

CONTEXTUALISING CHANGE IN NIGERIA'S LEADERSHIP QUESTION THROUGH THE FILM MEDIUM: A CRITICAL READING OF JETA AMATA'S *BLACK NOVEMBER*

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Abstract

*Change is dynamic; it is ever occurring in any given circumstance. It explains the popular saying that, 'there is nothing that is permanent in life except change'. However, change is positive when it is progressive; and negative when it is retrogressive. Over the years, Nigeria, as a country, has been in search of credible, dependable, focused and result-oriented leadership. This explains the need for regular intellectual discourses on the leadership question that the country has been grappling with. There is no arguing the fact that, no matter the personal, educational, psychological, economic, religious and cultural background of a leader, the constitution of his/her power base will have determinate effect on his/her approach to leadership. This is because leadership is all about using people to achieve predetermined group objectives. In fact, the contemporary Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, has become a veritable platform to interrogate the leadership question in Nigeria. Consequently, this study examines Jeta Amata's **Black November**, a film that portrays a volatile community in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria ravaged by crude oil exploration and exploitation activities of a multi-national oil company. The people fight against the evil machinations of corrupt government and oil company officials that collude to impoverish them. The submission is that only transparency in the policy actions of leaders, at all levels of governance, will mitigate incessant youth restiveness in oil producing communities. Furthermore, the film medium remains a viable option in managing change in Nigeria's search for credible political leadership.*

Introduction

Over the years, Nigeria, as a country, has been in search of credible and people-oriented leadership. This underpins regular intellectual discourses on the leadership question that the country has been grappling with. There is no arguing the fact that, no matter the personal, educational, psychological, economic, religious and cultural background of a leader, the constitution of his/her power

base will have determinate effect on his/her approach to leadership. This is because leadership is all about using people to achieve predetermined objectives.

The contemporary Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, has become a veritable platform to interrogate the leadership question in Nigeria. This study examines Jeta Amata's *Black November*, a film which portrays a community that is ravaged by the oil exploration and exploitation activities of an oil multi-national in the volatile Niger Delta area. The people fight against the evil machinations of corrupt government and oil company officials that collude to impoverish them. The submission is that only transparency in the policy actions of leaders, at all levels of governance, will mitigate incessant youth restiveness in oil producing communities. Furthermore, the film medium remains a viable option in engendering change in Nigeria's search for credible leadership.

Conceptual Framework

It is necessary to briefly define the key words: contextualising, change, leadership question, Nollywood films, and critical reading, in order for us to establish our conceptual framework.

- a) **Contextualising**: To contextualise means to put something in a given perspective and look at it from that direction. It is like looking at a substance through a prism.
- b) **Change**: To change is to alter the look or state of something. Change is dynamic, in the sense that, it is ever occurring in any given circumstance. The President Muhammadu Buhari-led government came into power using the change mantra in the 2015 electioneering campaigns. As the saying goes, "nothing is permanent in life except change". For one to make progress in life, one must engender change – physically, structurally, economically, philosophically, intellectually, and so forth. Change becomes positive when it is progressive; but negative when it is retrogressive.
- c) **Leadership Question**: This is an issue that has bedevilled the Nigerian state. Ironically, the country has been faced with leaders that are not altruistic; they think of "self" alone. Thus, governance is not geared towards providing the basic necessities of life for the people: food, shelter, clothing, and critical infrastructure. The reality is that the generality of the people now live in abject penury, with great disaffection, because of the leadership deficit. How do we get out of this? This is where the leadership question becomes relevant.

- d) ***Nollywood Films***: These are films produced by filmmakers in the Nigerian film industry. From its humble beginning in 1992, Nollywood has become a major contributor to the nation's economy. Graduating from the use of VHS format films in 1992, as exemplified in *Living in Bondage* directed by Chris Obi-Rapu and produced by Kenneth Nnebue of Nek Video Links, films are now produced on formats that are in tune with global best practices. It has been such that Nollywood films can now be entered for international film festivals around the world.
- e) ***Critical Reading***: This refers to in-depth analysis of a film, taking into consideration its aesthetics: sight, sound, motion. It means carrying out a study that is an encapsulation of the narrative of the happenings in the film and the underlying motivations of such actions and approaches. In this study, we will do a critical reading of *Black November*, using the narrative approach.

The Leadership Question in Nigeria

Leadership is the means of direction applied by someone (a leader) to guide others (the followers), with the aim of attaining set objectives. Robert Appleby defines leadership as, "the ability of management to induce subordinates to work towards group goals with confidence and keenness" (117). Elsewhere, we had posited that leadership is

the process where a person (the leader) directs the work or behaviour of a group (the followers) towards the accomplishment of predetermined goals. A leader then is the one, who influences the actions of the group members. He is the most influential and exemplary person in an organization, who provides direction, guides group activities and ensures that the group objectives are attained. (Ayakoroma, Theatre Management 40-41)

Ideally, leadership positions are characterized by *authority* – the right to give orders and make others obey; *power* – the ability to act the way you wish, and not being susceptible to any external influences or manipulations; *responsibility* – guiding the activities of a group towards predetermined goals; *decision-making* – taking decisions in the best interest of the group and act accordingly; *expertise* – having sound knowledge of what the group is doing; and *delegation of duty* – having the liberty (or be willing) to assign duties to subordinates. Furthermore,

certain factors determine the selection of leadership style, namely: size of the entity, degree of interaction, personality of members, goal congruence, level of decision-making, and the state of the system (see Ayakoroma, *Theatre Management* 45-46; 50-54).

However, as the adage goes, “uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.” A leader is bound to face certain problems no matter the leadership style of that individual. Such problems could be attributable to the approach to leadership, the followers, or the social setting. The problems, which are by no means definitive include, religious differences, ideological differences, communication barrier, exploitation, unequal opportunities, inhumanity, conflicting interests or goals, disrespect for constituted authority, sycophancy, and corruption (Ayakoroma, *Theatre Management* 54-59). These have persistently militated against governance in Nigeria since independence, hence, the leadership question.

Most Nigerian leaders, traditional and constitutional alike, emerge under very questionable circumstances. Unarguably, if any leadership is predicated on shaky foundations, there are bound to be problems. Before now, in Nigeria’s political history, military juntas just seized power through *coups d’état* without due regard for the will of the people or the rule of law. The situation has also been worrisome under the present democratic experiment, in the sense that political god-fathers impose their cronies on the people. It is not surprising then that the leadership question has been a recurring decimal in Nigeria. Corruption has gradually become endemic; and attempts by successive administrations to fight it have been very feeble. Even the current effort by the President Muhammadu Buhari-led administration has drawn flak from generality of the public; that it is only directed at the opposition.

Talking about corruption, Nigerians will readily remember the oil windfall and Petroleum Task Force (PTF) scams of the 1980s; the frauds in various pension schemes (including the police and military pensions) and the Pension Transition Administration (PTAD) deals; the Halliburton scandal; sundry contracts inflation and fraudulent legislators’ constituency projects; the power sector scams; the fertilizer scams in the agriculture sector; political thuggery and election rigging; ostentatious lifestyles by political leaders; the Boko Haram arms deal (popularly called, “Dasukigate”); and the rot in the judiciary, among other corrupt tendencies. All of these and many more too numerous to list have been occasioned by unmitigated leadership deficit. Happening to people who produce the wealth of the nation, and are have nothing to show for it, one can imagine the pent-up anger which erupts at the least provocation.

Unarguably, transparency and accountability on the part of leaders are antidotes to the cankerworm of corruption. Our leaders are not answerable to the electorate, probably because they believe that whether they are voted for or not, they will still find themselves in power through the back door. Where they are appointed into office, they feel they owe the masses no obligation; that they are only answerable to their 'principals.' This explains why legislators could get contracts to construct access roads, sink boreholes, or provide electricity, as constituency projects, and they collect the money without executing such contracts. This is with impunity because those who could have called them to order are equally guilty. It is a vicious circle that continues to impact negatively on the masses. Once leaders are accountable to their followers at every point in time, then excesses could be checked.

There is no gainsaying that leadership failure has affected every area of the country's life. The discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in 1956 at Oloibiri, in present day Bayelsa State, made all tiers of government to gradually abandon agriculture for the oil wealth. The groundnut pyramids in the north, the cocoa exports, and oil palm produce slowly vanished over the years. Malaysia came to collect oil palm seedlings from Nigeria to cultivate in their country. Today, that country has become the largest exporter of palm oil in the world. The leadership deficit is also evident in the various levels of neglect in the manufacturing, power, transport and aviation, health, textile industry, education, culture and tourism sectors, just to mention a few, in spite of the huge budgetary allocations yearly.

As a point of fact, diverse issues concerning the leadership question in Nigeria have been extensively examined by different scholars, including *Culture, Leadership and Accountability in Nigeria*, edited by Olu Obafemi and Barclays Ayakoroma, as well as *Literary Perspectives on Culture, Leadership and Accountability in Nigeria*, edited by Barclays Ayakoroma. For instance, it has been argued thus:

The quest for the authentic and dependable roots to building and strengthening national institutions and structures run by credible, responsible, visionary and transparent leadership is one of the most elusive tasks and challenges facing our nation today. The argument recently credited to the effect that what is necessary for national development are strong institutions. However, in current thinking voiced by creditable public intellectuals and social

theorists, it has been commonly advanced that we also need strong leadership to drive those strong institutions. (Obafemi and Ayakoroma, "Introduction" 7)

In this study, therefore, we are looking at the leadership deficit in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, which has brought about utter neglect of the people, at the federal, state, local government and community levels, in spite of the huge oil revenue the region generates into the nation's economy.

Understanding the Setting of *Black November*

It is pertinent to briefly examine the background of Jeta Amata's *Black November*, because the film is based on the Niger Delta struggle. This will provide the prism for a critical reading of the film. We had posited elsewhere that the various militant groups in Nigeria influence the ideological inclination of the people to a large extent. On the part of the Niger Delta, we had averred thus:

The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which was the brainchild of the late environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, appeared to blaze the trail in the Niger Delta. The heartless execution of Saro-Wiwa precipitated a chain of reactions that has reverberated to the present day. The Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), the Ijaw Youths Council (IYC), and the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA), popularly known as the Egbesu Boys of Africa, are some of the youth groups that have been formed to protect the communal interests of the Ijaw. (Ayakoroma, *Trends* 182)

It is worth noting that, after the actions of militant groups like Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), among others had abated in the Niger Delta, a new militant group, Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), emerged to threaten and continue with hostilities and bombing of oil installations in the Niger Delta, just as they have taken up arms against the Federal Government, pressing for a fair deal for the people of the region, most especially in the allocation of oil blocs. For instance, the group had given a two-week ultimatum to multi-national oil companies to vacate the region,

reiterating that it was committed to its threat to cripple the nation's economy. Although the Federal Government reacted by also threatening to treat them like 'common criminals and saboteurs', members of the group were not deterred as they carried out more attacks, blowing up of pipelines, as well as killing security operatives. They expressed unhappiness over alleged marginalisation, injustice, hardship and poverty going on in the country while a few persons controlled the nation's commonwealth, stressing that the Nigerian Government was selfish and that they will do everything possible to resist it (John, "Expect More Attacks..." 9). The implication of the renewed attacks by the Avengers was that while the Federal Government projected a daily production of 2.2 million barrels of crude oil in the country's 2016 budget dropped drastically. Put succinctly, crude production in Nigeria, which was the highest in Africa, dipped down to about 990,000 barrels per day ("Avengers: Nigeria Loses ₦10bn Daily" 10).

Similarly, a Niger Delta militant group, the Concerned Militant Leaders (CML), claimed responsibility for an attack on Onitsha River in Anambra State, where eight soldiers were feared dead; an attack in Nkpor where three persons were killed; as well as the burning of a police patrol van. The group maintained that their actions were in a bid to show the Federal Government and security agencies that they should not underrate the activities of the Niger Delta militants. CML also claimed it was working in conjunction with NDA to cripple the nation's economy (John, "Militants Reject" 4, 5). Meanwhile, NDA in a statement signed by its spokesperson, Brig. Gen. Murdoch Agbinibo had promised that it would not kill or kidnap anybody. It also warned other militant groups in the region to desist from killing soldiers and oil workers, in order not to incur the wrath of God in their mission, which is to liberate the people, and not kill. The group also added that the heavy military presence in the region would not tempt it to kill in order not to derail from its agenda. The group advised the public to be weary of fraudsters who parade themselves as representatives or spokespersons for the group (Okpare "We Won't Kill" 6).

However, militants under the aegis of the Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force in their threat to destroy some selected national formations on 6th June, 2016, urged the occupants of Aso Villa, National Assembly and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to vacate the premises in order not to be caught in their resumed war against the Nigerian government. Their threat was targeted at vital government institutions as well as national assets in cities, such as, Lagos, Abuja and Kaduna built with oil and gas resources from the Niger Delta region. They had planned to fire missiles simultaneously at such targets to show their seriousness about actualising the breakup of the nation, as predicted by the United

States of America (Okpare “Militants Threaten to Bomb” 16; Folaranmi and Osuyi 6). As it were, discordant tunes emerged from the ranks of the Niger Delta militants following threat by Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF) to launch and test its missiles from Tuesday, 7th June, 2016, to signpost its intention of breaking up the country. This was just as NDA claimed responsibility for the wave of attacks on oil installations in the country, and disassociated itself from the planned missiles launch of JNDLF, requesting that it (JNDLF) should key into its own project of crippling the country's oil production without bloodshed (Odiegwu 6).

Despite Federal Government’s order for ceasefire to allow the National Security Adviser (NSA), General Mohammed Babagana Mungono-led committee have dialogue with NDA, the militants rebuffed the peace moves by the Presidency and continued with bombing of oil installations in the Niger Delta region. The Presidency had reached an agreement with governors of the Niger Delta States that the military should vacate communities in the region except the waterways; but the blowing up of Well RMP 20, belonging to Chevron, in Warri North Local Government Area, indicated that the militants were not ready for a ceasefire. They maintained that they will not negotiate with any committee, saying if the government went ahead to discuss with any group, it would be at its own risk (Folaranmi 6). Furthermore, President Muhammadu Buhari’s Democracy Day address on 29th May, 2016, read in part:

The recent spate of attacks by militants disrupting oil and power installations will not distract us from engaging leaders in the region in addressing Niger Delta problems. If the militants and vandals are testing our resolve, they are much mistaken. We shall apprehend the perpetrators and their sponsors and bring them to justice. (Folaranmi, “Soldiers, Militants’ Showdown” 24)

In the face of the incessant attacks on oil pipelines in the region, the Federal Government deployed armed soldiers in seven gun-boats that stormed Oporoza, the traditional headquarters of Gbaramatu Kingdom in search of the ex-militant leader, Government Ekpemupolo, known as, Tompolo, and members of NDA. Before the invasion, NDA blew up NNPC pipelines Warri, Delta State; Nembe, Brass 1, 2, 3 in Bayelsa State; and Bonny in Rivers State. In a letter he personally signed, Tompolo extricated himself from the NDA activities, as he appealed to them to sheathe their swords and embrace dialogue to solve the crisis

in the region. But the spokesperson of the NDA, General Agbinibo, was to later criticize Tompolo, accusing him of taking sides with the Federal Government in his desperate efforts to please President Buhari (Folaranmi, “Soldiers, Militants' Showdown...” 24).

Nonetheless, in the wake of renewed heartless attacks on oil installations in the Niger Delta by militants, the Ijaw National Congress (INC) pleaded for ceasefire. The socio-cultural organization urged the military and NDA to suspend all hostilities to create room for dialogue. It condemned the use of violence by the Avengers and government in settling scores, enjoining the aggrieved youths and the military to embrace peace and stop using the Nigerian economy (oil and gas) as the theatre of war (Orosewotu 6). Former Governor of Abia State, Dr. Uzor Orji Kalu, also added his voice to those trying to find a way of settling the conflicts by calling on government to extend an olive branch to the aggrieved Niger Delta militants just as he appealed to the Avengers to ceasefire as bombing of oil installations will not solve the challenges facing the region. Kalu suggested that to curb the menace, government should call stakeholders in the region to a round table to identify the way forward, including investing in critical infrastructure in the region, compelling oil companies to give back to their host communities in form of employment, wealth creation and environmental protection, and giving the Niger Deltans the right of first refusal in the award of contracts for the protection of oil pipelines and installations in the region since they are more familiar with the terrain in the creeks (“Dialogue with NDA” 10).

Incidentally, all the militant groups seek for relevance at every point in time. For instance, there were cracks in the camps of the militant groups. It degenerated, as one of them, the Reformed Egbesu Boys of Niger Delta, unilaterally declared cessation of hostilities. Meanwhile, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) raised a seven-man team, tagged, “Aaron Team 2”, composed of Henry Odein Ajumogobia, SAN (Rivers), Ledum Mitee (Rivers), Timipa Jenkins Okponipere (Bayelsa), Bismark Rewane (Delta), Sen. Florence Ita-Giwa (Cross River), Ibanga Isine (Akwa Ibom) and Lawson Omokhodion (Edo State), to negotiate with the Federal Government. This was just as it charged NDA to drop its defiant posture and embrace dialogue. The Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC) of the Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF) had indicated it had accepted the window created by the Federal Government for dialogue; but NDA maintained that it was not part of the negotiations. *Vanguard* reports had it that, government negotiators had penetrated many of the militant groups for them to declare cessation of hostilities and embrace dialogue. Many of the militants were furious, alleging that some powerful forces had hijacked the

struggle and were merely using them as bargaining tools to the detriment of the region (Amaize, Agande & Brisibe 1).

The Reformed Egbesu Boys of Niger Delta was also at loggerheads with NDA and JNDLF over their positions. While it was on the same page with JNDLF on cessation of hostilities, it disagreed with it on the release of the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Nnamdi Kanu and National Security Adviser (NSA) to former President Goodluck Jonathan, Col. Sambo Dasuki (rtd), both under detention. Consequently, they warned those they described as, ‘old generation of Ijaw activists’, namely, Government Ekpemupolo (alias Tompolo), Ateke Tom, General Boyloaf, General Africanus Ukpaparasia and others, not to meddle in the peace process. The leaders of the group, General Tony Alagbakeriwei and Commander Ebi Abakoromor, in a statement, said:

We align ourselves with the unilateral declaration of cessation of hostilities on oil and gas assets in the Niger Delta by various militant organisations. We are in total support of the Federal Government option of dialogue, taking into cognizance the numerous appeals from both local and international platforms. In as much as we have considered this option, we wish to reaffirm that the Ijaws have never been a conquered people. (Amaize, Agande and Brisibe 2)

Espousing its stance on true federalism, the militant group averred thus:

In conclusion, we wish to reaffirm the Ijaw position of true federalism within a restructured state and the Federal Government should immediately activate the necessary platform. We warn the Federal Government to be sincere and committed to the peace process and to state that any deviation would lead to resumption of hostilities. (Amaize, Agande & Brisibe 3)

It will be recalled that, on 12th May, 2016, the spokesperson of NDA, General Agbinibo, had stated that by October 2016, NDA will display its currency, flag, passport, its ruling council, and its territory to the world. Somehow, many militants and Niger Deltans do not share such aspirations. Nonetheless, other demands of the group included implementation of critical

aspects of the report of the 2014 National Conference, specifically, 60:40 percent ownership of oil blocs in favour of oil producing communities, proper funding of the Amnesty Programme, trial of APC members allegedly indicted for corruption, unconditional release of the IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, and effective take-off of the Nigerian Maritime University (NMU), Okerenkoko, Delta State (Amaize, Agande & Brisibe 3).

As a point of fact, the Niger Delta activist and founder of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Ken Saro-Wiwa, was executed on 10th November, 1995. Thus, it could be construed that the film, *Black November*, draws its title from that incident. According to *Wikipedia*, the film was premiered at the Kennedy Centre, Washington, DC, on 8 May, 2012, and was also screened on 26 September, 2012, during United Nations General Assembly. It was said to have had such an effect on United States congressmen, Bobby Rush and Jeff Fortenberry that they sponsored a joint resolution aimed at pressurising the Nigerian government and Western oil companies to clean up spills in the Niger Delta.

About the Film, *Black November*

Written, directed and co-produced by Jeta Amata, *Black November* opens in Warri, in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria, where a gallows is being prepared for the execution of a young female activist, Ebiere Perema (Mfong Amata). The scene changes to Los Angeles, California, USA, where in a Gestapo-like operation, members of the United Front for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta People of Nigeria, led by Tamuno (Enyinna Nwigwe), cause mayhem, taking Tom Hudson, the Managing Director/CEO of Western Oil, a multi-national oil company in the Niger Delta (Mickey Rourke, with Mark Kubr as his Stunt Double), and other innocent persons, hostage. Their demand is the unconditional release of Ebiere, who had led the struggle. They are told point blank that the United States Government does not negotiate with terrorists.

There is a flashback, which gives the background of the plight of oil producing communities in the Niger Delta. They produce the crude oil that feeds the entire nation; but they live in abject penury; they hardly see any government presence; but they suffer the hazards associated with oil exploration and exploitation – gas faring, oil pollution, oil spillage, neglect by oil multi-nationals, exploitation by local chiefs, and so on.

An unfortunate oil spillage occurs and gullible villagers scramble to scoop the fuel not minding the dangers or likely fuel explosion. The Police try to intervene but to no avail. As it is to be expected, there is a devastating gas

explosion, ironically caused by a security agent, who should protect the lives of the people. Officials of Western Oil negotiate with the people to pay compensation to the affected families. However, the village chiefs, Chief Kuku (Zack Amata), Chief Gadibia (Isaac Yongo), Chief Kokori (Emmanuel Okhakhu), and Chief Sam (James Luper Sokpo), see it as an opportunity to embezzle a greater chunk of the money. The situation gets out of control as the jobless, unemployed youths find solace in kidnapping oil workers. In the face of the incessant kidnapping, Ebiere, who had just returned to the village after her studies abroad, tries to mediate.

In one of the sequences that follow, there is celebration in the oil company camp; but the celebration is short-lived as the youths storm the company and take some of the workers (played by Dave Pavinski and Robert Sandler) hostage. The militants go to the extent of blowing up the critical oil installations. The MD of Western Oil, who was born in Nigeria, sees the need for peaceful negotiations. He requests the youths to lay down their arms and give peace a chance. But Ebiere, who had tried to mediate, finds out too late that she had been betrayed. In the shootout that ensues, several young men and some security operatives are killed. The villagers give the dead mass burial which further exacerbates the restiveness.

On the heels of the senseless killings, the Chiefs meet, where Chief Gadibia (Isaac Yongo) decides to return his share of the looted money back to the community because of guilty conscience. Unfortunately, he is found dead the next morning, a development that attracts reprisals from angry youths. Chief Gadibia's son, Peter (UC Ukeje), leads the protest to avenge the heartless killing of his father. The youths go after all the chiefs in the community: Chief Kokori (Emmanuel Okhakhu) confesses and he is arrested; while the Head Chief Kuku (Zack Amata), fails in his escape bid, as his car refuses to start. He finds himself locked inside the car, helplessly, as the angry youths set it on fire.

In the usual military crackdown, soldiers invade the community, maiming, raping, shooting and killing hapless villagers. For Pere Militan (Robert Peters), he watches helplessly, at gun point, as his wife is brutally raped by a randy soldier. Ebiere is arrested and put on trial for manslaughter; and she pleads guilty. In prison, she accepts liability for all the actions and inactions of the youths. Thus, while others are freed, she is sentenced to death by hanging. She is pregnant and delivers in prison.

The people are undaunted as they agitate for the unconditional release of Ebiere. On the day set for her execution, the people continue the protest, this time, carrying caskets; but she is still taken to the gallows. Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, California, USA, tensions are high. The militant group is ready to carry out the

threat of killing the hostages. The security operatives eventually use deception – a fake press release that Ebiere has been released. There is jubilation among the people and the militants, as they freely put down their weapons. They find out too late that it was all a decoy: Ebiere is executed, just as they are arrested to eventually face the full wrath of the law for attempting to overawe the system.

***Black November* and Contextualising Change in Nigeria's Leadership Question**

Having looked at the narrative structure of Jeta Amata's *Black November*, it is pertinent to highlight a few areas in the context of change in Nigeria's leadership question. The film vividly portrays the gross underdevelopment in the Niger Delta region. This is in spite of the fact that the region is the proverbial "goose that lays the golden egg". It shows the blinding effects of poverty; the people scoop fuel from burst pipelines in utter disregard of the imminent dangers. Ironically, such pipelines are sometimes intentionally vandalised by the youths from host communities in order for them to scoop the fuel. At the end of the day, they all perish from the gas explosion, as shown in the film. These are situations that could be averted if the oil multi-nationals respond quickly when there are reports of such spillages or burst pipelines. For instance, in the film, Mama Ebieren (Barbara Soky) accused Western Oil of not taking action when a complaint on the burst pipeline was lodged with them. The clean-up of Ogoni land from perennial oil spillages, which had been politicised, is a clear case in point. The question is: Must we wait until there is a tragedy before we take preventive measures? This is definitely a reflection of leadership failure, which needs redress.

Furthermore, every time there is any gas explosion, the oil company executives, the indigenous managers, and the local chiefs will be more interested in what financial gains accruing to them, especially when compensations are to be paid. In the film, the chiefs decide to share a greater percentage of the compensation paid for the gas explosion, to the detriment of the development of the community. To perfect their evil machinations, they also offer the company's community relations officer, Gideon White (Fred Amata), the same \$50,000 share of the money. When Chief Gadibia (Isaac Yongo) decided to return his share of the looted funds because he felt remorse over the blood spilt and the agitations by the youths, the other chiefs conspired and eliminated him. His murder propelled the youths to carry out jungle justice. This scenario is reflective of the events that led to the hanging of the "Ogoni Nine", including Ken Saro-Wiwa, which shook the Niger Delta and indeed the world, and changed the face of militancy in the region. Many oil producing communities are still experiencing the same

problems; and there is need to for the relevant authorities to ameliorate them so that the restiveness will not continue to affect the production or supply of oil and gas.

There is also the question of integrity on the part of leaders. When the actions of the restive youths went out of hand, the Management of Western Oil solicited for Ebieri's intervention. Seeing that she commanded the respect of the youths and that they could not bribe her, they pleaded with her to mediate. Unfortunately, they had ulterior motive, with the connivance of the relevant security operatives. While they wanted Dede (Hakeem Kae-Kazeem) and his boys to lay down their arms and agree to negotiate, the security operatives were fully armed, and were bent on exterminating the militants. Thus, Ebieri realised, too late, that she was the pawn on the socio-economic and political chessboard. This may explain why Tompolo refused to report for questioning by the Police, when he was declared wanted.

Black November reflects on some extraneous factors why some youths resort to militancy. Tamuno (Enyinna Nwigwe) was a loyal police officer, who led an operation to stop his people from carrying out a planned protest in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. In the line of duty, he had to live with the bitter experience of seeing his sister, Hosanna (Jane Unogwu) shot by a trigger-happy police officer. On the other hand, Pere Militan (Robert Peters) watched helplessly, at gun point, as his wife was mindlessly raped by one of the soldiers. For Peter Gadibia (UC Ukeje), his father, Chief Gadibia (Isaac Yongo) was murdered by the other chiefs in order to silence him, especially as he had wanted to return his share of the loot. He decided to embark on a vengeance mission to prevent future occurrences. Put succinctly, the bitter experiences in the film by the above persons, respectively, necessitated the extreme positions they took.

The film also reflects how militants always draw on the power of the mass media. According to renowned media theorist, Marshall McLuhan, *the world has become a global village*, due to the power of the media. Members of the United Front for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta People of Nigeria, led by Tamuno (Enyinna Nwigwe) realised that for their cause to receive global attention, they needed to carry out an action that should shake the world. They found their way to the United States of America, and perfected their plan to abduct the Managing Director of Western Oil, Tom Hudson (Mickey Rourke). In doing that, they ensured that a reporter from an international news agency was on hand to capture the whole scenario. Of course, with the use of modern technology, they communicated directly to the authorities concerned and expressed their demands. This underpins the view that the media makes the event.

One major ideology reiterated in the film is that an individual cannot overwhelm the American state. This is because of the strong institutions that have been put in place. No matter what happens in Hollywood films, America is always shown to be victorious (Ayakoroma, *Trends...* 32). In the face of the terrorist action where Hudson, other motorists and passersby were taken hostage, as well as the abduction of Hudson's daughter (Kristin Peterson), the security services maintained that the United States of America does not negotiate with terrorists. At the end of the day, a media decoy was used to secure the freedom of all the hostages, unhurt, including Hudson; while the militants, Tamuno, Pere and others, were arrested. In other words, the film seems to posit that, any militant action against the American state will always end in ignominy. The question is: can we say the same of the Nigerian state?

Black November is also a model in film production, which provides salient lessons for Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry. The scenes supposedly shot in Los Angeles, California, are exemplary. The roads, the vehicular movement, the response of the police to the terrorist action, the approach of the security operatives, the facilities in the control room, among other aesthetic elements, contrast sharply with what obtains in our local production approaches or film aesthetics. It is therefore a call for film directors to look beyond the surface and change their approaches to productions to meet the challenges of global best practices in film production.

Conclusion

In this study, it has been noted that change is dynamic, as it is ever occurring in any given circumstance. From independence, Nigeria, as a country, has been in search of credible leadership. No matter the personal, educational, psychological, economic, religious and cultural background of a leader, the constitution of his/her power base will always have determinate effect on the approach to leadership. This is because leadership entails using people well to achieve predetermined objectives. The contemporary Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, has become a veritable platform to interrogate the leadership question in Nigeria. Jeta Amata's *Black November* portrays a volatile community in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria ravaged by crude oil exploration and exploitation activities of a multi-national oil company. The people fight against the evil machinations of corrupt government and oil company officials that collude to impoverish them. The conclusion is that only transparency in the policy actions of leaders, at federal, state, local government and community levels of governance, will mitigate incessant youth restiveness in oil producing communities. Thus, the film

medium remains a viable option in managing change in Nigeria's perennial search for credible leadership; and Jeta Amata's *Black November* is a veritable contribution in that direction.

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Filmography

Amata, Jeta. *Black November*. Script: Jeta Amata. Cinematography: James Michael Costello, Tommy Maddox-Upshaw. Editors: Debbie Berman, Lindsay Kent, Adam Verney. Starring: Mbong Amata, Hakeem Kae-Kazeem, UC Ukeje, Fred Amata, Nse Ikpe Etim, Zack Amata, Mickey Rourke, Kim Basinger, Sarah Wayne Callies, Vivica A. Fox, Ann Heche, Persia White, Akon, Wyclef Jean. Producers: Bernard Alexander, Jeta Amata, Ori Ayomike, Marc Byers, Wilson Ebiye, Dede Mabiaku. Company: Wells & Jeta Entertainment. Year: 2012. Language: English. Duration: 95mins.