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The Moving Image as a Panacea for Concise Analysis and Means of Ensuring Good Governance and Ameliorating Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

Ikiroma-Owiye, Jariel Somieari

Department of Theatre and Film Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of Port Harcourt

Email: somieari.ikiroma-owiye@uniport.edu.ng, iraeimos@yahoo.com

Mobile Phone: +2348037083099

Abstract

The world is plagued with plethora of social issues generated from the complexity of modern existence. The control of sources of raw materials, exploitation, production, and trade has polarised our world. This paper looked at the Niger Delta situation from an audio-visual angle as reflected in the film 'Krakraye' by Gentle Jack. The Niger Delta region and her people have been neglected in terms of developmental needs in the Nigerian state, hence, the youths resort to self-identification and resource control which is the problem being stated. The aim of this paper is to present this issue bare in an audio-visual manner. The objectives are to concisely chronicle the real situation from the emergence of the military in the Nigerian scene to the present. Theoretical framework was the analytical approach to cultural studies, while the research methodology would entail the qualitative approach enmeshed with visual impressions, still photographs from the film 'Krakraye', and from other graphic and audio-visual sources. Findings of this study show that it is deliberate to underdevelop the Niger Delta region, keep the people poor so they will be loyal and could easily be overcome by the majority tribes, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo who have never spoken against injustice meted to the Niger Delta communities. Contributions to knowledge is that visual presentation has shown the true plight of the Niger Delta people in visual images. Recommendations are that a naturally endowed, rich industrial environment should not be neglected for peace and development to thrive; stealing of the people's commonwealth brings about capital flight as those in government are afraid to show their wealth in Nigeria rather, they launder and invest these monies abroad. This paper critically assessed the reach of film in exposing social anomaly as the case of the Niger Delta people, allegorically.

Key Words: Film, Niger Delta, youth, democracy, development

Introduction

The true nature of film is succinctly put by Kokler (2006) thus: “there is a curious cliché that says pictures don’t lie.” part of that cliché that says seeing is believing.” The Niger Delta issue can only be verified by a filmic approach. Before the emergence of militancy, the Niger Delta was calm, cool and nature oriented. It gradually became volatile because of the insensitivity of government as a result of maladministration, and abject neglect of the oil producing Niger Delta area of Nigeria. This phenomenon has been on-going for over fifty years with the oil companies prospecting and producing oil for commercial purposes, but with very little to show on the part of the exploited producing areas in terms of infrastructural development. Consequently, this has prompted the youths to agitate for resource control in 1999, which was later hijacked by politicians. Hence, certain negative adjectives such as lazy, militants, kidnapers, oil thieves, etc. are today used to describe youths from the Niger Delta. Thus, the need to use this film as a practical guide to encourage an ethnographic research as a means of laying bare the true picture of the situation, to interpret and showcase the real relationship between oil companies and their host communities. The true condition of things cannot be ascertained without an audio-visual representation of the real nature of things. Thus, this paper will analyse this situation using graphic representation from the film ‘Krakraye’ directed by Gentle Jack to examine the real situation of things in the environment.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to show that the audio-visual means is the best way to show the disparity and neglect of any society especially the oil producing Niger Delta area of Nigeria in terms of development. Feature films are sometimes presented to depict or reveal the true nature of things in the society as it will help find a lasting solution to issue of neglect in terms of infrastructural development, youth restiveness, pipeline vandalism, and agitation for self-determination in the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, necessitated by lack of basic necessities of life like water, road, light, health care, etc.

The analysis arising from this paper will reveal the true nature of things to people in the outer world because of the film’s nature of sometimes capturing everyday events, real people and real situations. Re-enacting them as they would occur in real life in relation to the given circumstances will help alleviate the anomaly of oppression, subjugation, marginalization, frustration of the Niger Delta youths. The issue of pipeline vandalism and company/community clash is new to the Niger Delta environment. They are as a result of injustice meted out to the producing communities prospecting the poor living conditions of the people in host communities and producing areas. All that is required to douse the tension would have been the provision of basic infrastructure that can stand the test of time such as pipe borne water, electricity, roads, health care centres, good transport systems to rural communities of the Niger Delta.

Film

Since its introduction in the early 20th Century as a means of recording real events, it has helped man to reflect on social happenings in his environment. It has been used to influence the psychology of individuals and society in diverse realms of cultural life. This influence, according to Shehu, Krushev recognised when he stated in his address to the Soviet people that:

Our party regards the soviet cinema as one of the most important artistic vehicles for educating our people in the spirit of communism. There is

nothing to compare with the cinema in its power to impact on human minds” (as cited in Igoil& Yakubu, p. 178).

The point is that everything we do is mediated, and everything we see is some kind of representation. We choose how close to reality ... which is itself something built upon complex, often unconscious, but always learned agreements we have made with culture... an image might be” (p.14).

In furtherance of this view, Bordwell and Thompson (2004) has this to say regarding the way filmmakers present their argument: “some filmmakers will present their basic argument first, and then go on to show the evidence and the problems and how they would be addressed by the solutions argued in the film” (p. 142). This is exactly the approach adopted by Jack in his film “Krakraye” (The Truth) in exposing the abject neglect of the Niger Delta people in Nigeria in terms of provision of basic necessities of life.

Niger Delta

The Niger Delta is the distributary creeks that empty water into the ocean from the Nigerian land space into the Atlantic Ocean. It is like the fibrous roots of the Palm tree. It is blessed with natural resources especially crude oil and gas. The people of the Niger Delta region participated in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and later palm oil trade with Europeans before amalgamation and colonialism when they were forcefully submerged in the Nigerian state by the colonial masters. Oil exploration, exploitation and exportation has been on-going in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria for over 50 years. Prior to the establishment of the oil industry as a major source of revenue earning in Nigeria, there were groundnut, cocoa, hides and skin, tin, cobalt, coal, palm oil and its associated products, etc. but through all the years of earnings from these products, revenue accruing from them have not been distributed among the various states evenly. Again, never had high level of violence been associated with any producing area as experienced in the Niger Delta region in the last 15 years. This is as a result of mismanagement and miss-appropriation of oil resources and revenue by the ruling class in Nigeria.

To start with, one is bound to ask the following questions: Why is the Niger Delta engulfed in crisis related to oil? Why are there so many gaps in infrastructural development between the oil producing areas and other parts of the country? Why is there poverty written on the faces of the Niger Delta people? In answering these questions in the course of this paper, the film ‘Krakraye’ will be referenced to analyse the appropriate manner lasting solution will be arrived at, to address this hydra headed crisis in the mineral producing Niger Delta of Nigeria.

Synopsis of ‘Krakraye’

Opening, the film ‘Krakraye’ shows youth restiveness resulting from oil company’s manipulation of the Niger Delta space. It shows a long shot of some youths gyrating in the water ways with a speed boat theatre. The camera gets to a close up and cuts to a long shot of people going to board a boat to one of the riverine communities. Amongst them is Kio, who just graduated from the university with a first class from one of the Nigerian universities. Then, the camera fades to reveal some tough youths quarrelling over their inability to make a catch after toiling in the creeks for hours looking for fish.

Igonikon: with what are we going to train our children in school?

Ebi: Igonikon, sometimes you make me wonder if you actually understand the enormity of our predicament at all.

Ogolo: Ebi how do you mean?

Igonikon: please ask him!

Ebi: we have been traversing the seas and waters of Toru-Ama without a single catch, yet Igonikon is talking about sending children to school... is it not the man that has fed well, and has provided for his family that will think of sending his children to school?

Igonikon: so is that all I did wrong that made you imply that ...

Ebi: point of correction, I wasn't implying. I said that you have a way of sounding stupid when serious issues are on ground.

Ogolo: I.G. each time we fight amongst ourselves, we justify our oppressors for dividing us. Ebi is not the oil companies that poisoned the waters, killing the fishes and denying us some means of livelihood.

Kio: papa am through and back

Chief Iju: Kio!

Kio: de papa

Chief Iju: at last, a cup of cold water down my parched throat. At last, there's light over my dark way. At last I chief Iju is expectant of a bountiful harvest! Why should I not dance?

Kio: where is mama?

Chief Iju: your mother has gone in search of water.

Kio: in search of water yet we live in water itself.

Chief Iju: oil spillage has become an epidemic. It will one day force us out of the lands of our fathers or we shall all be submerged in it trying to make a living.

Middle men and community chief; these categories of people represent the community in the company to empower themselves and their family. Chief Pelebo Douglas is of this type.

Chief Benebo: is it that they have received the petition or they are simply ignoring us?

Chief Tonye: they dare not ignore us. They know the implication of such an irrational decision.

Chief Dumo they will reply us favourable, in fact soon.

Chief Tonye: how did you know that?

Chief Dumo: I have information from a very reliable source that they have already gone around to assess the extent of damage caused by the spillage with a view to determining the amount of compensation due to us, the affected community.

Chief Dumo is the spokesman of the community and mediator between company and community. Whatsoever project the company wants to execute, he will divert the project in collaboration with some company officials and execute a substandard work. If scholarship is given, it will be shared between him, his friends and family members and he sells the rest to non-indigenes of the community.

Chief Tonye: I smell trouble. Those boys are up to something.

Chief Dumo: chief Iju... chief Iju is behind this, but I will teach him a lesson or two.

Chief Dumo: You will go round. Meet Chief Benebo, Palebo Douglas, Graham and all those who shared the money. We need to raise money to settle the youths immediately, so they will have to part with a hundred thousand naira each from their share.

The film 'Krakraye' is about the plight of the Niger Delta youth and factors that led to the declaration of Amnesty by President Umaru Musa Yar'dua. The play begins with Ebi going fishing and coming back without no catch. The scene changes to Ebi telling his mother he has been invited for an interview in Lagos, she runs around and raises money for his transport. He goes to Lagos and returns without finding a job, he joins the village youths' gangsters and tells his mother he has found a job for himself at home. Joining the youths to kidnap pipeline workers and demanding for ransom which in a guise was classified as resource control. Their activities get to a point where companies start leaving the Niger Delta region. We see chief Duma and his click representing the chiefs and elders of the community who connive with company workers to deny the people the basic necessities of life.

King Dateme: Chief Dumo, we have no time to waste. Our people are suffering. I expect you as CDC chairman to be proactive.

Chief Dumo: Your highness, the CDC is working. I said let me come and see you before I'm accused of by-passing your authority.

King Dateme: whatever your committee is doing, let it do fast. No water to drink, no fishes in the river, crops are all withered ... Chief Dumo this is pandemic.

Chief Dumo: your highness we have done them a letter of complaint.

King Dateme you know the particular company responsible for the spillage?

Chief Dumo: Cross Atlantic oil Nigeria limited.

King Dateme: good let them come and clear the mess.

The youths get information of monies paid to the community elders that they have shared and plan to kidnap the company agents bringing the money of which they succeed in kidnaping them. The government in order to create harmony for society to function appeal to them to drop their arms and be incorporated back to society and they accept amnesty from government as they are recognised and given prime positions.

Youth Unemployment

We see the young promising Kio, who just graduated from the university with a first class after serving in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) for one year was invited for an interview in Lagos. The mother sells her wrapper to secure transport for him to attend this interview in Lagos. Despite coming first in the interview could not secure the job because of his place of origin. He comes home frustrated. Prior to this time, the whole community had heard of his sojourn to Lagos and are awaiting his triumphant return. This annoys the youths which brings up the comments: "they said we are not educated but even when we are educated, we can't get the job what else do they want us to do? When we agitate, they say we are restless, when we bunker, they say we are pipeline vandals or oil thieves."

Ebi, addressing the youths says:

I was a student union activist, a 300-level sociology undergraduate. My only offence was to lead a demonstration and the authorities labelled me a cultist and rusticated me from the university.

They are going to try to discourage you. They are going to try to break our ranks. They will leave issues and begin to discuss persons, but I urge you to remain focused on the struggle because it has always been the fashion of the society to pursue the messenger instead of facing the message.

He continues;

Our brothers who led the struggle before us, Isaiah Bakaboro and Kentule Wawa, in their time were labelled terrorists, sectional bigots and enemies of the state until the system ultimately emasculated them, but has that stopped the struggle?

The oil is here but the wells belong to someone elsewhere (northerners). Not only owning the oil wells, the revenue accruing from oil is what is used to run the country in a lopsided manner. Prior to the discovery of oil, the revenue allocation formula of the country was based on the 1963 Republican Constitution. But with the aftermath of the Biafra Civil War, the Nigerian government adopted 0% revenue allocation formulae for oil producing areas. Not until 20 years after in the era of Ibrahim Babangida that 1% was allocated to oil mineral producing areas. Then the killing of Ken SaroWiwa by the Nigerian government opened the eyes of the Abacha led junta to increase oil revenue to producing areas to 13%.

Democracy

Currently, almost all the oil blocks are owned by Hausa/Fulani and their Yoruba collaborators. People from the Niger Delta own two descriptive oil wells: Dan Elette etc. whose well had been taken over by Obasanjo and O.B. Lulu Briggs whose well is functional. The affected communities do not see themselves as being a part of the Nigerian nation as they are denied the basic necessities of life earmarked by the federal government in terms of infrastructural development. There is no federal presence in most parts of the Niger Delta. Companies operating in the Niger Delta do not build permanent structures; they rather use house boats and makeshift structures because if they build permanent structures, the communities will benefit.

Youth Restiveness

The youths now organise themselves into groups to address these problems themselves. These results in their confronting the chiefs and seizing monies meant for their part payment and kidnapping company workers. Sometimes the companies and chiefs pitch the youths one against the other and it results in many deaths.

The film reveals the injustice meted to oil producing communities in Nigeria. Imagine a Niger Delta youth with a first-class degree in Engineering going for a job interview in faraway Lagos, being unable to pay even his transport fare to Lagos.

Lekan: with a first-class degree and an indigene from an oil producing community, you don't need even need to take this test with us.

Kio: (laughs) you think so?

Lekan: of course! You are as good as having a job.

Despite Lekan's belief, he comes home frustrated. He sees wealth all around him, but still lives in a community without potable drinking water, without electricity, no schools, no job, and with the waterways even polluted. This means that even the traditional occupation of the people cannot be a source of livelihood for them.

Development

The youths now see agitation for self-determination as a right of any oppressed people world over. This brings about the Kaiama Declaration of 1999 where the youths started the agitation for resource control which was hijacked by politicians, and heightened political thugs and extra judicial killings leading to the deaths of Marshall Harry and A. K. Didkibo. The coming of Yar'dua's government brings about amnesty for repentant militants which later became a milk cow of only PDP members as the communities did not benefit from the dividends of democracy in the Niger Delta but only militant leaders and their political masters embezzled the monies meant for the development of the Niger Delta.

Development is not selective but communally based, but in the case of the Niger Delta, it was selective and politically based as the Kinsley Kuku led Amnesty Board who gave scholarships to only militants and PDP political thugs under Yar'dua and when President Goodluck Jonathan came, it was still the same thing as no community benefited from the democratic dividends except well-connected individuals. Azikiwe asserted that,

The colonial situation in Africa, by its denial of political, economic, and cultural freedoms negated human dignity. The liberation of the African politically, culturally, economically and mentally was the only way of restoring the dignity of man to the continent (as cited in Rodney, p. 60).

For the people of the Niger Delta, the oil exploration in their land has led to environmental denigration, hence, they need a better share accrued oil revenue and government presence in terms of infrastructural development. In terms of development and developing Africa, Senghor is convinced that in negritude, Africans can achieve a synthesis between what one may style world culture and African culture. The concept of negritude is

appalled by the civilization which has produced colonialism, poverty, misery and environmental pollution, it regards the values of such civilization as essentially false. What is needed is the new Africa standing on the threshold of modernity is not the importation of such false sterile values but the rediscovery and adaptation of traditional African norms (as cited in Rodney, 1972, p. 62).

Thus, the Amnesty programme is seen as not being a genuine development programme for the Niger Deltas but a diversionary antic by the PDP led government to empower their supporters to the detriment of the communities. The NDDC also was bipartisan in its award of contracts and siting of projects. Contracts awarded were mainly to militants and PDP members. Let us look at the excerpts below:

King Dateme: to start with, I want to express my disappointment with the oil company for not responding quick enough. I don't know if you people sometimes forget that everything about the life of people revolves around the creeks, rivers and the sea water... when the activities of your company pollute the rivers, my people cannot fish, cannot get water to drink, even those involved in subsistent farming lose their crops.

Badejo: I understand your grievance your highness, but I would like to state clearly that nothing was taken for granted, rather we were only observing certain procedures that would ensure that community gets the best... your highness I will beg to take my leave, but before then. I have here the sum of 10 million naira... it represents 50% of the total sum which my company intends as compensation for your community for the damage caused by the recent spillage.

Chief Iju: your highness, chiefs of Toru-Ama, I cannot think of a more damming insult than this one that the oil company has slammed on our faces.

King Dateme: Chief Iju why do you say that?

Chief Iju: your highness what we expect the company is to come and clean the mess they created not to insult us with these peanuts.

Chief Tonye: did Mr. Badejo say exactly when they will be bringing the balance of 50%?

Chief Dumo: sometimes I think if you are with me in this business.

Chief Tonye: what do you mean by that?

Chief Dumo: the question has never been when they are paying the balance 50%, but where they are bringing it.

Chief Tonye: you will agree with me that I have done one glass to many.

Chief Dumo: I've been trying to convince him to bring the money to my house as chairman of the CDC so I can in turn pass it over to the elder's council, but the greedy man is asking for 40% if he must do that.

Chief Dumo: this is two hundred and fifty thousand naira. We want you to take this information and spread it amongst the boys. if possible, break their ranks

Chief Dumo: I know you don't know that chief Iju was on the pay roll of both the oil companies and the CDC.

Chief Tonye: off course that was how he was able to train Kio through the university

Chief Dumo: now that the CDC says your son has graduated, it is the turn of another family to begin to enjoy that benefit; chief Iju refused and instead, sent his son to mobilize other youths of the community against us. Is it fair?

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study show that youth restiveness in the Niger Delta was a deliberate attempt by the PDP led government to create restiveness through her cronies to deny the people the basic necessities of life in terms of infrastructural development. Militancy in the Niger Delta was government sponsored, so, the politicians will deliberately deny the people the basic necessities of life, citing restiveness.

The militant youths also served as political thugs between 1999, 2003 till date. At the aftermath of the 2003 elections, the politicians were no longer comfortable with the hydra headed demons they created and wanted to eliminate them by setting them up one against another which led to the war between Alhaji Asari's camp and the Ateke Tom's camp in Port Harcourt and people started fleeing Port Harcourt. President Obasanjo had to call the warring

parties to Abuja and a deal was struck as they confessed of being PDP members, they were to return arms for money.

So many young men lost their lives through these killings, beheadings, sale of human parts as businesses emanating are cult related and the resurging Ogboni cult activities in the state. The government agents were not apprehended as they paid their ways through the security agencies. Kidnapping and armed robbery now became the order of the day. Politics became a do or die affair as opposition parties were intimidated and coerced out of contention. One party won all elective seats. Professor Gerry Gana's team came and gave accolades to the rivers state government as the best performing government in Nigeria. They saw nothing wrong in the brewing malady of self-destruction being incubated from Rivers State to truncate our hard-earned democracy. Now the bug has infested the North West as Boko Haram and the middle belt as Herdsmen farmer's debacle to deny the ordinary people the dividends of democracy. Government hinges restiveness as the reason for non-service delivery. This is a colonial construct of divide and rule; to this, Walter Rodney (1972) opined, "African development is possible only on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system, which has been the principal agency of underdevelopment of Africa over the last five centuries" (p. viii).

Recommendations

In any democratic governance, the people's voice must be heard at every level of the polity or democratic space, be it at the local, state or federal level. Internal democracy in political parties is the key to democratic sustenance, hence, there should be transparency in inter and intra party politics. Nigeria as a country got it right in 1993 but western interest truncated the process because they did not believe Nigeria could develop a high standard democratic formula in Option A4. Then, they introduced this open secret system through Abacha's coming to power which is still operational today. Governance cannot succeed from up down but from down up. People should identify with their wards to come to political prominence but in this case of upside-down politics, one needs to know somebody at the centre to be recognised as a candidate. This process has put the people outside the political process as their votes do not count, and restiveness is used as guise to deny the people basic amenities as those in governance usurp the allocated resources as security vote in the name of fighting crime and restiveness by buying ammunition for the army, navy and air force as experienced in Rivers State from 1999 till date. For the people of the Niger Delta to outgrow injustice, they must take what western imperialism classifies as; "The Cuban threat was ... the spread of Castro idea taking matters into one's own hands," might stimulate the "poor underprivileged "elsewhere, who are now demanding opportunities for a decent living" (Chomsky 2005, p. 2) .

Conclusion

Modern technology has limited time and space in a sense that whatever is happening anywhere in the World can be seen by all. The audio-visual technology has created room from sensing the truth on the run, hence, the real situation between oil producing companies, community and environment need not be a mirage any longer. The film 'Krakraye' is a microcosm of the plight of the Niger Delta youths. Multi-national corporations are above the law; international standards are not operational in the Niger Delta what we have is, according to Chomsky, "Corporations have been granted rights that go far beyond those of persons. Under the world trade organization rules, corporations can demand what's called the right of

‘national’ treatment.” (Chomsky, 2005, p. 209). He further asserted that, “Other rules require that the rights of investors, lenders and speculators must prevail over the rights of mere flesh –and- blood persons. A Nigerian can’t come to America and demand national treatment but cooperation can” (Chomsky 2005, p. 210). Cooperation can come to Nigeria and its primary interests will be protected to the detriment of the indigenes of the environment, which is highlighted by the governor’s words, thus, as representing the state:

it is unfortunate that none of them took advantage of our peace initiative. We are therefore left with no other option than to smoke them out of their hiding places, because we will not abdicate the business of maintaining law and order to criminals.

It was a bold step that President Umaru Yar’dua to created relative peace through Amnesty programme but government after him mismanaged that. Instead of creating developmental structures in the Niger Delta, they were busy paying amnesty for six years. The amount of money spent in paying amnesty could develop the Niger Delta.

We have seen film and the media generally as agents that could make bare the truth to the people by highlighting government deficiencies in providing democratic dividends to the people. The Nigerian film industry has witnessed significant growth; thus, this is the time when film should be used basically for the interest of the people in terms of entertainment and acting as a police dog to monitor the activities of Nigerian politicians thereby correcting their excesses.

Having seen how it is in the Niger Delta through the lens of ‘Krakraye’, there is need for lasting solutions to be proffered for the lingering crisis in the volatile Niger Delta suffering from such vices as marginalization, coercion, intimidation, militancy and abject neglect of the major oil producing area of Nigeria.

Government using film as a means of education, entertainment and criticising government efforts in development will help the nation to attain self-reliance all facets of life.

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