerian government. The most painful thing is that many people, including security personnel, children, and women have died and millions worth of property worth millions of naira have been destroyed. In his opinion, Okpadah (2016) points out that youth restiveness in the Niger Delta is a “quest for resource control” (3) Emma and Aghara concurred while narrating the statement made by Attah, a one time governor of Akwa Ibom State. According to him;

my people are ready for war with the Federal Government of Nigeria over resource control, particularly the on-shore/off-shore, controversy, between the Federal Government and the state governments that had since been taken to the supreme court for a declaration of the constitutionality or otherwise of the contending claims which was not simply the latest indication of the bitter relationship between the government and the people, but a clear manifestation of the endemic nature of restiveness both among the adults and youths (2010:400)

The major source of funding or revenue generation for Nigeria as a nation is crude oil, mostly found in the Niger Delta. Also, 80% of the revenue of Nigeria is gotten from crude oil, popularly known as the black gold; a commodity that is presently valuable around the world. However, this region producing the most valuable commodity is also ironically most undeveloped, both in education, health, job opportunities, etc. These and many other reasons have led to youth restiveness and





agitations against the government and other multi-national oil co-operations . . . Effort by the federal, state governments and other non-governmental agencies in their various capacities to put a stop to youth restiveness in the region have proved abortive. Therefore, in order to draw the attention of the international community to the plight of the people of the Niger Delta region, some social commentators have resorted to Art as a form to express the plight of the people of the area. Thus the production of Home video Films like *Liquid Black Gold*, *Amnesty* and *Black November*, the focus of our attention in this study. Although most of the films are shot in the English language as medium of expression, other are produced in other languages like Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa, and even the pidgin English. According to Onuzulike, the content of some of these Nigerian films depict an imagery of Africa. Thus, themes like love, juju, witchcraft and Africa epic history are explored, using African art forms like costumes, proverbs, idioms, songs drama, painting, artefacts, etc. This study therefore explores the extent the Home Video has succeeded in contributing to the discourse on youth restiveness in the Niger Delta and proffering solution thereof, using the film, *Black November*.

The Nigeria Movie Industry: Nollywood

According to Onuzulike “the story of Nigerian film from the beginning can be divided into four eras: the Colonial period: 1903-1960; the Independence period: 1960-1972; the Indigenization Decree period: 1972-1999; and the Nollywood period, 1992- Date.” (2009: 17). He asserts that the colonial era began with the first exhibition of films in Nigeria in August 1903 at the Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos. These films were largely documentaries. The motive for introducing the film industry which came in form the cinema to Nigeria by the British was largely political and, to a lesser extent, Social. In the Independence period, the Federal and States Film Units in Nigeria replaced the colonial units, but concentrated only on the production of documentary films. The coming of the Nollywood era changed the nature, tempo and themes of the film industry in the country. The Nollywood brand of is found everywhere in Africa and beyond. The 2008 rating put the Nigeria movie industry as the second largest film industry in the world in terms of number of annual film productions, placing it ahead of the United States and behind only India. Notwithstanding the success of the industry which hangs mainly on quantity rather than





quality, it is still at its tender age compared with Hollywood and its development is still ongoing. Today, the industry is becoming the most resourceful film industry in the world. This was not an easy task for those who started the struggle for the production of local films in the country. According to Ejirika, despite being frustrated by the high cost of film production in the 1960's, Hubert Ogunde and Ola Balogun were among the first film makers who were brave enough to produce the first indigenous films. However, with the advent of Nollywood as a genre in the Nigeria film industry in 1992, there was a dramatic and upward surge of events with the production of the film *Living in Bondage*(7). The growth of the Nigerian movie industry from 1960 to this time is remarkable and has changed for the better. Ejirika further states that most recently, nollywood films are not only available in VCDs and DVDs, but are screened in cinemas both in Nigeria and beyond (10). Media platforms such as iROKO TV have also designed an online movie streaming website where thousands of Nigerian films are streamed each day.

Youth Restiveness

Youth is a young person growing from adolescent to adulthood. *The Advanced Learners' Dictionary* defines a youth as "a person who is young, especially the time before the child becomes an adult" (745). This means looking at the bracket of between eighteen and twenty-five years and young adults from twenty-five to thirty and five years. Also, the National Youth Development Policy (2001) agrees with the advanced Learner Dictionary on the definition of youth. He however added that after children and women, youths usually are the second largest in every community. He concluded that 45% of Nigeria population are youth. On the other hand, the term 'restive' is used to describe something or someone who is not stable, still or quiet. A wall clock pendulum is a good example of a restive object. When used to describe a group of people, it means a people who are not easy to organize or control. This happens when the group is not pleased with something. A restive youth is most times marked by aggression, commotion and breakdown of law and order. Citing Umar (1998), Oromareghakeet al (2013), believes that a restive youth is a metaphorical word that is used in describing the younger people who aimed at dishonoring unworkable and progressive governance, especially when their interest is not considered nor





protected(47). Some scholars have identified restive youths with youths in social conflict, fighting because of scarce resources. Oboh on his part sees restiveness as a social conflict, or a struggle for prominence, power and scarce resources, asserting that one of the aims of restiveness is to disorganize, disarm and injure a rival party. Restiveness can take place among individuals, groups, societies, and even international communities. Most conflicts have been in the quest for political and social-economic power; and at times territorial gains. (In the same vein, youth restiveness is sometimes grouped alongside militancy and radicalism. For Fever (1966), the phenomenon is not new. It is also not dangerous to the human community in general. He argued that with time, the young generation will simply outgrow their extremism, fanaticism and militancy. He however blamed the present political leaders which he classified as the older generation for dominating and refusing to encourage and include the younger generation in prominent positions in politics and governance. This according to him, has led to generational imbalance. It is this imbalance that most times leads to agitation, kidnapping and hostage taking. Although while the intention behind some of the agitations are questionable, others are genuine. Such genuine agitation is organized and reasonable and therefore attract some level of coverage, especially by the media and the film industry, such as the Home Video.

Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta

The history of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta can be traced to the period oil was first discovered in 1956 in Oloibiri. The discovery of oil was supposed to be a good development for the people of the region, rather, they go through hardship and environmental pollution. Because the foreign oil companies and the Nigerian government neglect have failed to address the challenges and agitation of the host communities, the people, especially the youths have resulted to restiveness for their voices to be heard (Jumbo, 2016, np). Since that time, youth restiveness which has gradually led to insecurity in the country has become an every day issue for discussion both in local and international discourse (The series of youth restiveness experienced in the region is as a result of the government of the day's failure to address the lingering problem of oil spill, environmental degradation, poverty, unemployment, deprivation and total disillusionment of the people of the region. protest to taking up arms and vandalizing the oil pipelines. It has also





included abducting prominent individuals working for the oil companies. As a response to this attitude of nonchalance by government at all levels, the youths in the area then resorted to blowing up oil pipelines, hostagetaking of both local and foreign oil workers, kidnapping etc. While one may agree with the youths on their right to agitate, there is no doubt that their method of agitation have unfortunately, impacted negative on the same environment, the people and economy of the area. Thus, there is the need to change the method of the agitation, which is the thematic trust of the film, *Black November* as directed by Jeta Amata.

Synopsis of *Black November*:

Directed and produced by Jeta Amata, *Black November* is set in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, Los Angeles, the U.S.A, and California. *Black November* is an action drama. There have been many oil spills in the Niger Delta region resulting from extreme drilling of crude. The film tells the story of a group of people in the Niger Delta of Nigeria and their struggle with the corrupt government of Nigeria and the international oil companies operating in the region to stop oil drilling and exploitation, pay compensation for losses incurred. Ebiere is a human rights activist in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. She is to be killed. Tamuno who is the leader of a militant group calls Tom Hudson to guarantee that the Nigerian government stops the execution of Ebiere. The people mobilize to make a peaceful protest, but the police barricade the road, with the military also invading the community, beating the men, raping girls and married women, and killing scores of people. In response to this, the youths turn militant and decide to move to the creeks from where they engage in violent unrest, killing and setting ablaze some chiefs whom they accuse of conniving with the government and the oil companies in the region. Ebiere is blamed for the atrocities and is hanged by the government.

Youth Restiveness in *Black November*

Youth restiveness in *Black November* is triggered by various factors which include but are not limited to peer motivation and excitement to explore and experiment with new ideas, perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation, lack of good governance, and corrupt practices of government officials. An examination of the film divulges the cause of the agitation in the Niger





Delta region of Nigeria. For example, one of the terrorists who held John Hoston hostage said; “my people are dying our lands are devastating, our farmland, livestock, wildlife...” This statement reveals what the people of the Niger Delta are passing through. The air and local environment is polluted, resulting in the suffering of local people. Also, the people have been side-lined, cheated, marginalized and oppressed by the government. It all started with a spill in one of the oil pipelines in the Niger Delta. The result of it is the death of thousands, including women and children, and poor productions of crops in the soil. Aside from making the waters unfit to drink; the fishes in the rivers are also killed. “What they do is give us sickness and they treat us, they make us hungry and they feed us, they kill our loved ones and then offer us money for burials.” (Ebiere)

For four weeks after the people called on Western Oil and report an oil spillage in the area, nothing is done about it. This then results in the people scuping the crude oil which they refine locally and use it to make a living. make a living for themselves. The question of whom to blame then arises. Should the government or Western Oil be blame? For Hoston, the Nigerian government is to blame because the company paid and is willing to pay even more for the damages incurred on the people: “I don’t care if you give it to the individuals, or make it throw in the air. Just make it go away”. For the Niger Delta youths who are members of the United People’s Front for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta people of Nigeria, what they need is not money but freedom- freedom of the free-born of the Niger Delta child. This is revealed in Dede’s words: “We are here to save Ebiere ...EbierePeremo is a true daughter of the Niger Delta”. Therefore, whom to blame does not matter to the youth. For according to Tamuno: “I am not blaming you for my government, I am blaming you for you”.

In the same line of thought, it is important to note that most administrations in the country have not apportioned much to the needs of the youth, and worse still, the meager allocation is often diverted by government officials to their private accounts and projects. Thus, youth are restive and agitated when they perceive that resources meant for them are being wasted by those in authority. Ebiere warns: “you came here to enrich yourselves from the spurs of our land and in the process, wiping out families and generation, yet you keep the fuel burning... It is high time you started





thinking of the people, rather than your selfish fat pocket. If you do not change your ways, the people will rise”.

Further, besides side-lining the people and wasting public funds on individual upkeeps, it seems that developed nations benefit more from the proceeds of the country. Tamuno says: “One out of every five Americans uses Nigerian oil. While we export crude oil, they export refined oil, why? Because Western Oil and our corrupt government won’t allow our refineries to work”. Here, Tamuno hips the blame not only on the oil-producing company, but on the corrupt government. The growth and development of the local communities are unfortunately being hindered. Instead of making home refineries to work, giving room for economic development and employment of youths, bad government and corrupt leaders won’t allow that because of selfish interest. Hence, the need for the youth to rise and fight for what is right has become habits for succeeding administrations in the country, and rise they did. Dede says: “I don’t believe in doing these things with protest. I want to fight, I want to make life unbearable for them.... violence is the only language they understand. What the government and oil company want is war and we will give it to them. Man dies but ones”. This is in harmony with what has been outlined above where we mention that the governments of many developing nations are the ones providing the avenue for youth to become restive. It should be noted that youths constitute a force in any political system and so, their views and interests must be heard and protected. Oromareghakeet al (2013) concurred when they assert that government represents the older generation and, in many cases, provides an obstacle to ambitious youths seeking advancement. This inadvertently leads to a tendency towards activism.

Further, when policies are not in the favour of the majority, protest becomes an option in making popular opinions heard and influencing the policies to help affect the desired change. Following the refusal of the community people to accept money from western oil and the acceptance of bribe by the elders of the community to enrich themselves, Mama Hosanna with the support of Ebiere and others in the community decide to go on a peaceful protest to Abuja. Unfortunately for her, she losses her life in the process as she is shot by a member of the Nigerian army.





Peaceful protest in the film continues after the death of Hosanna. Groups of youths and women carrying placards troop into Western Oil facility shouting solidarity chant in pidgin English. In the name of the Federal Republic of Nigeria they are given 15 minutes to leave facility or face dire consequences of brutally being beaten and injured by men of the Nigerian police force. Those injured include married and old women that were thrown out of the compound. This incident propels Dede's statement to Ebiere that, "protest doesn't work, they rather push you in the line of fire. I will rather die fighting than walking from Lagos to Abuja"

Also, the film *Black November* opens with taking John Hoston, men, women, and children hostage in the United States in captive by members of the United People's Front for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta people, signifying another characteristic of youth restiveness- unlawful taking into hostage members of Western Oil expatriate staff who are relatively all white. As noted earlier, such activity is followed by the use of weapons. Also, following the invading of communities, raping of girls, women, and the vandalization of properties by men of the military, the boys took to the coast. To enable them feed and carry out their activities and objectives, expatriate staff working with Western Oil are kidnapped from which ransoms are paid. While the world and the law regarding such activity as bad, men of the United People's Front for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta People of Nigeria insist that kidnapping is the only language the Westerners understand. "We are not bad people; we do not want to hurt anybody... We are here to save Ebiere". This superposes that not all the kidnaps taking place in the Niger Delta region are money-driven. Ebiere therefore, symbolises resilience, emancipation and freedom of the people of the Niger Delta, but with peace as a weapon

Conclusion/ Recommendation

In line with Mgboh (2018) whose opinion is that it is not a crime for the youths to agitate for their rights, but the way and manner such agitations are communicated is of great concern, especially when it is done violently, this paper appeals to the youths to use the *Ebieres Approach*- A constructed approach borne out of dialogue and good conscience to express and communicate their





grievances to the government. It is only when this is done that they can be perceived as true leaders of tomorrow.

The study recommends the following:

1. Oil-producing companies in the country especially those in the Niger Delta region should carry out cooperate social responsibility and act on time when there is a report of any spill in any of the oil pipelines, rather than delays, thereby causing economic hardships on the host community.
2. Every successive government makes a promise, And so, in the interest of the youth, the study recommends that the government should implement policies and fulfil promises they make. They should rise to the challenge and create job opportunities.
3. The government should be more determined to purge corruption from the country by ensuring prompt check, trial and punishment of crooked and dishonest persons in government to serve as a deterrent to others.

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