

Alpha Female?: Redefining Heroism and Environmental Sustainability in Jeta Amata's *Black November*

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Abstract

Using Jeta Amata's *Black November*, this paper argues that even when the environmental struggle of the region is more speculated and centred on male-ness, the selected film adequately deconstructs heroism and gender in the socio-historical history of the Niger/Delta environmental struggle. As a theoretical drive for this paper, auteur theory is adopted, and furthermore, the paper also uses Spivak's postcolonial postulation, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, as a model of evaluation for the *assumed* gender silence, as a response to the issues of ecology in Nigeria.

Keywords: film, eco-criticism, heroism, Niger/Delta, gender

Introduction

One of the issues that often elude popular discourse is the racial, gender and class dimension of environmental degradation. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon investigates the elusive damage of oil exploration and its impact on the poor of the global south. In his study, he defines the poor as "a compendious category subject to almost infinite local variation as well as to fracture along fault lines of ethnicity, gender, race, class, region, religion, and generation" (4). This study attempts to explore the gender dimension of literary trajectory of Niger/Delta region of Nigeria. The study further posits that despite the attention of scholarship on the region, the trope of heroism which is one of the 'fault lines' has not received due attention from the film produced from region.

In 1995, Nigeria almost descended into a pariah State as Sani Abacha-led government condemned to death by hanging nine eco-activists of the Ogoni ethnic group. This judicial decision led to Ken Saro-Wiwa's death and other men of the same ethnic group who were aggrieved by the years of negligence the region had suffered from the Nigerian government and oil multinational companies. Albeit biting global criticism the execution of these nine men provoked, the Niger/Delta was a posthumous Conradian scene of dehumanised vista and environmental degradation further attesting to the leadership predicament of Nigeria's political milieu several years after independence. However, the death of Saro-Wiwa and the other Ogoni eight projects an exclusivist perception of a male-centred struggle—a history in which the female voice becomes doubly absent. First, this perception generates for the female identity as a subaltern under the persistent shadow and protection of her husband who helps with her burden. Next is the female as an atrophied body whose biology is constantly under threat because of the bad and polluted environment, but whose voice is dislocated or projected through the male.

As early as 1985, the literary mooring of the region attests to this. Ken Saro-Wiwa wrote his *Sozaboy* where he chronicles the chivalry of a male character, Mene, through whom he maintains the survivalist impulses of his family. His memoir, *A Month and a Day*, follows the same male trajectory in which the eponymous hero, Ken, chronicles his several interventions for a better region, improved welfare of a more humanised Delta and subsequent inhibitions by the power-that-be. The story does not detail his only ecological crusading as there are other objectors he mentions in the novel that capture the male-ness of the Niger/Delta struggle. This mesh has been further forged by Helon Habila in *Oil on Water* where he locates the triumph of two heroic underdogs around his male protagonists Rufus and Zag. Though dominant in fiction, constant reference to “Egbesu Boys” by Tanure Ojaide echoes the same male heroism as his poetry celebrates the militaristic measures advanced by “Egbesu boys” and invocation of a male god “Ogidiga” against the predicament occasioned by industrialisation and urbanity. Earlier, J. P. Clark's *Ozidi Saga*, an epic adapted from the folklores of the region, focuses on the legendary achievement of an epic hero further substantiating the preference for male heroic narrative figures in the region. This recurrent male-image in their narratives points poignantly to patriarchal countenance of Niger/Delta society.

Notwithstanding this dominance, Kaine Agary redefines heroism through her female protagonist in *Yellow-Yellow*. In her account of the neo-colonial project of the multinational company, the male image which is a regular feature of previous narratives is replaced with Zilayefa who enjoys the parade of white males who are constantly displaced throughout her life (Chukumah, 2013). Despite creating a practical female identity whose body signifies desire and pleasure for the flickering male image, Agary becomes a constructivist by accounting for the independence of her female hero. Her novel could be accounted for as one of the recent writings that address the issue of gender imbalance in the eco-activism and eco-critical scholarship of the Niger/Delta. Inadvertently, Agary creates protagonist whose body is a metaphor for the pillaged Niger/Delta.

Apart from being a more referenced canonical African fiction that interrogates the encounter between the Western civilization and African culture, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is one of the earliest work that celebrates and venerates male heroism in African society. Okonkwo the hero of the novel is a rigidly patriarchal figure who sees femininity as a sign of weakness. In "Problematising Heroic Ideals in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*", Christopher Anyokwu asserts that,

In fact, having gone through the novel's narrative schemata, we can reasonably assume that Chinua Achebe, given his European-style education as well as his Christian upbringing, must have deliberately or otherwise quarried into western literary tradition and Judeo-Christian hermeneutics. Thus for diegetic purposes, the characterisation of the novel's protagonist, Okonkwo, cannot have been anything but hybrid and composite, melding character traits and heroic elements drawn from profane reality gleaned within the immediate Igbo (African) universe and from far-flung reaches of the sympathetic imagination. Even so, can Okonkwo be said to have descended from royalty or divine parentage like, say, Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*, Odysseus in Homer's *The Odyssey*, Beowulf, Prometheus or, to cite well-known examples from African orature, Ozidi of the Izon (Nigeria) and Sunjata of the epic of the old Mali Empire? Does the world witness meteorological irruptions or cosmic convulsions at his birth, as are common in the heroic narratives of epic heroes? What extraordinary events attend his formative years? (18)

Anyokwu's argument appears saturated especially in his adoption of the Homeric measures to problematise the notion of heroism in Achebe's novel, and extending such tentacle to the Aristotelian concept of a tragic hero. Soyinka in *Death and the King's Horsemen* has disavowed such position and seemingly re-theorised heroism by originating a humble precedence for his tragic hero, *Elesin-Oba*. Yet, Soyinka's work returns to the same circus of male heroism.

Consciousness of the post-independence disillusionment inheres the dominant themes of contemporary Nigerian literature. The contemporary African writer is committed to interrogate the neo-colonial condition of his society and transfers anger, vision and remarks into the mouth of the hero who s/he believes in. Chidi Amuta clarifies this further when he avers,

The state of the heroic institution in modern African society and literature presents a contrasting picture. The reality of underdevelopment in Africa connotes that those historical challenges which necessitate the assertion of the heroic instinct are still abundant; not only is the conquest and control of nature through science and technology still waiting to be accomplished, but the persistence of imperialism, neo-colonialism and the proliferation of corrupt and oppressive governments in Africa are historical challenges requiring urgent heroic intervention. (58)

The post oil-boom era of Nigeria is a nightmarish scene of murky waters hardly supporting lives around the Niger/Delta region (Adeoti, 2014). This has generated a lot of debates, remonstrations and highlighted new literary consciousness that calls for environmental sustainability in the region. In essence, Jeta Amata's *Black November* offers alternative gender perception into the literary trajectory of the region. The paper also postulates that, by presenting a female hero, Jeta Amata dislodges the notion of a male-dominated struggle and redefines the un-subalternised female-hero in Niger/Delta eco-discourse.

Towards Female Heroism and Eco-Feminism in Nigerian Literature

By post-independence, a number of female writers such as Zulu Sofola, Tess Ouwueme, Buchi Emacheta, and Flora Nwapa, who occupied the creative space in Nigeria responded to the umbrage of symbolic male-image by creating characters that constantly question the male hegemony in politics and economy of the home and society at large. One of the recent feminist writers whose works have received rave global attention is Chimamanda Adichie. Her attempt at re-evaluating heroism is portrayed in different instances through the displacement of Eugene (patriarchal figure) and reinforcement of a female hero (Aunty Beatrice) at the end of her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, shows the redefinition of heroism in her work. In her more recent work *Americanah*, she further invigorates female heroism through the character of Ifemelu by creating an emotionally abject protagonist and independently transgressive. As represented in the novel, both Ifemelu and Obinze are voracious readers; however, Obinze insists Ifemelu has not been reading 'proper books'. His interest in introducing 'proper books' to Ifemelu and the latter's refusal to cower to such persuasion clearly highlights Ifemelu's agency as self-reliant and represents her sign of independence. Lola Shoneyin also attempts an impassioned engagement in her debut novel, *Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Her decision to create a male, Baba Segi who assumedly arrogates power to himself by marrying many wives despite impotency demonstrates how female writers in Nigerian literature bandy the male characters to relocate the discourse of power in their writings. Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* also is bildungsroman story where a young female encounters all sorts of male perverts.

One of most recent Nigerian films in which gender issue is portrayed is *The Wedding Party I & II* (2016 and 2017) by Kemi Adetiba. The film focuses on Nigerian middle-class imagination, where the woman as the matriarch of the home becomes the subject of multiple expressions of patriarchal, political, economic and cultural power. In addition, it shows the intra-gender power play of women as an expression of reassertion of space of women in gender discourse. Despite the vast creative responses feminism gains from Nigerian writers, ecofeminism has enjoyed little attention. As a discipline that merges feminist principles and environmental activism, ecofeminism annexes the relationship between women and the environment. For eco-feminists, women are more culturally and biologically tied to environment than men.

This strand of feminism allows us to navigate not only the protest against the increasing damage of nature, but also how such impact activates responses from women who perceive the misogynistic angle from which environmental activism narrative is projected. Though women are not completely absent in the history of Niger/Delta region, they have only had enjoyed little literary representation. One of such recent representations is Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. As a postcolonial movement, different third world feminists and writers have entrenched in their works the focus of ecofeminism to reject the cowered position in which the third world woman is perceived on environmental matter (see Kaur 2012). Giving Smore insights into the tenets of this branch of feminism, he furthers:

Ecofeminism argues that there are important connections between the domination and oppression of women and domination and exploitation of nature by masculinist methods and attitudes. The term ecofeminism was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 in the book *Feminism or Death*. The strand of ecofeminism predominant till today is cultural ecofeminism. (385)

It is instructive to state that Jeta Amata's *Black November* is a materialist-ecofeminist work that explores the economic disparity between the oil multinationals from the Niger/Delta region and the masses of the region. This constructivist approach questions the otherness of women in Niger/Delta struggle and guarantees a space for ecofeminism through its redefinition of heroism; and by extension, it queries the subaltern position women occupy in Niger/Delta society.

Jeta Amata as an Auteur

One of the few emphasises made by Jonathan Haynes in “‘New Nollywood’: Kunle Afolayan” is the shift from the overdriven commercial framework upon which most films are produced. While making a case for the new turn in the films of Kunle Afolayan as an alternative response to abject plot and structures which have generated stereotypical perspective for the industry, Haynes argues that,

Kunle Afolayan is the obvious figure on whom to focus in order to get a deeper sense of New Nollywood: he is the leading figure associated with it, his prominence is based solidly on superior talent and charisma, and his situation and the evolution of his strategies are inscribed in his films. The stories around Afolayan's career, as he experiments, illustrate possibilities and constraints, not inevitabilities. (61)

Kunle Afolayan's artistic vision facilitates his recognition as an agent of recovery from the bounds of Nollywood commercial proliferation. From *Irapada*, *The Figurine* to *October 1st*, his films have become identifiable with critical expectations and scholarship (Adeshina Afolayan, 2014). However, his cinematic oeuvre was greatly influenced by another significant auteur in Nigerian films industry, Tunde Kelani. It is through this director's significance which transcends the commercial lane and consumer's choice that Jeta Amata's *Black November* can be given appreciable recognition. Cinematic authorship is the kernel of auteuring. Auteuring makes it flexible to de-emphasise the camera and examine the film from prism of the author and political significance of film in order to provoke critical engagement within scholarly and public discourse. The burden of historical and political capacity of *Black November* removes the film from Barthesian outline in his seminal work, *Death of the Author*. Roland Barthes, just like other post-structuralists, throws literary and artistic world into the world of multiple interpretations which severs the writer/author/director from their work. Amata's personality and artistic vision comes with his work in examining the postmodern burden of environmental degradation in Niger/Delta region. Through the film, he confronts the crisis of existence in the 21st century within the logic of scarcity instead of buoyance. He captures through his artistic vision the brazenness of oppression, and quagmire existence in Niger/Delta and Nigerian society as a whole (see Ofeimum 1998 cited in Afolayan 2014).

The task of applying auteur criticism to Jeta Amata's *Black November* makes a postcolonial investigation inevitable especially the context through which the film secures a space for itself through its singular-thesis. Moreover, this duty fuses both the ideological and historical commitment of the film. By avoiding the drudgery of the popular tag of 'Alaba' films and inserting itself into the global discourse on ecology, we are bound to view Amata as another auteur in Nigerian film industry. More, he does not dwell on excessive hesitance of serial adverts of upcoming films which most Nollywood films are known for from the beginning. Right from its inception, he injects critical thought into the mind of the audience and prepares a substratum upon which the ideology and the vision of the film are built. The prelude caption that Nigeria is the World's 5th largest producer of oil and the most environmentally devastated land in the world anticipates the political context of the film for the audience. Later, other series of caption indicates life expectancy in Nigeria's postcolony which is at low ebb. Quickly, the film sets the audience more in the mood by presenting a rowdy pedestrian scene of the Niger/Delta. This scene barely survives a minute before it opens again to Warri Prison where the hero of the film, Ebiere is introduced and to be hanged. Through this suspenseful overture, Amata whets the attention of the audience and coerces them into patience through suspense to have an insightful understanding of what leads to her sentence. Also, the prologue shifts to United States where Hudson is held hostage in a tunnel, the audience has insights into the imperial imaginary of the film.

Ebiere is one of the prodigious subalternised Niger/Deltans raised under a poor ecosystem polluted by oil spillage and bastardised biodiversity. As a young promising girl from a humble family and duly committed to her studies, she is able to secure scholarship from one of the oil multinational companies, Western Oil, who have profiteered on the oil boom of the region. Despite her academic excellence and the open city of opportunities she has after completing her studies abroad, she feels more drawn to her home. With gross negligence from the government and the oil multinational firm on the oil spillage, her parents like other villagers, unable to curtail the menace decidedly gather their kegs and bowls to evacuate the oil spilled to use for their domestic chores. Ebiere would only return to her home in a tragic scene of decimation which was initiated by the brutality of the governmental agent, an Inspector, on allegation of oil thievery. With this fatalistic conflict thrown in, Ebiere quixotically begins her environmental justice journey, and becomes the voice for Niger/Delta plebeians. She is not a radical revolutionary, unlike her lover, Dede, who believes in ferocious approach in negotiating with the government. She is ready for dialogue with the leader of Western Oil, Tom Hudson, who views as a potential tool in bending the rage of the locals in the village. Several indices of failed negotiation were festooned by the gluttony of Gideon White, whose complicity with the local chiefs leads to the loss of trust in government and the company. This instigates a headlong of attacks, reprisal attacks and kidnappings by the militant group under the helms of Dede and his foot soldiers. With this dissonance, Ebiere who is observed as the leader of the movement for the people is captured. Understanding the judicial politics that informs her incarceration, she agrees to the guilty status in the courtroom and she is sentenced to death.

The Alpha Female of *Black November*

The notion of alpha female is foregrounded in the reinvention of women's role in Nigerian films as against the formulaic portrayal. One of the prevailing arguments of Sunday Abah in "One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward: African Women in Nigerian Video-Films" is the stereotypical role which women play in the movies. Abah posits that an "ideal woman was depicted as married, submissive, and with children. Women are dangerous when they are economically, socially and politically independent" (339). This oversimplification of roles has also been noted by Agbese Aje-Ori when she argues that women who acted outside the expected and culturally defined gender roles as bad and doomed (88). Taking her case further in the essay in "The Good, the Bad & the Oh So Wicked", she cites some examples of films such as *Girl's Cot*, *Aristos*, and *Be My Val* as film that create inaccurate image of womanhood in Nigerian video films (88). Most of these films project women as subalterns who are devoid of their own fundamental human rights and live at the mercy of the male, the Leviathan from whom power and authority emanates. Nevertheless, some few films have taken anti-patriarchal stance. However, few Yoruba films such as *Lagidigba*, *Express Ladies*, *KKK* and so on have challenge the generalisation and representations of femininity in Yoruba video film industry (Olujini, 2008). By taking these characters outside their passive roles, these few films present an alternative perception in examining gender portraiture in Nigerian video films.

The popular Indian postcolonial theorist, Gayatri Spivak in her seminal essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” interrogates the schematization of the Western feminists who have formed hegemony on the discourse of global gender inequalities, and have turned themselves into mouthpieces for third world women. Spivak loans the concept of subaltern from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. The identity of the subaltern is an *othered* individual who lives at the mercy of a superior human being and whose existence is determined according to the whims and caprices of the latter. As a subjugated subjects, subaltern’s agency is assumedly weak and can never confront brutality of the power-that-be.

Valorisation which is often absent while depicting subalternity is infused by Jeta Amata in *Black November*. While removing the film from such parametre of gender stereotypes which most Nigerian video films project, Amata presents a number of characters who mobilise themselves against the indices of oppression. The spatial setting of the film is a village traumatised by industrial pollution of the oil firms. This anonymity universalises the experience relayed in the film. Though there is no series of scenes to support the pre-oil days when the occupation of the region was mainly agrarian before the ‘oil remedy’ as Tanure Ojaide argues in his collection, *Tales from the Harmattan*, Dede’s canoe trip around the creek region with dead fish in the polluted water indicates the ecological decimation which is occasioned by the industrial occupation of the oil multinational companies. Amata draws attention to the significance of this hazard by giving the water a close up shot, and this allows one to see the level of toxicity which the contaminated water has on the aquatic life. Unarguably, Dede’s lamentation in the scene gives one credence to the rupture in the relationship between humans and nature.

Worried by the negligence of government and compromising attitudes of the multinationals, the villagers once again receive the news of busted pipeline with great joy. They alert one another. This is the day Ebieren returns from her study abroad. Her mother has also gone to the pipeline to fetch some oil for domestic chores in her home. However, not long after all the locals have gathered around the pipeline filling their kegs, the police patrol van arrives with an inspector and his men. There, through Ebieren’s mother, Amata probes the assumed silence which is appropriated to womanhood in the Niger/Delta.

Inspector: You are all under arrest.

Ebieren’s Mother (*pacing up towards the inspector*): What is our crime?

Inspector: This fuel is the property of the Federal Government of Nigeria

Ebieren’s Mother: So, what would you rather we do? Stand and watch the Federal Government of Nigeria’s property spill, and spoil our land.

Inspector: It is your duty to report any leakages in the pipeline.

Ebieren’s Mother: But we did; last week, no one came here to do anything it.

Inspector: I warned you not to continue.

Ebiere's Mother: So, what would you do, shoot me? Which is worse, watch fuel flow past your house, and yet in three days you cannot get one gallon of what your federal government cannot make available? (*Addressing the children and women cupping the fuel with various sizes of bowls and gallons*) Abeg continue, take this fuel. *Oya, oya...*

Ebiere's mother is undeterred despite the fatality course this encounter with agency of power might take. However, she is unbent to the agency of power (the police) who sees her as a subaltern. She is ready to withstand the coercion this might take, and encourages the locals to continue with their activity. Through her interception of the police, we are able to learn about the years of nonchalance the villagers have suffered watching their environment ravaged by toxic waste and oil spillage. Her diction in choosing possessive adjective 'your' informs one of her community being *othered* and the disconnection between the people and the government. This scene ends tragically, and she becomes the first martyr in the film after they are all brutally burnt together. One can contend that Ebiere's mother is the first eco-feminist the film presents for the audience.

Yet, she is not alone. The tragedy that begins the film later morphs into movements of women under the leadership of Hossana who is another eco-feminist in the film. She is economically independent and manages the finances of her household. Her dialogue with her husband shows she is a matriarch. Amata's disempowerment of Hosanna's husband and his inability to stop Hosanna from joining the assembly of women-protesters points importantly to the eco-feminist statement and displacement of male-heroism in the film. She is a lady-dragon who could not contain the ruthlessness of government that burns children and women at the pipelines. As a crusader of justice, she is unlike the group of elders (men) who have sabotaged the interest of the people for their selfish gain. Her embrace of justice leads her to lead the group of women who are journeying to Abuja to register their dissatisfactions with the government. Though her death emerges out of reckless abandon of a Police Officer, it underscores the excessive brutality of law enforcement agencies on civilians. Her death later provokes Tamuno, who is a former police inspector, to join the group of militants from the village. Constant reference to her name through the song in the film is a symbolic motif, and attests to the redefinition of female heroism in the history of activism in the region. She is another eco-feminist Amata presents. But more importantly, throughout the film, the statistics of female characters who participate as eco-activists testify to the strength of the film to qualify as one of the first films that emphasise the gender dimension in the struggle of the region.

Redefining Heroism and the Uncastrated Female

The hero of the film, Ebieri, fails to meet Homeric heroic standard. She is not of noble birth. She is a subaltern born from the impoverished region of Niger/Delta. Her mother during her birth does not undergo Western maternity care, and her child delivery takes place inside her round hut courtesy of local midwives. In addition, Ebieri's birth is not foretold as a supernatural being. On the day of her birth, she is celebrated by a group of men with local gin. However, like all child born around Niger/Delta, she witnesses an ecological collapse that makes eking out living harder for her parents. Her outstanding performance in school later wins her scholarship sponsored by Western Oil. Amata's yardstick for heroism is in tandem with Soyinka's evaluation of heroism in *Death and the King's Horseman* as we have in the case of Eleshin-Oba who Soyinka originates a humble precedence for. Though Elesin Oba remains a debatable hero because of his utilitarian excesses in rupturing Yoruba cosmology, Amata originates the same humble precedence for Ebieri, a crusader for her community, whose death is also historical allusive to Ken Saro Wiwa's death. This misses the Greek stamp for heroism as seen in most classical literature such as *Oedipus the King*, *Aeschylus*, among others. She returns home from her studies abroad only to meet her parents and village decimated by pipeline explosion. Significantly, she is a female in a society where heroism and valour belongs to the males.

When conflict later developed after the multiple deaths at the pipeline and representatives of the oil firm visit the village to negotiate with the locals, Amata quickly gives an understanding of the society Ebieri's society where men are at the helms of politics and decision-making. In her altercation with one of the representatives of the oil firm in which she is asked why she is delegated as the representative for her family, she firmly replies that she wishes the fire had kept them alive. Ebieri introduces herself as a new voice among the agitators when she curtly advances with a question – if women feel pain differently from men. As a crusader of justice, she is impatient with patriarchal ego when she replies one of the chiefs, who signifies a patriarchal order that she would have to be regarded as a man if the dialogue demands for female absence. During this encounter, Ebieri rises to prominence within few minutes and lampoons the irresponsibility of Nigeria's government and Western Oil Company to cater to the need of her people. This is intoned in her statement, "I am blaming you, for you." However, like all heroes, Amata characterises Ebieri as a charismatic personality whose femininity transcends the limits of the patriarchal politics of her society. Her eloquence is brought to the fore when she denies that she is not a messiah of "a failed utopian" (Osofisan 2008). Her refusal to be labelled as new spokeswoman for the people indicates arguably that she is not a proper hero like most Greek classics, or the Beowulf-like character in English epic. She is an agency who is interested in the socio-economic conditions of her people and does not have a noble background like most classical epic. Clearly, her transgressive actions equate previous gender projects as seen in the case of Ifemelu in Adichie's *Americanah*, Bolanle in the case of Lola Shoneyin's *Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Lives*, and Yejide as instantiated in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me*. She does not accrue importance to herself as she replies that 'she is just one of those faces in the region' who is being denied a decent living.

Moreover, this statement is followed by a precedent where she forewarns the elders and the delegates from the oil company that people would rise. An assessment of her cogent replies suggests the location of power in the people. In most epic, the hero is often a bourgeoisie and a central locus of power who decides the existence of his subject. Amata works outside such standard and portrays the hero of the film as an eco-feminist materialist whose voice is conscience nudge for the power-that-be.

Certainly, Amata offers trenchant characterisation in the film in his constructivist motive. The anti-hero, Gideon, is from the same region as Ebiere. He is presented as a hydra who works with the oil company. He connives with the elders to pocket the compensation issued by the oil company. As the Iago or antagonist of the story, his interest is built on self-aggrandisement and financial buoyance. He, like all the other elders who should serve as the voice of the people, turns to a pervert whom appropriates the people's entitlement to themselves. This essentially flames up Amata's depiction of the males in the film. By building a powerful female image and rendering the male image in such lights, Amata strengthens the gender horizon of the film. Ebiere, unlike Gideon, is not a bribe-collecting individual and when Tom Hudson, director of Western Oil learns about her, he is shocked and asks, "What Nigerian doesn't accept bribe?" This question homogenises the global perception of Nigerians as unscrupulous individuals, nefarious for all sorts of dishonest activities. It is noteworthy that Amata's interest here is to decolonise the gaze of the West from such erroneous homogeneity. Though through the bribe, one observes easily a test of the cohesive resilience of Ebiere's community. Ebiere's refusal is a rebuttal for the homogenous perception and 'turbo-capitalism' of Western Oil (see Rob Nixon 2011).

Another way by which Amata entrenches the issue of heroism in the story is through Dede. Dede unlike Gideon and the village chiefs, is not a debauched individual. He is interested in the welfare of the villager, however, his radicalism and impatience compromise heroic status. As a lover of Ebiere and father of her unborn child, his temperament leads to his downfall, and his displacement towards the end of the story is a concerted effort of Amata to make sure his hero, Ebiere survives her status, and does not stay under the rented shadow of a male hero. Using Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" as a critical parametre, one can aver that Amata denies the "paradox of phallogocentrism in all its manifestation" (803). Ebiere is not a castrated female who leans on the effort of Dede, and by eliminating Dede at the end of the movie, Amata clears the symbolic presence of the phallus to foreground female heroism. Such patriarch unconscious is also removed when at the end of the film Ebiere accepts that she kills some men. This significantly points to the triumph of the female-image over the patriarchal order. Her decision to die as a martyr is antithetical to the mainstreaming of the female identity existing within the triangular narcissistic desire of the male. Plotting Ebiere's relationship with all the male characters and sustaining her personality above them gives an alternative perception of Niger/Delta literary trajectory and it is another attempt in recovering female spectatorship in Nigerian video films beyond sexual symbols.

Conclusion

While gender stereotypes have become the hallmark of most Nigerian video films, it is argued in this paper that Jeta Amata's film is one of those films that are critical of such ill perception which has blossomed for some time. This dismissal is resonated in his female hero and the portrayal of male characters in the film. More importantly, the film checkmates the celebration of male heroism in Nigerian literature. As noted above, while Nigerian video films constitute one of the most lucrative and booming artistic enterprises of 21st century, only few films enjoy intellectual engagement. With the impact films currently have on Nigerian society, it is instructive to say that the historical and imaginative portrayal of Niger/Delta struggle is not complete without examining the contribution of film to environmental tensions of the region. Moreover, writers and film directors alike should be able to mirror the contradictions which are located within the history in order to have a proper understanding of the trajectories that surround the struggle of environmental sustainability of the region.

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