

**EXPOSITIONS OF CIVIL UNREST AND MILITANCY IN NIGERIAN FILMS: AN ANALYSIS OF OLOIBIRI****Dr CHIBUIKE M. ABUNIKE**[cm.abunike@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:cm.abunike@unizik.edu.ng)

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*Understanding the political economy of Nigeria is needed to reveal the root causes of its many ethnic, religious, economic, and political problems. The pressures now weighing on Nigeria could literally fracture the state along deep fault lines if rampant corruption continues. There has been much hue and cry about militancy in some Nigerian video films of late. It appears that most people (Africans and non-Africans) now perceive Nigerians as very violent people considering the avalanche of militancy that play out in most films that emanate from Nigeria. Nollywood is further gaining popularity due to its transformations, which bear resemblances to the processes of gentrification and representation. The case study approach of the qualitative research method has been employed in engaging an analysis of the Expositions of Civil Unrest and Militancy in Nigerian Films. The paper adopts frustration-aggression and social exclusion theories as proposed by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mower, and Sears as major theoretical constructs. The study also extends the argument that some Nigerian filmmakers are as responsive to national and historic issues as their counterparts in other artistic endeavours and also examines the portrayals of militancy in Nollywood films. A close study of Oloibiri reveals the anxieties and aspirations of filmmakers who re-imagine the politics of oil exploration as it influences the Nigerian people.*

**Introduction**

The Nollywood video films dates back to the 90s. The movies produced initially were in Yoruba language but by the early 90s, Igbo producers and marketers arrived on the scene. They began to dominate the movie industry and have continued even till date. These home videos treat so many topical issues. Such issues include: money making rituals, class distinctions, love, HIV/AIDS, widowhood, inheritance, witchcraft, poverty, armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution and so on. In most of these issues, violence and security challenges can be seen as a recurring theme.

The role of film in moulding society has been a source of controversy in academic circles. Some writers like Stella Okunna (22) and George Gerbner (67) have argued that films could have destructive effects on the society. On the other hand, William Schramm and argue that films have a positive effect on the society. It would appear that the most popular and persuasive mass medium ever invented, to which the general public have regular access to is Film. Nollywood is adjudged to have great influence on most Nigerian viewers. More so, research by Dauda Enna, Emmanuel Idakwo and Olaku Akpovye also show that there is a direct relationship between the perceptions of Africa by most teenage children in Nigeria and portrayal of magic in Nollywood (186).

Many studies that show that Nollywood has a great influence on the value system of most Nigerian viewers abound. A greater percentage of Nigerian population therefore, have access to Nollywood films. They are exposed to both the advantages and disadvantages arising from watching Nollywood films. Okunna posits that, "Watching violent films/programmes makes people behave violently in real life situation." (1) A lot of people tend to practice what they see in movies including violence, especially young minds. Recently, Nollywood has also come under harsh criticism. These criticisms, which are centered on violence and modes of production are indicative of the importance placed on the industry. The video film has a great influence and impact on the viewers and their general attitude. Okunna states that; "The film as a mass medium can create new opinions and cause a shift in attitudes and values that have not been strongly entrenched. However, their greatest strength lies in reinforcing existing attitudes." (23) There is need therefore, for the movie makers to properly scrutinize the quality of their productions, especially in terms of their social, moral values and violence inherent in them. The early Nigerian films actually emphasized on culture and history and to some extent morality.

According to Orewere; "Film is a powerful medium of entertainment and transmission of cultural values" (206). Thus, thematic fixations in Nollywood mostly revolve around the socio-cultural, ethno-religious and socio-political world view of the Nigerian peoples. It tells the Nigerian story and tackles social problems that are faced by ordinary Nigerians in their daily lives. The implication is that Nigeria and Nigerians are adjudged through the eyes of Nollywood. Most importantly, Nollywood has carved its niche as a projector of Nigeria's cultural experience. It has become the voice of the common man on the street, the voice of the oppressed and the voice of the many cultures that want to be heard both within and across Nigeria. Olabanji Akinola Opines:

The unprecedented rise of Nollywood in the past two decades attests to its successes in uniquely telling African stories from the perspectives of Africans, a storytelling role that had for too long been left in the hands of many who portrayed the continent as the bastion of dangers and backwaters of human civilization. (12)

Buttressing the social importance of Nollywood to the African continent, Adesoke as cited in Onuzulike sees the video film industry as representing “a mode of self-conception and self-advancement, through which people renegotiate the changing sense of selfhood in contemporary West African societies...” (178). This therefore stresses the popularity of the medium among the local population. It is this belief and dependency on the medium that surreptitiously empowers it as agent of socialization, a crusader and as a social commentator both within and beyond the Nigerian state. As a result, the expositions of civil unrest as related to militancy are not to be treated without the carefulness required in safeguarding the mentality of a nation. This is because Nollywood occupies a strategic place in Nigeria from where the majority of the people are socially oriented.

The number of films that portrayed Niger Delta conflict (e.g. *Black November*, *The Liquid Black Gold*, *King of Crude/Crude War*, *Blood & Oil*, *Militants*, *Niger-Delta Avengers* and *The Battle of Militant and the Military*) has grown at the same pace, although the industry has produced several activist films and political critiques. Miller and Tsika suggest there have also been significant developments in the film industry and its scholarship, with monographs being dedicated to Nollywood celebrities or newer forms of organisation and distribution (25). What seems to remain unchanged is the dearth of reception studies of Nigerian and African screen media (Krings, 20) or even the assessment of the potential ‘impact’ of films among the people whose lives and culture they represent. In contemporary home video, the movie practitioners seem to be interested in their net profit rather than considering the social and moral consequences of their production. John Bittner opines that; “The message of the movies, like a bullet would be received by the individual directly, and it would have immediate effect on him, persuading him to do exactly the way the movie message advocates...” (41-42)

As we all know, films are highly influential. Thompson Andy attests to this when he said that, ‘Films are the country’s most influential media.’ (3) In view of this, some scholars are of the opinion that films influence the people in a society negatively rather than positively. Violence is found in all societies. It is not just an episodic problem affecting two or more individuals but a

structural and strategic problem rooted in wider, social, economic, organizational and cultural factors. It is a social phenomenon, which bears social costs. The industry has been accused of over-emphasizing negative themes by critics, and the industry's over-emphasis on negative themes is becoming a national concern. The National Film and Video Censors Board, the industry's regulatory body in its guidelines for motion picture producers, as a result, called for productions to be above board in portrayal of violence, crimes, sex, and pornography, vulgarity, obscenity, religion and other sensitive subjects (NFVCB 2000: 107-111). As a result, The National Film and Video Censor Board imposed a ban on many films such as; 'I hate my village 1' for promoting cannibalism and failing to uphold Nigeria's cultural values. The board also placed bans on seven films: 'Shattered Home', 'Outcast 1&2', 'Night Out' (Girls for Sale)', 'Omo Empire', 'Isakaba 4', 'Terrorist Attack', and 'Unseen Forces' due to lawlessness and upholding of immorality and cannibalism by the producers. An analysis of these selected movies reveal that issues highlighted in them include: violent robbery, ritual performances, rivalry, conflicts, sexual violence, organized crime, prostitution, murder, greed, avarice, impatience, jealousy, envy, pride, arrogance, infidelity, treachery, occultism and so on. Gerbner cited that the media violence has negative effects on the youths. He calls it "The main world syndrome".

### **Nollywood and Portrayal of Socio-Political Issues**

Nigeria has an estimated population of over 173 million, making it the most populous country of Africa and the eighth most populous country in the world (UNDP, 14). The country is divided into 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja is the seat of government. Lagos is the former capital and Nigeria's largest city (AfDB, 12). There are three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria: the Hausa, the Yoruba and the Igbo predominantly located in the north, southwest and south east of the country respectively. There are also some significant minority ethnic groups including the Fulani, Kanuri, Tiv and Nupe. Whilst there are approximately 400 languages spoken by different groups in Nigeria (Heaton and Fayola, 8), English has been the official language since 1960 following the British influence on the nation during the colonial era. Pidgin English, which is a combination of Nigerian languages and English, has also become a commonly used language (Faloya and Heaton, 8). Code-switching is a practice common among the ethnic groups as a way to ease communication with others who do not speak their native language. Toribio and Bullock define code-switching as the alternating use of two languages in the same stretch of discourse by a bilingual speaker (12). For instance, the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba switch between their mother

tongues and English as a way of intercommunication. According to Ugochukwu; ‘Engligbo’ best defines a fusion of Igbo language and English (6). She observes that although it is primarily used for business and inter-ethnic communication purposes, code-switching ‘Engligbo’ is becoming widely practised even in Igbo-Igbo interaction. Most Nollywood films have this element of code switching whereby the characters change from English to their native language and back to English and many Nollywood films are characterised by Pidgin English.

An interesting thing about Nollywood is its resilience in the face of harsh economic indices, favouritism, nepotism, inadequate and sometimes non-existence infrastructure. The industry has grown and has consistently told the story of the Nigerian state, society and people. Film is popular culture and as expected, it must exhibit, play upon, mirrorize, recreate, or retell the stories of the societies in which it subsists. Nollywood is no exception, it has been able to portray an image of the Nigerian society or in other terms the image of the Nigerian people and state, which as a matter of fact is the reason why the Nigerian motion picture industry has been a beehive of activities research, investments, visits and so on. Over the years, the industry has promoted certain identities and images about the country which in a way has helped to boost the country's reputation. Nollywood has been able to showcase the socio-political profile of the country especially during an era in which the nation was notorious for military coups and political instability. The production of films in the military epoch which explores the lives of Nigerians shows to the world that Nigerians are innovative, creative and balanced, irrespective of the social upheavals in the country which also negated the bad image being generated in the international press about the nation. Nollywood has helped also to change the perception of the rest of the world about Nigeria and indeed the whole of Africa through the films produced. Many people outside the continent and especially those who have not visited it have come to understand that Nigerians and Africans do not live on trees or work about naked as had been speculated previously, nor are we bloodthirsty and cruel, but are just like other people of the world who could be bad, good, greedy, or nice because people are people, regardless of their nationality and location.

Moreover, in the light of its optimization of digital technology, Adenuga posits that Nollywood has positioned Nigeria as a basket of talents (08). The capitalization of Nigerian filmmakers on digital technology has turned Nigeria into a bastion and a force to reckon with in global filmmaking, a scenario that has improved the image of the nation by creating an opportunity for Nigerian filmmakers to tell our own stories without fear, favour or prejudice. For so long films

were made in Africa but not by Africans. Nollywood has reversed this situation bringing good acclaim and favourable recognition to Nigeria.

### **Frustration-Aggression and Social Exclusion Theory**

This theory explains why people become frustrated and aggressive when their goals and aspiration are not achieved. In 1939, researchers at Yale University Institute of Human Relation published a small monograph that has had a tremendous impact directly or indirectly, almost on all behavioral sciences. Led by John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Miller, O.H. Mower, and Robert Sear, the group attempted to account for virtually all human aggression with a few basic ideas. Most of the studies investigating the causes and consequences of aggression in the immediately following decades were oriented, to some extent, at least towards issues raised by the aggressive inclination even when they are not arbitrary or aimed at the subject personally.

According to Maslow, the usual definitions of frustration are in terms simply of not getting what one desires, of interference with a wish, or with a gratification (41). Such definition fails to make the distinction between a deprivation which is unimportant to the organism (easily substituted for, with few serious after-effects), and, on the other hand, a deprivation which is at the same time, a threat to the personality, that is, to the life goals of the individual, to his defensive system, to his self-esteem or to his feeling of security. It is our contention that only a threatening deprivation has the multitude of effects (usually undesirable) which are commonly attributed to frustration in general.

Social exclusion theory on the other hand describes a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. A term that emphasizes the structural facets of poverty and social marginality: Exclusion refers to the systematic process of being kept out of touch with decision-makers and the sense of powerlessness that ensues. The concept was developed in Europe during the 1980s and offers a broader, multidimensional perspective on social disadvantage than the purely economic elements of poverty. Exclusion can be social, political, cultural, or emotional. These frequently interact: racial minorities are commonly economically disadvantaged as well as being politically and culturally marginalised (which, of course, serve to maintain their economic disadvantage).

Social exclusion offers a way to explain the endurance of social and health inequalities. It recognizes that not all disadvantage can be reduced to economic terms. The term emphasizes the

structural facets of poverty or social marginality: the reality of being out of touch with decision makers and the resulting powerlessness. Exclusion indicates the segmentation of a society in which hierarchies are closed to outsiders. Not only is a person poor, but they may be systematically denied access to the means to overcome their poverty: the old boys' club is not open to them. Those who are excluded typically lack the capacity for collective action to overcome their exclusion.

Militancy in Nigeria's Niger Delta therefore is mostly motivated by frustration and neglect created by deprivation and a threat to the personality, that is, to the life goals of individual or a group of people in the region. Therefore, the study adopts frustration-aggression and social exclusion as theoretical construct.

### **The Synopsis of *Oloibiri***

*Oloibiri* is a Nigerian film that plunges into the realities of what happened in Oloibiri, a historic small community in Ogbia LGA of Bayelsa state, in Eastern Niger Delta region of Nigeria. In 1956, Shell Darcy discovered the first commercial oil in Oloibiri, produced by Rogers Ofime and directed by Curtis Graham, succinctly captures the plight of the indigenes of Oloibiri community and how the process of exploring crude ruined what used to be a lively community. The community which was popular for their fishing occupation could no longer carry out their normal activities as a result of environmental pollution and biodiversity in the community caused by oil spillage. *Oloibiri* creatively used interconnected characters to creatively narrate the tales of the Oloibiri indigenes and how the oil exploration affected them drastically. The characters dramatize the sorry condition of the historic community and make it easy for the audience to understand the predicament of the community and other degraded oil mining communities abandoned by the Government and oil multinationals.

### **The Expositions of Civil Unrest in the Film**

*Oloibiri* is set in the eastern Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The contemporary Niger Delta society in which the movie is set is prominent for its respect for fishing and farming. Thus, recognition and social importance are most times given based on the community achievements.

From a careful analysis of *Oloibiri*, one can detect the seeming imbalance and subtle unconstructiveness the theme of militancy is presented in the film. Thus, the militants and their activities are the only ones presented in a bad light. They are projected as the problem of the Niger



Deltans as they kill, destroy properties and set the whole community in turmoil without scruples. They are viewed as dissidents and opposition to constituted authority. For instance, Boma Tamuno, who although regards himself as a freedom fighter, is subtly presented as a rebel bent on disturbing public peace for his selfish gains. He seeks compensation for the oil discovered and drilled in his community which constitutionally belongs to the government. Hence, he is killed and dumped in spilt oil. His defeat and eventual killing is villainous which seems to whittle the essence of his freedom fighting. In fact, the film lacks what may be termed contrastive balance needed to achieve realistic representation of militancy in Nigeria where exploitation, deprivation, bad governance and unemployment tend to push youths into violence of various sorts. One is tempted to submit that the director concerned himself with projecting militancy as unwarranted, dreadful and counterproductive.

Militancy is a fall out of the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and the attendant devastation of lands, destruction of crops and pollution of the people's water that followed that oil exploration. Indigenes of the area upon feeling exploited by government, which upon inception of oil exploration was the British government, for their personal gains began to take drastic measures in order to get the attention of government when initial peaceful dialogues proved abortive. Youths of this region who accuse government of being insensitive to their plight having been exposed to life-threatening dangers occasioned by oil spillage without compensation take up arms against the government, to drive home their demands. Although this is the theme which *Oloibiri* tends to present, the plight of the common Oloibirians seems underplayed in the film. While the government seems to be absolved of any blame regarding the oil spillage and the purported underdevelopment of the region in the film, the people of Oloibiri are however presented as greedy, selfish and undeserving of any meaningful attention. Dogo's self-centered approach is sharing the compensation fund released to the community by the oil explorers led by Robert Powell is a good example. Dogo in the film instead of sharing the fund equitably as is supposed, shares the fund based on bias and personal sentiment and this sparks serious faceoff between him and Tamuno. The director based on the perspective from which he presents the story seems to agree with the West that Nigeria and extension Africa are self-centred and unable to govern themselves.

The degradation of the community made Elder Timipre flee to the West on a scholarship and years later, he returns to the community, a shadow of himself, traumatized and determined to make LESH petroleum, the oil company behind the sorry condition of Oloibiri to pay for the harm they



have caused him and the entire people of Oloibiri. While Boma believes in violence as the only solution, Elder Timipre believes that Negotiation is the best. This could be heard during Timipre's ordeal in the hands of the militants, he says to Boma;

**Elder Timipre:** Violence will never offer a permanent solution.

The narrative approach in *Oloibiri* toes this popular notion of militancy. The frustration, aggression, exclusion and perspectives of militancy created in the movie are represented through the major characters both in their actions and dialogues. Dollard et al postulations in the theory of frustration-aggression become pellucid with the analysis of the characters of Elder Timipre, Boma Tamuno, and Dogo the quintessential Nigerian militant. The character of 'Boma Tamuno' is used to create a suiting background for the eventual construction of the desired idea of militancy as represented in the movie. The director portray militant as a judge on criminals who robs the poor within their jurisdiction. The opening scene of the movie is used to establish 'Gunpowder' the leader of the militant group accosted 'Dogo' a leader of a group of criminals who according to Gunpowder do not have the interest of the people at heart. The following conversation occurred:

**Gunpowder:** Let's play a game Dogo, a game called judgement day. I ask the question, you answer and I judge.

**Dogo:** You will let me go, I am your friend, we started this together, me and you.

**Gunpowder:** Until greed got you, we vowed to protect Oloibiri you and I... do you use this money (pointing to a bag of money) to protect Oloibiri? Do you think destroying the values of the Niger Delta solves these issues?

**Dogo:** We fight the same course.

**Gunpowder:** No Dogo, you fight for your stomach. Look at your boys; they are now common thieves like you...

At this point Gunpowder shoots Dogo while Dogo was still ranting but Gunpowder allowed Dogo's boys to go. The director here projected militancy as a protector of the people around its region as many people were present and no one got hurt. The director also portray militancy as a terrorist group as their activities affects local and international dwellers, this they do by engaging in a serious warfare and exchange of firepower with Armed Forces, hitting the convoy of Mr. Powell, a Whiteman who came to survey the effects of the oil drill he was dealing in the region. The militants kidnapped Mr. Powell's wife and daughter which is an international crime.

Gunpowder's camp was invaded by the Nigerian Army and was shot eventually. This was to shun activities and intent of opposition against Armed Forces of the state.

The theory of social exclusion becomes clear where the director points out the obnoxious state of the nation where the government allows foreign companies to dominate and exploit the oil of the people without giving credence for their well being. A reading of the following conversation between Elder Timipre and Mr. Powell will enhance the understanding of this discuss:

**Elder Timipre:** Years ago, the same company signed the Anglo-Asian alliance till the Iranians wanted more control over their oil wealth which was much to your dislike.

**Mr. Powell:** Look here, we've come all this way with the blessing of everybody here, your Chief, your Elders to come and empower this community. We are offering all sorts of development objectives, building roads, schools and even employing your youths on daily basis.

**Elder Timipre:** As cooks, cleaners, suffers...

## **Conclusion**

Nigerians are law-abiding citizens given the platform that justice is supreme, and discrimination and absolute rule are unacceptable. Discriminatory instruments of the administration must be dismantled, while oppression, marginalization, injustice and flagrant disobedience of the rule of law are properly addressed. Militancy and violence provide a meeting point at which kidnapping, especially for ransom, flourishes. Government efforts must be geared towards getting all stakeholders involved in the process of solving nation's problems. The government should remove sentiment from the application and implementation of government policies so that they can serve the public interest for the good of all citizens.

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