

**REPRESENTATION OF TERRORIST ATTACKS IN
NOLLYWOOD FILMS: AN ANALYSIS OF JETTA AMATA'S
*BLACK NOVEMBER***

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Abstract

Nollywood's dramatization of anarchy has come in scanty but different forms inspite of the near-impossible feat at actualizing large scale human and property destructions. This problem derives from funding constraints, accessibility to technical-know-how to execute precise representation of terrorist attacks in a magnitude befitting of national and global references. The study aims at making Nollywood present terrorism as a social menace that is not only a heinous crime but a bold move aimed at making a loud statement where several attempts at correcting obvious anomalies have failed to yield desired results. In most cases, the leadership composition of known terrorist organizations appeal to some quarters as folk heroes who have salvaged some communal crisis, while also pandering to a version of criminal desperado. Nollywood has enacted series of anarchy which in most cases endeared sympathizers who would stop at nothing to justify the rationale behind its glorification of anarchy over order. Nollywood films such as Jetta Amata's *Black November* highlight the intellectual basis for taking arms against a state. This paper therefore bases its argument on the idea that social circumstances which ignites the effrontery of criminal conspiracy to unleash terror on a sovereign nation derive from several factors such as anomalies not unassociated with political incompetence culminating in security breach triggered by social, economic, cultural, religious and political injustices. It concludes that some filmmakers base their production concept on exposing inherent insincerity of purpose by government and terror mongers with certain perceived anomalies thereby warranting violent insurrections.

Keywords: Nollywood, Terrorism, Anarchy, Productions, Social Justice.

Introduction

Post-election violence, it seems was the commonest of anarchy that rears its ugly heads in modern Nigeria. This supposes that there was a country

where at the news of natural disaster elsewhere, folks will lift up their hands and thank God that it was not affecting Nigeria. Acts of terror have become common place with incessant ethnic clashes and religious differences becoming more pronounced nowadays. The invasion of Benin Kingdom in 1897 and the subsequent amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates it seems are unashamedly terrorist in execution as this superimposition run contrary to the indigenous wishes of the natives. In the course of the Nigerian civil war, the Federal Government and its foreign allies perpetrated a terrorist hegemony over the seceding state of Biafra and truncated its vision of an Eastern-across the River Niger Free State. Many acts of anarchy have occurred in Nigeria and much more unfold on a daily basis yet every mechanism employed to checkmate acts of criminality and terror seem to yield little or no concrete results.

It seems that Socio-economic, religious and political factors influence anarchy in Nigeria. Culturally, ethnic crisis and land disputes have left many homeless in this country, but not in a most unsavory way as the socio-economic campaigns of MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta), which in its drive to address the injustice of resource control has mounted anti-state military bombardments of oil facilities. Not different in intent is the campaigns by the Niger Delta Avengers and other such groups. This in part has culminated in the Amnesty programme for Niger Delta Youths. In the name of Religion, families have been torn apart, supremacist ideologies hoisted by one religion over another and the chances at a better life, denied some people especially in some parts of the North. In the most notable acts of terror ever unleashed in Nigeria, the Boko Haram sect have sacked the North-Eastern states of Nigeria in its efforts to Islamize Predominantly Christian-populated areas in the North-East. Again, the economic joker card rears its head again as there are ample references suggesting that while the sect wishes to entrap the region in its religious abracadabra, there is no gainsaying that prospects of oil explorations in the Chad Basin is the prime factor influencing its jihadist exploits in the North-East of Nigeria. The political point to note in this state of anarchy is rooted in Government's inability to make life bearable for all. Means of survival in a modern state are totally unavailable and to make ends meet, a large chunk of jobless youths become ready tools in the hands of insincere politicians as thugs and in the process, become criminals who terrorize the state.

It is common knowledge that some politicians arm unemployed youths who they use to intimidate their opponents and disrupt free and fair elections. When the victory is won and the weapons are not retrieved, the youths become a serious threat to the wellbeing of the state. In some cases, the welfare of the citizenry is totally forfeited for personal aggrandizement leaving socially conscious youths with no options than to take arms against the state. There is some iota of truth that some ethnic jingoist are raising a secret army to unleash mayhem where land-grabbing campaigns have been mounted to dispose indigenous people of the Middle Belt of their ancestral homes. The farmers-herders' crisis which has decimated communities in the Middle Belt, a geo-political zone in the North Central blessed with lush vegetation does not betray any concealed sentiments. The confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers provide the most golden opportunities for nomadic exploits as villages are terrorized and claimed. Whether this comes as ethnic cleansing or not, political benefits and resource-control (Federal Allocation?) as the more local governments these land grabbers possess will inform how much democratic joker-cards they play with. On the religious angle, there is a distinctive barricade between Islam and Christianity and this immediately sign posts a dichotomy that when thoroughly examined from a religious and ethnic point of view sets each against the other. While a side cannot claim to be enforcing a genocidal campaign, the most intelligent means to actualize dispossession would be to raise a mercenary contingent totally unattached to the identifiable group to embark on a mission of wiping out any resistance towards actualizing a clandestine goal.

In the light of ongoing destruction of lives and properties in the Middle Belt, it seems that human lives have even become less valued against the life of a cow. These medieval precedents have exposed the stark reality of ethnic bigots who, in spite of apparent dots connecting them to the clannishness of Jihadist tendencies operate without conscious efforts by the security chiefs of Nigeria to apprehend them and bring them to justice. In cases where reprisal attacks were common, the security apparatus which is Pro-Destructively biased would rather swoop into actions and make arrests whereas, when communities brutally displaced are ransacked, no arrests are made. One only hopes that in the long run, a bloodied civil war which might consume all does not ensue. It is a known saying that one cannot continue to beat a child and expect him not to cry. And when the birds are come home to roost, there shall surely be retaliatory efforts in the manner in which cattle rustlers have been overtly taking a pound of flesh

over their stolen cows. Yet it baffles one to imagine why after series of attacks on indigenous people, the state government of all affected states have not deemed it fit to make concrete plans to enact laws by its state houses of assembly for state policing, drone networks and satellite patrols.

Nollywood Films and Representation of Terrorist Attacks

According to Ismaila “Every society at one point or the other has experienced not only violence at individual level but at intra and inter communal levels” (16). It still baffles the victims of terror attacks why they continue to experience the dastardly and wanton destruction of their lives and properties. People all over want a good life, to wake up every day and begin a new life, but this is hardly the case. While some are going about their daily lives, a disgruntled sect who profess a supremacist agenda, whether on a political, religious or ethnic basis, plan to unleash mayhem. Arguing further is the position by Ismaila that “In our present world, the oppressor and the oppressed, the ruler and ruled, the state and the masses and all manner of groups provide justifications for resorting to terror and violence” (26). The case of the Middle Belt is peculiar because, if the communities were properly policed and a herder’s cow that was stolen warranted arrest of the perpetrators, there would not be need for reprisals costing numerous lives and unnecessary destructions of properties. If criminal elements in a community are in the habit of smearing their ancestral homeland with acts of violence against strangers and they are not shielded by law enforcements, nomadic folks, whether of different or same tribes will not feel the need to retaliate. But the lines are blurry here as regards why religion and economic transactions have found an unholy alliance. What is happening in Nigeria does not fall short of terror, whether for economic, religious, political, ethnic or ideological purposes.

In the words of Jenkins:

Terrorism is often described as ‘mindless’ violence, ‘senseless’ violence, or ‘irrational’ violence. None of these adjectives is correct. Terrorism is ‘not’ mindless violence. There is a theory of terrorism, and it often works. To understand the theory, it must first be understood that terrorism is a means to an end, not an end itself; in other words, terrorism has objectives (3).

The assertion above clearly indicates that terrorist perpetuations are aimed not only at wreaking havocs but to achieve noble as well as selfish purposes as it may concern the perpetrators. Whether as an individual or a

group who seek to make statements politically, religiously, economically, or scientifically, there is always the need to use pressure to quicken their resolve, especially when the system is considered a hindrance to achieving the ‘unpopular’ demands as it concerns the socio-cultural and political wellbeing of all and sundry.

According to Weiman in his discussion of Media and Terrorism, he opines that “from its early days, terror has combined communicative and psychological aspects”. He went further by asserting that the word “terror” itself comes from the Latin word “terrer”, which means “to frighten” or “to scare”. Submitting that the first use of large scale terrorism was during the popular phase of the French Revolution which lasted around the period of June 1793 to July 1794 in France popularly known as the Reign of Terror or simply ‘The Terror’. The background of the upheaval, Weiman says followed the overthrow of the Monarchy which plunged the nation into chaos and the government found itself into frenzied paranoia. The era witnessed the executions of thousands by the Revolutionary Tribunal which aimed to instill fear (3).

Citing Laquer (104), Weiman asserts that modern terrorists have become exposed to new opportunities for exerting mass psychological impacts as a result of technological advances in communication technologies. He noted that media inspired terrorism have now replaced the public executions in Parisian squares with spectacular violent productions performed on the global stages for the mass media. In Nacos’ (8) view “getting the attention of the mass media, the public, and decision-makers is the *raison d’être* behind modern terrorism’s increasingly shocking violence”.

In the view of Jenkins (1) terrorism appears to have increased markedly in the past few years. Political extremists in various parts of the world have attacked passengers in airline terminals and rail road stations, planted bombs in government buildings, in the offices of multinational corporations, in pubs, in theatres, have hijacked airliners and ships and, recently...have held hundreds of passengers hostages, have seized embassies, and kidnapped government officials, diplomats, and more recently, business executives. Terrorism may not be synonymous with violence but it exudes violent operational systematics. This is because all terrorist attacks are violence inclined and aimed to cause untold pain and warrant a mind-changing status-quo especially with large scale decision making. As noted by Ismaila (1) “violence as a word covers a wide range

of activities from mere use of words to large scale terrorism...Violence has been studied from several perspectives ranging from: its impact on cinema and television, sociological study of effects, study of the psychological mechanisms involved, laboratory studies, economic perspective, and cultural studies”.

It is Jenkins’ (529) opinion that “Terrorist attacks are carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the International Press. Taking and holding hostages increases the drama. The hostages themselves often mean nothing to the terrorists. Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims. Terrorism is a theatre”. In view of the above Kerber (529) is of the opinion that “The terrorists’ message of violence necessitates a victim, whether personal or institutional, but the target or intended recipient of the communication may not be the victim”. These days, terrorist prefer the world stage—open-public opinion galvanized media compared to obscure sources of operations as maintained by Bell (89) when he said that “It has become more alluring for the frantic few to appear on the world stage of television than remain obscure guerillas of the mass-mediated terrorism in terms of effectively reaching huge audience than with the nature of dastardly destructions that will result from their operations (Weiman 3).

According to Weiman:

From the ‘Theatre of Terror’ perspective, the September 11 attack on America was a perfectly choreographed production aimed at American and International audiences. Although the theatre metaphor remains instructive, it has given way to tension as a global television spectacular with ‘Live’ breaking news, watched by International audiences, and transcends by far the boundaries of theatrical events (6).

Going further, Weiman asserts that in the past, most-if not all acts of terrorism resulted in a great deal of publicity in the form of news reporting, but the September 11th attack introduced a new level of mass mediated terrorism because of the choices the planners made with respect to method, target, timing and scope (6). Describing the targets chosen for September 11th, for example as symbol of American wealth, power and heritage, Dobson and Paine (5) capture the anecdote of one of Black Septembers’ response after the terror attack by Palestinian terrorist of the Munich Olympics 1972 saying that:

We recognized that sport is the modern religion of the Western world. We knew that the people in England and America would switch their television sets from any programme about the plight of the Palestinians if there was a sports event on another channel. So we decided to use their Olympic, the most sacred ceremony of this religion, to make the world pay attention to us. We offered up human sacrifices to your gods of sports and television. And they answered our prayers. From Munich onwards, nobody could ignore the Palestinians or their course. (n.p)

Jenkins opines that ‘some governments are prone to label as “terrorism” all violent acts by their opponents. Rebels rarely call themselves terrorists, but frequently claim to be the victims of government terror. In short, the definition of terrorism seems to depend on point of view-it is what the ‘bad guys’ do”. By this definition, Jenkins assert that Terrorists recognize far fewer immune civilians. Terrorists may regard a person as an enemy, and therefore a target, solely on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, or religion. Or one can become a target by mere happenstance-by watching a movie in a theatre when a bomb goes off, or by passing through an airport waiting room when passengers are machine-gunned (2).

Whilst discussing ‘terrorism and the role of the media’, Spencer submits that it has become widely accepted that there is an almost symbolic relationship between terrorism and the media as terrorism provides for exciting and violent stories which help sell the news product and the media provides terrorist groups with a means of spreading their message and creating fear among the general public (5). The hashtag **#Breaking News** which most media stations headline causes in some quarters a predisposition for the bizarre and stomach churning Armageddon of bad news and violent occurrences. The mainstream media is not the only sources where the propagation of bad news is evident. There is the use of social media to perpetrate bullying and acts of violent insurrections as Weiman (2014:3) posits that:

Terrorists have good reasons to use social media. First, these channels are by far the most popular with their intended audience, which allows terrorists organizations to be part of the mainstream. Second, social media channels are user-friendly, reliable and free. Finally, social networking allows terrorists to reach out to their target audiences and virtually ‘knocks on their doors’-in contrasts to older models of websites in which terrorists had to wait for visitors to come to them.

In her attempt to juxtapose the relationship between a planned theatrical outing and its similarities with a terrorist attack which takes much time to plan, Silva holds the view that Marvel's 2012 summer blockbuster *The Avengers* describes in simplicity the way that terror and performance are related. Iron Man (Toni Stark) and Captain America discuss Loki, legendary bad guy, demi-god, and brother of Thor's plan to defeat them (1). Further on, it is Silva's assertion that 'Loki's strategy to capture earth and force human kind to bend to his will' compares with a planned attack in the form of 9/11 wherein the location of the attack was the world trade centre (Stark Tower) with its new sky scrapper and clean energy beacon situated downtown. She opines that 'from images of New York City's destruction, flying spaceships knocking into buildings, temporary memorials for the lost and dead, and an imminent 'foreign' threat thereby making *The Avengers* just one of many adventure films that drama out post 9/11 anxieties of attack and terror in the crowded NYC (1).

Corroborating the above point is Beall when she said that:

The collapse of New York's Twin Towers on 11th September 2001 dramatically demonstrated the susceptibility of cities to terrorist attacks. Two and a half years later, on the 11th March 2004, bombs were detonated on packed commuter trains in Madrid, killing 191 and injuring over 1,500 people, extending an amplified sense of urban vulnerability to cities in Europe. This was reinforced by the London's bombings in July 2005, which again targeted ordinary city dwellers going about their daily lives (1).

In the light of the above, it comes to the understanding that violence is sometime borne out of the desire of man to control, exploit and infringe on the freedom of one another (Ismaila 15).

Terrorist Aparatus Deployed in *Black November*

Black November does not conceal its hatred of capitalism and the powers which undermine our collective and individual destinies as the Federal Military Government and Western Oil collaborate to make life unbearable for the Niger Deltans in this Nollywood production. The film which is but an innuendo for the foreign corporations exploring crude oil in the Niger Delta, interrogates the rationale behind constant exploitation of the Niger Delta folks by its government and capitalist interest. It is noteworthy that the brutality perpetuated in the movie is only but a signature of the military junta which undermined human rights. Ebiere, who is a beneficiary of the scholarship of Western Oil dies a martyr for the inspiration which served

as basis for the numerous support/protests aimed at facilitating a better Niger Delta region.

The provocations emanating from the peoples' resistance of Western Oil's encroachment on the peoples' environmental wellbeing and the Government's nonchalance soon gives birth to a radical group that seeks to wreak havoc on the economic life line of the Nigerian State. Such burning issues of a socio-economic, political and cultural concern which made it to centre stage is given birth to as an aftermath of Ebiere Perema's harassment and disillusionment as we come to appreciate her individual efforts and how this inspired a radical group. The activities of Western Oil which resulted in oil spillage and incessant pipe line explosions resulting in deaths, trigger assemblage of the mammoth crowd at the facility of Western Oil. Instead of dialoging with the indigenes, the corporation uses force and backdoor 'tactics' to pacify the people as it hands money to some insincere elders who did not commit the funds to a better course.irate youths soon take the laws into their hands leading to arson and revolts. From this point, when the authorities vehemently forbid further protests and shoot at unarmed citizens, a splinter faction of the law-abiding folks became radicalized.

The Los Angeles terror alert scene, the SWAT team, News Team and the Soldiers comes as no surprise after numerous attempts to rally support for the welfare of the Niger Deltans. The opening scene at Los Angeles, in candid opinion looks like a Hollywood Action film, and this is made possible by budgetary considerations. The assemblage of the actors, the props-cars, trucks, and use of space, in this case, the tunnel gives the movie a critical attention score as we return to the Niger Delta. This first impression leaves us anxious and desperate to see how the explosives on the tankers will detonate. America does not negotiate with terrorists yes, but in what was clearly a terrorist attack, the world media was given insight into the fate of a girl (Ebiere Perema) whose campaigns for environmental preservation was met with Authoritarian and Capitalist force. The circumstances under which the Niger Delta militants gained access into America's border meant that the matter was deserving of global intervention. *Black November* clearly demonstrates that terrorism may not be solely aimed at destructive acts but to achieve a noble course. There may be casualties along the way, but as in this film, the militants became reactionary only after they were treated brutally by Government forces that were hell bent on disorienting them rather than proffer solutions to the cause for which they fought.

In the initial days of the struggle, the youths began only to take arms and captives for ransoms after all mediation reached a dead end as the government agents who wanted them to lay down their arms came only to wipe them out. It was at this point it became clear to them that the government cared more about the proceeds of the oil exploration and destroy everything standing on its way rather than concede any 'People' mandate. Serious attacks on the state became pronounced as an indigenes Officer watched his people brutalized but was powerless to retaliate. It was the indigenes Officer who brought a wealth of military tactics to bear on the operations of the amateur Niger Delta militants. Their ultimate goal was not to sabotage economic activities but that, Ebere Perema must not be hanged which was the premise of their planned attack on US soil. Western Oil being a US company made the choice of the attack on America; to drive home the point that America's economic interest which undermines the wellbeing of indigenes Niger Delta people was against the good interest of Nigerian populace.

The prominence of the USA, which is arguably the World's political and economic hub can, by its International Relations and Diplomatic might; influence the Nigerian Government to reverse the death penalty upon a daughter of the Niger Delta, thus the socio-economic and political need to exploit this avenue. For this reason, the production of *Black November* gives the opening scenes a viable reference detailing the rationale for the American attack.

Terrorism and Media have a symbiotic relationship as we see in the case of the deceit which was pulled by the ANN boss. Tension rises and fall when ANN's boss saves America the embarrassment of a Terror attack by amateur Niger Delta Militants seeing that Hudson could not reach the Nigerian President to undo Ebere's capital punishment, calls one of the low-IQ militant, who excitedly announces that Ebere Perema's sentence has been abrogated. There is however some lessons to be learnt in this portrayal of sheer zeal and hunger for the emancipation of the oil rich Delta from capitalist and corrupt government strangle-hold. Ebere's heroism and the resolve of the militants to repel injustice deserve some commendation as Western Oil and the Government are not to be trusted to renege on their words. *Black November* makes a simple statement, that in the light of oppressive regimes, the masses can only save themselves by engaging in team work as we see the strength and evolution with which the youths coordinated themselves and went deep in the creek. In the

course of time, the boys, following cash piled up over time from ransoms became emboldened to stockpile arms with which they 'went to war' as attacks upon attacks became a common news item. The film indicates by its climactic plot, that it sets out to notify the world of Nigeria's human rights abuse and environmental degradations using a resistant *modus operandi* as Governments and her capitalist interests does not understand the word-*dialogue*.

Conclusion

The study reveals that the template of most Nigerian films churned out fortnightly, lack attendant propaganda details and inherent power to tackle life challenging subjects. Given the critical issues espoused in *Black November* it is imperative to note how recent Nollywood films have taken the initiative by exploring core-communal and people oriented subjects on a monumental scale. At present, more indigenous movies have been screened at the cinemas with landmark and record breaking box office returns partially based on key concepts therein treated. The scope of their explored subject matter transcends the shenanigans of two village rats and the idea of a dirty girl called Dumebi should be the subject of a film. Issues of national and global importance are having centre stage in New Nollywood films which hitherto were deliberately ignored. This brings to the fore that New Nollywood films are addressing issues previously considered hard nuts to crack over funding constraints.

The subject of terrorism as it stands poses a threat to the continued existence of the various peoples of Nigeria as a sovereign nation. When one considers the religious and ethnic difference which abound in Nigeria, issues such as the idea of marauding Fulani-Herdsmen and Farmers' clash look like subjects to steer clear lest one is labelled an enemy of the North. Yet it does not cease to baffle the masses how Government's apathy and indecisions helps to fuel the crisis at the expense of helpless indigenes of the Middle Belt. This brings us to the immediate failure of state governments at nipping terror in the bud in their various states. For example, there is nothing stopping a state government at legislating a law via its houses of assemblies to have an autonomous local police as the Federal body have proven largely incompetent. Here, the security votes of affected states can go a long way, if sincerely deployed, to address the nature of internal security of lives and properties. Despite the series of attacks on indigenous people, especially in Southern Kaduna, Plateau-Jos, Benue, Nasarawa and villages where land-grabbing bandits seek to

displace and possess their lands and ancestral homes. It follows that if Nollywood were to proffer solutions, a well-conceived idea to be executed cinematically should involve a pilot state which rejects the Federal Government's *Cattle Colony* but invests heavily in its own Agricultural Crop and Animal Husbandries using European models of Cattle Ranches owned by indigenous people. This will greatly discourage the need for nomadic pastoralists from settling in peoples' farm lands where over time, they begin to lay claims to peoples' land.

A look at the so much talk about the attackers coming to kill and burn villages at night, a model film can be produced in which the state government allocates budgets in collaborations with her indigenes overseas as well as town unions to fund a functional satellite in the state's airspace for monitoring of any group of terrorists. To actualize this, all armed forces in the state will have their arms registered; all owners of licensed fire arms will have their weapons catalogued so that any foreign arms can be tracked at all open/closed state borders. While machine-gunning people may not be the only method of genocidal campaigns used by these killers, the use of drones and satellite to monitor movements of people in most vulnerable places will assuage the pains which come with the heartless killings. What should be done would be to have every security post manned with enough man power and assault rifles, and while monitoring unverified movements of suspected bandits, alert a post of incoming movements so that unscrupulous elements are checked. In the light of the above, Nollywood films which propagate a secured family and nation in the case of overwhelming security breaches and loss of lives and property should be scholarly sanctioned. Times there are when taking up arms against the state looks like the best thing to do but in the long run, the demerits unleash more damages. Here, it is advised that Nollywood films should not only espouse the mundane but philosophically vibrant ideologies aimed at nation building, economic prosperity and a political vision capable of inspiring us to actualize a better society. Films should be used as a medium to speak truth and discourage injustice, not minding whether the proposition of supremacist agendas threaten our individual position, but the collective good.

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