

Emancipation and Activism for Change in the Niger Delta: A Reawaking Discourse of Jeta Amata's *Black November*

¹Frank Ifeanyichukwu Amiriheobu, ²Owunari George,

³Albert Ireoma Noble & ⁴Omuku Diepriye Precious

^{1&4}Department of Theatre Arts Education, School of Arts and Social Sciences,

²Department of Music Education

³Department of English Education,

Federal College of Education (Technical) P.M.B 11, Omoku, Onelga, Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Faced with issues of corruption-bribery, fraud, nepotism, divide and rule system and looting, the Niger Delta region is for long, besieged with activism for resource control by aggrieved militant and militia groups; manifesting through vandalism of pipeline installations, illegal oil bunkering, kidnapping, politically motivated assassinations, lethal car bombing, armed robbery and other forms of social vices which affects the people and the country at large. This is to the fact that the proceeds from the sales of the crude oil are not properly channeled to ameliorate the damages accrued due to the exploration and exploitation activities by the oil companies' that has acetous and malicious effects on the fauna and flora of the ecological system of the region; thus, has gargantuan increase in the level of death, poverty, hunger, suffering, sickness, pain, starvation, under-development and total negligence of the people as portrayed in Jeta Amata's *Black November*. This study therefore aims at interrogating the cause and effects of terrorism in the Niger Delta region, drawing reference from Jeta Amata's *Black November*. Jeta Amata, as a 21st century film director, strives in his films to address issues of terrorism, banditry and thuggery in the Nigerian state. To achieve this, Social and Behavioural Change Communication Theory and Content and Analytical Methodology are employed as guide. The effect of this study will create positive attitudinal change amongst Nigerians, thereby effectuating change around societies. The study therefore recommends that further rehabilitation should be carried out in the Niger Delta as that would help create peace and development in the region.

Keywords: *Emancipation, Activism, Change, Niger Delta, Reawaken, Black November*

Corresponding Author: Frank Ifeanyichukwu Amiriheobu

Background to the Study

Comparatively, all terrorism activities in the Nigerian state in the 21st century are targeted at attracting local, national or international recognitions; thus, aimed at addressing some socio-political cum religious a issue which maliciously affects the identity of the regions. Notably, Nigeria as a state is under perpetual and internal security threat. At a more general level, the threat has social, economic, political and environmental dimensions. Each of these dimensions, according to Llufoye (2009), are singly and conjointly affects the nation's stability and well-being.

More so, Terrorist activities according to Umejei (2011) in Emmanuel (2016) have been on the upswing in Nigeria, a country that has suffered attacks from suicide bombers masquerading as Islamic adherents. Daily, the Nigerian economy wobbles under the weight of terrorism that has damaged investors' confidence and sent the economy on a downward slide. Counter terrorism initiatives in combating the scourge of terrorism have proved abortive (Emmanuel, 2016).

Against this backdrop, Babajide et al (2020) writes that “crisis is inevitable as long as we live together, especially in a multi-ethnic, cultural and religious community life Nigeria”. To this, however, crises leaves us with various forms of retardation and underdevelopment resulting from the destruction of lives, farmland and property in the Nigerian state. To complicate the situation, Bakere (2011), according to Emmanuel (2016) avers that “most of the foreign missions advise their citizenry to be wary of doing business in the country because of what they believe is a high security risk”. A survey released by UK-based global analysts, Maplecroft, showed that Nigeria is the 19th most at risk country from terrorist attack.

To clarify this claim is the dreaded Islamic sect popularly called Boko Haram in the Northern part of Nigeria (Emmanuel, 2016). Ideologically, Boko Haram according to Zumve, Ingyoroko and Akuva (2013), in Emmanuel (2016) proposes that interaction with the Western world is forbidden, and also advocates the establishment of a Muslim state of Nigeria. Conforming to Abimbola and Adesote (2012), Emmanuel (2016), insisted that “the activities of the Islamic group especially since 2009 in the region have not only constituted a major security threat to the nation, but has also make the area the most dangerous place to live in the country.

In like manner, Babajide et al (2020), while quoting Okoro (2018) avers that “the deadly crisis between herdsman and farmers have become one of the major insecurity problems in Nigeria”. As observed in Babajide et al (2020), the bloody attacks have created social and relational implications and economic adverse effects. The killings recorded by Fulani herdsmen and farmers clash has rampaged most communities, displacing them of their farmlands and loss of their major source of livelihood. This is becoming unbearable with Fulani herdsmen always having their ways leaving the farmers at their mercy. Ajibefun (2017), attribute the roots of the Herdsmen agitation to religious differences resulting in the killing of their cows while the farmers see the herdsmen as a threat to their crops and agricultural produce since the herdsmen allow their cows to feed on the farmers' crops.

Further, The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) are pro-Biafra group that agitates for self-determination from the Nigerian government. The group agitates for self-determination from the Nigerian State for the independence of the Biafra Republic (Celestina, et al, 2019). It is worthy of note that the Republic of Biafra was a secessionist state which existed during the period of Civil War in South-Eastern Nigeria between the period of 30 May 1967 and 15 January 1970 which undoubtedly affected economic activities (Nafziger, 1972, in Celestina et al, 2019). The agitations of IPOB and all the strategies used according to Celestina et al (2019) cannot be separated from the political stability of Nigeria. The Nigerian Federal Government has gone ahead to proscribe IPOB and designate them a terrorist group through a court judgment. According to a report by Scan news (2018) in Celestina et al (2019), on the 20th of September 2017, Justice Kafarati with an order proscribed IPOB and designated it a terrorist group upon an ex parte application by the attorney general of the federation and minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami. While quoting Gabriel, Agbakwuru, Yakubu and Agbo, (2017), Celestina et al (2019) noted that “declaring the group a terrorist group implies that the group from now will be handled as terrorists by the security forces if they should be found gathering or engaging in any of their activities”.

Concisely, (2009), avers that “threats to human and national security in the Niger Delta ranges from the menace of separatist and extremists demands, illegal militia armies, ethnic and religious conflicts, terrorism, armed robbery, corruption and poverty to sabotage of public properties, economic sabotage and environmental degradation”. Among these, ethno-religious fighting and violent attacks in the oil-rich Niger Delta forms the major security dilemma in the Nigerian state. The predominant threats and security challenges in the area are emanating from un-abating attacks on oil installations, arm proliferation, sea piracy, youth restiveness, bunkering, kidnap and hostage taking.

Against this backdrop, (United Nations, 2008) avers that “this terrorists attacks clearly has a very real and direct impact on human rights, with devastating consequences for the enjoyment of the right to life, liberty and physical integrity of victims. In addition to these individual costs, United Nation further opines that “terrorism can destabilize Governments, undermine civil society, jeopardize peace and security, and threaten social and economic development. All of these also have a real impact on the enjoyment of human rights”. This malicious occurrence, rather negates the ideology and glory, therein the exploration activities in the area. Addition to this claim, Palash and Ben (2016) in their article avers that “the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region in 1956 generated hope, expectations and opportunities to improve the welfare of the local people”. Palash and Ben further aver that “however, the reality is, national elites, comprised of politicians and former military personnel, have been the principal beneficiaries of oil revenues in contrast to the local communities who so far seen little or no benefits”.

It is against the above statement that Preye and David (2010), writes, that “there are two incontrovertible facts about the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: First, it is a region of strategic importance to both the domestic and international economies. Secondly, it is a region of great and troubling paradox-it is an environment of great wealth as well as inhuman poverty”. Narratively, Robinson (2006), in Preye and David (2010) noted that “Niger Delta creeks and

swamps which lie over one of the biggest reserves of oil on planet earth-about 34 billion barrels of black gold plays a phenomenal role in the health of the global political economy especially that of the most powerful nation on earth, the United States of America". Presently, the hydrocarbon resources of the region have made Nigeria the largest oil producer in Africa and the seventh largest in the world (Ajanaku, 2008 in Preye and David, 2010). It is therefore less surprising that the region's security according to Preye and David (2010), has become a major issue to the global community. This is the reason why mere whisper of unrest in the Delta has normally sent global oil prices spiraling upwards.

Extensively, in the last three decades, the Niger Delta region, the centre of Nigeria's oil wealth according to Llufoye (2009), has been the scene of protest, sometimes violent, against the repressive tendencies of the Nigerian state the one hand and against the recklessness, exploitative and environmentally unfriendly activities of oil Multinationals on the other hand. Such violent agitations according to Palash and Ben (2016) have claimed thousands of lives, other thousands displaced and inestimable properties have been destroyed. In economic term, millions of dollars have been lost to youth restiveness, disruption of production, vandalism of pipeline installations, hostage-taking, assault and bombing of oil installations to mention a few. Against this backdrop, Llufoye (2009), insisted that "the use of terror strategies by the Niger Delta agitated groups to end the real and perceived injustices has attracted global attentions and a rethink on resource distribution policies of the Federal government".

It is to the quest of identify the cause and effect of terrorism in the Niger Delta region as portrayed in Jeta Amata's *Black November*, that forms the nexus for this study. To achieve this, social behavioural change and communication theory, content and analytical methodologies are employed as guide.

Causes of insecurity in the Niger Delta Region

Many factors have been postulated as causing unrest in Nigeria. Some writers put their blames on the government while some others pass the bulk on parents. Other writers hold the youths as being responsible while others settle on the combination of these factors. Putting all these factors together will provide some of the following as responsible factors for the general state of insecurity in Nigeria. Namely: Unemployment, bad governance, lack of quality education or training, lack or inadequate basic infrastructures, corruption and corrupt practices of government officials, perceived victimization, arrant poverty in the midst of affluence, ethnic superiority, religious superiority, domination and exploitation, materialism and the display of it with impunity, etcetera (Jacob and Andrew, 2015).

These factors according to Omede (2012) in Jacob and Andrew (2015) may not actually be the causes of unrest in the Niger Delta. Omede according to Jacob and Andrew (2015) sees these factors as symptoms, shadows and not the substance. For instance, as Omede noted: Why unemployment if we may ask? Who is to provide the jobs? And why are they not providing the jobs? The answers may be found in corruption, misappropriation of public funds and lack of quality education, bad governance, and etcetera. Corruption, lack of good or bad governance, ethnic superiority and domination of one community or person by the other as well as the rest others mentioned above are all moral and values problems (Omede; 2012, in Jacob and Andrew, 2015).

In like manner, Egwuanyi et al (2014), writes that “it is pertinent to observe that the situation in the Niger Delta region is, indeed, a paradox of poverty and underdevelopment in the mist of plenty. This is because in spite of oil wealth in the region, it still remains one of the least developed parts of Nigeria, apparently characterized by widespread poverty (Ogege, 2011; UNDP, 2006 in Egwuanyi et al, 2014). It is the deep-rooted sense of neglect and marginalization by the government in providing or supporting critical human development and provision of basic social amenities that underlay the persistent militancy in the region. Even at that, Egwuanyi (2014) observed, quoting Ndoma-Egba (2004) that it is the inability of the Nigerian state to address the development needs of the region that has led to the persistent agitation and violent crisis in the region.

The agitation according to Egwuanyi (2014), becomes more violently expressed on the belief that the failure of the Nigerian state to meet their basic development needs is deliberate and a consequence of sheer lack of political will on the part of government leadership. In essence, the militants feel that they are in unjust situation and need to rise up in arms to redress the situation (Smith, 2002 in Egwuanyi et al, 2020).

Effects of Militancy to the Nigerian Economy

In essence, militancy as conducted in the Niger Delta has contributed to the further degradation of the environment. It is a case of destroying to destroy. The Niger Delta militants are themselves destroying the environment, compounding the destruction caused by the oil multinationals operating in the area. Further, Babajide et al (2020) highlight the following as major effects of Militancy in Nigeria:

1. Loss of lives and property. The violent activities that follow insurgency and terrorist activities result in a massive destruction of lives and properties.
2. Hindrance to growth and development. When a nation faces a constant threat of insurgency and terrorism, the growth is hampered.
3. Hindrance to tourism tourist activities are put on hold in nations plagued with violent.

Next, Ajibefun (2018), writes that “terrorism in Nigeria has had adverse impacts on economic growth, investment, and tourism. Militancy incidents in the Niger Delta usually result in massive destruction with injuries and casualties. These incidents according to Babajide et al (2020) have the tendency to physically destroy productive assets as well as redirect resources away from productive uses. The direct economic cost includes expenditures on direct attack, and defense/national security, which are calculated from direct approaches such as cost to property and products (Johnson and Patrick, 2019).

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed Theory

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed Theory is an exemplar towards searching for an adequate literature on identifying the cause and effects of militancy in the Niger Delta region as portrayed in Jeta Amata's *Black November*, thus, proffering workable solution towards curbing the menace. Explicitly, Theatre of the Oppressed Theory is best in tasking the mentality of a targeted audience regarding the antics of oppressors in their individual society. The theory is an ideology that helps purge the oppressed from ignorance towards fighting for

moral cause that would generate positive change. Theatre of the Oppressed is a form of popular theatre, of, by, and for people who want to learn ways of fighting back against oppression in their daily lives. It is a form of participatory theatre that fosters democratic and cooperative forms of interaction among participants (Ronald, 1994 in Amiriheobu, 2019).

Ronald (1994), according to Amiriheobu (2019), also observed that "...the Theatre of the Oppressed is emphasized not as a spectacle but as a language designed to analyze and discuss problems of oppression and power and explore group solutions to this problem..." The purpose of Theatre of the Oppressed is basically to dehumanise humanity.

By way of personification, Amiriheobu (2019), writes that oppression is when one person is dominated by the monologue of another and has no chance to reply. To this, "Boal's life is devoted to giving those who are in this one-down position the tools with which to express themselves and discover a way out of their powerlessness". This form of theatre aims at addressing issues that have captivated the well-being of the people and jettisoned the people into accepting that change can be achieved if there is no oppression of any kind in the society. Augusto Boal developed a conception of theatre that would propagate that view of society and help to bring about fundamental social change.

Conclusively, Theatre of the Oppressed is a dramatic technique whose purpose is to bring to light systematic exploitation and oppression within common situations, and to allow spectators to become actors (Saxon, 1964 in Amiriheobu, 2019). To this, Boal according to Amiriheobu (2019) adapted different techniques which include Newspaper Theatre, Image Theatre, Invincible Theatre, and its major technique - Forum Theatre. All of the above have been elaborated to pursue a clear objective, which is to transform spectators into actors; thus, address their chaotic challenges (Amiriheobu, 2019).

Methodology

This research work employs the case study and content analysis research approaches of the qualitative research method. It involves explaining the issue, describing, analyzing and interpreting data on the analysis of the cause and effect of militancy and terrorism in the Niger Delta as portrayed in Jeta Amata's *Black November*. It is qualitative because it deals with the analysis of this film by a notable Nigerian film director and descriptive because it involves the use of ideas to describe and analyze the cause and effect of militancy in the film. To achieve this, the study employs the primary and secondary sources, which are the film and the researchers' ideas concerning the cause and effects of militancy in the Niger Delta region and the materials from the institutional publications, articles, journals, text books, internets, research materials, among others, respectively.

Synopsis of *Black November*

The film, *Black November*, revolves around Ibiere, a brilliant, strong and intelligent young girl who decided to abandon all the benefits and opportunities in the United Kingdom where she went for scholarship and come home to fight for the liberation of her people from the whelms of the Western Oil Company, the sleazy and greedy chiefs and the Federal government who for long have maliciously enriched themselves with the wealth drawn from the community and

deprived their means of livelihood. These cankerworms, through their oblivion exploitation and exploration activities have created environmental degradation of the land and the people that has affected the fauna and flora of the ecological system of the region. These heinous anomalies pragmatically affected the soil texture, which ultimately destroys the seafood's, thereby increasing sickness, hunger, pain, suffering and death of the people.

The major action in the play started when Tamuno Alayigbeni, the Leader of The United People's Front of the emancipation of the Niger Delta People and some of his members decided to ambush the CEO of the Western Oil Company which ultimately affected other people, thereby creating public nuisance at the United Kingdom. There and then, Tamuno decided to narrate the ordeal in the Niger Delta region before a Live Television Station and demanded that the CEO of Western Oil Company should call the Nigerian Federal Government to order the Nigerian Prison Authority to release Ibiere who was already set to be hanged.

Tamuno, in his narrative, ultimately explained how Ibiere came back from overseas after her scholarship studies to witness the massive gas explosion in the community which led to the gruesome killing of her mother, her three siblings, community women, youths and children who went to fetch fuel from the gas leakage. He also explained how the CEO of Western Oil Company unpatriotically released the sum of Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00) to reminisce the death and destructions in the community and how the chiefs maliciously shared the bountiful part of the money, leaving very few for the community.

Angered by this new development, the women and few youths in the community, led by Ibiere and Hosanna (Dede's younger sister), decided to travel to Abuja to conduct peaceful demonstration against the Nigerian Military Government. On their way to Abuja, they were ambushed by the Nigerian military agents, which out of struggle led to the brutal killing of Hosanna by a military officer and the arrest of the armless women, who were later released, owing to the intervention of the CEO of Western Oil Company.

The death of Hosanna led to a peaceful protest against the Western Oil Company by the women but was later intercepted by the Nigerian Army who inflicted injuries on the armless women. In provocation, the Nigerian Army invaded the community, killed, maimed, arrested some men and raped the women. In retaliation, the youths, led by Dede, decided to form The People Front and took to arm against the Western Oil Company Workers, mostly the whites and the government agencies. Their activities range from kidnapping of the oil company's workers, vandalism of pipeline installations and illegal oil bunkering.

Trickily, the CEO of Western Oil Company and the Government, lured Ibiere into accepting to convince Dede and the United Peoples Front member to accept dialogue which would bring about their freedom. Unfortunately, Dede and his boys accepted to meet Gideon White (the mediator between the Western Oil Company and the people) and Captain Hassan. Unknowing to them, Hassan and Gideon White had already positioned some military officers who showed up at their arrival to the meeting ground. This obviously resulted to a confrontation and exchange of bullets between Dede, his boys and the Nigerian agents which led to the death of Dede, Gideon White and Captain Hassan and their boys.

The death of Dede and his boys, led to the discovery by Chief Sam that the reason for the militancy and terrorism that led to the death of the youths in the community is as a result of the community money that was paid by the Western Oil Company which was shared amongst them. To this, he insisted of submitting his own share of the money to the community. On hearing this, Chief Kuku, Chief Gadibia and Chief Kokori planned and killed Chief Sam through food poisoning.

At point of death, Chief Sam revealed to his son his killers, which led to massive demonstration against the chiefs and their subsequent killing in a flaming car by angry youths, unknowing to them that their action was captured by a live television. Ibiere and some youths were later reprimanded by the Nigerian Police and were later charged to court for killing the three chiefs. Ibiere pleaded guilty of all charges levied against her and the group and was later sentenced to death by hanging, even when her fellow comrades pleaded not guilty. While waiting to be hanged, Ibiere discovered that she is pregnant with Dede's child and later delivered of a baby boy.

The play came to an end when the CEO of Western Oil Company pretended calling the Nigerian government, to free Ibiere, coupled with a false alarm that Ibiere is free, Tamuno and his boys decided to free the CEO and later surrendered to the US agents, only to realise that Ibiere is already hanged to death.

Black November and theme of Militancy in the Niger Delta

From the discussion above, it is pertinent to deduce that Jeta Amata's *Black November* redirects our attention on the prevalent security challenges in the Niger Delta region which for long have been neglected due to the emergence of other malicious issues that threatens the security cum political front of the Nigerian state. These heinous issues include the activities of the Boko Haram sect, the herdsmen and farmers clashes, the IPOB agitation and demonstrations, and the resent communal terrorism on security agencies in the country. These draconian issues, despite their political inclinations, does not equate the gargantuan nature of the militancy and militia issues in the Niger Delta that produces 95% of the total domestic gross which has sustained the Nigerian state for more than half a decade.

In a nutshell, *Black November* encapsulates the cause, effects and possible remedy to the issues of militancy and terrorism in the Niger Delta. On the cause and effects, it is revealed in the film that the total negligence and marginalisation of the Niger Delta region and her people by the government and the multinational oil companies are the major causes of terrorism and militancy in the Niger Delta. The people are abandoned to suffer effects of the exploitation and exploration activities due to crude oil spilling that damages their lands and kills all their fishes in the rivers and lakes, owing to the fact that the major occupations of the Niger Delta people are farming and fishing.

In the same vein, the exploration and exploitation activities by the multinational oil companies also results to gas flaring which damages the ecological system, resulting to constant breathing of gaseous discharge by the Niger Delta people, which ultimately creates early blindness, lung issues and all forms of cancer challenges. These have rather increased

pain, suffering, sickness and death of the people. Most often, the people are affected as a result of gas explosions and gas leakages.

In the film for instance, Ibiere arrives home from the United Kingdom after her scholarship studies, to receive the news of a pipeline leakage and how the men, women, youths and children, including her mother and three siblings have gone to fetch fuel from the pipeline, only to witness a massive gas explosion which left no one alive. In the Niger Delta region, pipeline explosion has been a reoccurring one which have killed thousands of people and renders many homeless. In rare occasions, the affected families are minimally compensated while some are left to groan in pain. In the film, compensation was made to the leaders and chiefs who shares handful amongst themselves, leaving very few for the community.

This singular act generated protestation in the film and later metamorphosed to forming of the United People Front. Such as this group, Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), and Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), among others had abated in the Niger Delta; other smaller groups have of recent surfaced which makes it more complicated to address. These groups, such as in the film, engages in kidnapping, vandalism of pipeline installations, illegal crude oil bunkering, assassinations and lethal car bombing.

Unlike in the film, these militant groups also carry out operations which includes incessant killing, armed robbery and rape that affects their people. Their activities, instead of bringing the lasting peace and development to the Niger Delta region as craved for, assert negative influence on the people and the region, due to their continuous confrontation with security agents, using government infrastructures as theatre of war. They also carry out attack on anyone in the region that is found working with the government and the oil company in detriment of the people. Evidence of this is seen in the play when the youth, led by Ibiere, captured and killed Chief Kuku, Chief Gadibia and Chief Kokori because they connived and killed Chief Sam because he decided to return his share of the community money.

Such as in the film were Tamuno and some of his freedom fighters decided to create havoc in the United States of America so that the CEO of Western Oil Company should direct the Nigerian government to release Ibiere, some Niger Delta avengers have on so many occasions, demanded for international attention regarding the marginalization and deprivation issues in the Niger Delta region.

Conclusively, such as most Niger Delta militant leaders and freedom fighters, such as Adaka Jasper Boro, Ken Saro Wiwa and their fellow freedom fighters, Ibiere, Dede and their boys also lost their lives in the struggle for emancipation in the Niger Delta.

Conclusion

From the study, it is established that militancy and terrorism in the Niger Delta region is gradually sidelined by the Nigerian government due to the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in the North-east, the Herdsmen/farmers clashes in some states, the IPOB agitation for self-determination in the South-east and the local terrorism prevalent in all

Nigerian states, even when it is glaring that kidnapping, vandalism of pipeline installations, incessant killings of both government agents and local community people are on a high rate in the Niger Delta region. It is also observed in the play that the activities of the militants and the militia groups in the Niger Delta region which has affected the Nigerian state in the 21st century.

Recommendation

The study recommends the following as plausible steps towards curbing militancy and terrorism in the Niger Delta region.

1. Militancy and terrorism in the Niger Delta region should not be overlooked due to the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency, Herdsmen/farmers clashes, IPOB agitation, and the general unrest in the Nigerian society.
2. Further rehabilitation should be carried out in the Niger Delta as that would help create peace and development in the region.
3. Job opportunities should be made available to the youths in the Niger Delta region, to ameliorate the surge of poverty, suffering, pain and death caused by the exploration and exploitation activities by the multinational oil companies.
4. Further measures should be carried out by the multinational oil companies to avoid constant pipeline leakages that results to explosion.

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