

CRIME, TERROR AND DISTRESS IN NIGERIAN COMMUNITIES: EXPLORING THE EFFICACY OF VIGILANTE SOLUTION IN SELECTED NOLLYWOOD FILMS.

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Abstract

Since 2015 after the general election was conducted in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the kind of crime, terror, distress and general conditions of insecurity that have surged in the country has remained unimaginable in human history. Boko Haram ravaging the North Eastern and Western parts of the country, hybrid of kidnapping, armed robbery, ritual killings and cultism amongst other forms of nefarious crimes devastating other parts of the country. Human conditions have become vastly characterized with unexplainable anguish, fear and tension. Not even the presence of the state controlled security system in the country appears to have yielded an end to this ugly menace. There is trouble everywhere. Man seems helpless and hopeless. The need to rekindle hope through a restoration of peace and sanity in the land therefore becomes necessary. This study investigated the option of neighbourhood watch through vigilantism for solution. The study relied on Iloma N. Richard's theory of Vigilante sub-genre of action film to critically analyse two purposively sampled films: Ashes 1&11 (Andy Amanechi 2001). A critical textual inspection of the selected film texts revealed the efficacy of Vigilantism in combating crime in Nigerian communities. This study therefore recommended amongst other things, the legitimization and empowerment of vigilantism in the security architecture of the country.

Keywords: Crime, Terror, Distress, Communities, Efficacy, Vigilante Option

Introduction

In recent times, many communities in different parts of Nigeria have been bedevilled with violent crimes. As Emeodu E.N, Etire G.J, Dickson G.K & Oscar I.A (2022) validate: "In Nigeria, ethnic violence are pervasive and abduction for ransom remains a national security worry". The Post-Electoral violence and upswing in cult related civil disturbances which rocked Rivers State after the 2015 general elections in Nigeria is perhaps one of the noteworthy experiences that degenerated the real essence of humanism and generated public outcry in the country. This violence witnessed the sacking of many communities in Rivers State by armed bandits after wrecking colossal brutalization, degradation and general devaluation of the human dignity. The kind of crime experienced was such that was widely believed to be unknown to the people's history. Ranging from the wanton raping of female genders of all categories including people's wives, sisters or under aged daughters to the frequent assassinations and horrific beheadings of their victims, the lucrative business of kidnapping, terrorisation and molestations of all forms, ritual killings amongst others became the order of the day. The kidnappings of entire eighteen seater commercial busses together with all commuters on board were also the new trend which rocked many axis of the state, especially the Ndele axis of the East-West road. Everywhere was in disarray as turmoil, fear and great tension became typical of the human condition. Even more worrisome is the inability of the security agencies in Nigeria to effectively curb this menace, man appeared to be left to his fate as disillusionment and despair stare him at the face

Perhaps, one of the recent circumstances which gave hope to humanity in Rivers State was in the activities of an extra-ordinary police officer, ACP Bako Agbashim who was reported to have made fabulous gains in sanitizing the Ogoni area of the state of crime and restoring peace in the area. It is consequent upon this heroic exploits that he was posted to Ahoada Division as the Divisional Police Officer. Ahoada had been on red flag

for unimaginable forms of insecurity in the state. Killings, raping, stealing, kidnappings and many more were widespread occurrences. As the hopes of inhabitants soared high for the coming of a seeming messiah, ASP Bako, a perceived larger than life police officer due to his alleged supernatural prowls and indestructible exploits was brutally murdered in cold blood by a notorious cult gang terrorizing the area. What even generated more public outcry was the mutilation of his body in parts and posting on various online platforms. The Rivers State Governor, Sir Siminilaye Fubara placed a bounty of One Hundred Million Naira on the suspected leader of the criminal gang, Gift Okpara also known as 2 Baba and charged the Nigerian Police to recover the remains of the slain cop. Narrating the response of the Police after the charge, Daniel Abia (<https://www.vanguard.com/2024/03/rivers>) explains how the Police had six months after the murder of Angbashim, made some head ways. Citing the statement by the Rivers Command spokesperson Grace Iringe-Koko, Daniel explains how the police operation targeted the camp of the cult leader, 2 Baba at Odiemudie forest, killing him and recovering the skull of the slain ASP Bako Agbashiem.

As this problem of insecurity still persists around the country, this study opted for the option of vigilantism through a content analysis of Andy Amenechi's films titled: *Ashes 1&11* (2001) with the view of determining its efficacy in salvaging mankind from the pangs of the established problem.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Iloma Nyenwemaduka Richard's (2018) theory of *Vigilante sub-genre of action film*. This theory believe in the efficacy of vigilante outfits in combating crime in host communities. It reveals vigilante sub-genre of action film as a film genre which deals with the combatant exploits of vigilante organisations against armed bandits, criminality and general insecurity in a given area. In this sub-genre, the hero, who often is the leader of the vigilante group faces series of life threatening challenges circling around serious fights, violence, chase and narrow escapes and with kin reliance on voodoo which aids in the areas of attack, defence and investigations, he triumphs over his adversaries to finally rid the community of all criminal elements and restores sanity. The Most commonly used weapons in this film category are machete, cudgels, clubs, guns, and charms amongst others.

Review of Relevant Literatures

Inarguably, one of the greatest challenges which currently confront the Nigerian nation is that of insecurity. The country has witnessed diverse guises of criminal elements and organizations in different parts which perpetuate different forms of crime, terror and horror. While the effects of these nefarious deeds are distressing, dehumanizing, devastating and degrading to humanity, all that represents humankind from his social, religious, psychological, cultural and economic lives amongst others appears disarrayed. Renewed concerns for salvaging mankind from these problems have resultantly led to different forms of security measures. Perhaps, one of such is vigilantism.

Vigilante is mostly a voluntary organization set up to check and combat criminality in crime ridden areas. It is mostly made up of groups of young men and women who, triggered by the magnitude of unbearable provocative crimes encountered and motivated by the need to provide security to the defenceless populace and restore the sacredness of the human dignity. These groups usually engaged hoodlums in bloody combats. The vigilante is mostly made up of people from the same local environment where the criminal activities take place, people who have mastery knowledge of the culprits together with the topographies where they operate from. These vigilante groups are known by different names, depending on their areas of operation. Diobu Vigilante in Port-Harcourt, Bakassi Boys in Aba, Onelga Security and Advisory Committee (OSPAC) in certain areas in Rivers State and the likes exemplify different vigilante groups in the southern parts of Nigeria. Looking at the responsibility of film at responding to social realities around it, many Nigerian films now dwell on the subject of vigilantism. Consequently, several studies have evidently emerged to sustain conversation on its subject matter.

Accordingly, Ajibade, (2012), posits that the destruction and economic desperation after the Nigerian civil war influenced the mentality of the average Igbo person to engage in any venture that offers him an opportunity to amass wealth, not minding how risky it is. He explains how critical the desperation was in crystalizing the materialism that punctuated the malicious triangle of crime, police and merchants in Onitsha and Aba areas. In these metropolitan areas, Ajibade (2012, p.186) explains how residents live off the large markets trading on different kinds of goods including, “locally made, imported, both fake and genuine-in a network of stores sustained by mingling of credible human populations”.

These commercial cities are very viable and noted for attracting serious commercial activities from within Nigeria and other West African countries. Incidentally, however, following the large cash circulation in them, as Ajibade explains, these cities became “Nigeria's most notorious crime hot spots”. He notes that criminals were able to operate a connection through Benin City to Lagos where stolen cars were moved across the borders into Benin Republic. He also notes that other stolen goods were also sold along the route. Explaining further, Ajibade (citing Nwana 2000, HRW/CLEEN, 2002 and Harnischfeger 2003) notes that in the year 1997, there was a dramatic surge in Aba in which armed robbery, extortion, murder, rape and protection racketeering reigned supreme. To ascertain the intensity of these crimes, Ajibade notes that they were mostly committed in broad day light where criminals successfully carry out onslaughts with unbelievable impunity. Houses, shops, commuters and pedestrians were frequently attacked by vicious gangs of neighbourhood youths. Sometime in 1998 however, Ajibade narrates how a particular murder incident catalysed mass action in Aba against the atrocious men of the underworld.

According to him, in that particular instance, a woman who was well known to the traders in Ariara market was brutally murdered after robbing her of the sum of Two Hundred Thousand Naira (N200,000). At this instance, it became a consensus amongst the traders that if the spate of crime is allowed unchallenged, one day they would all be consumed as the entire lucrative market was soon to permanently lose all her costumers over fear of insecurity. Driven by this circumstance, the traders spontaneously mobilized themselves, carrying different weapons and swung into action by hunting for the known criminals. Consequently, hundreds of those apprehended were lynched in jungle justice and sanity and social engagement were soon restored in Aba. Following this success, the shoe makers at the Ariara market formed themselves into a vigilante group to protect the market on a permanent basis. This vigilante group came to be known as Bakassi.

Ajibade explains how delinquency became a normal way of life in the years preceding 1998 in most eastern Nigerian cities. He posits that due to gross underfunding of police and high level of corruption within the period in retrospect, the Law Enforcement Agents were deprived of power and strength. Following this development, society became debased with the escalation of such crimes as assassination, ritual murder, rape and armed robbery, amongst others. Amid realities of helplessness and frustrations coupled with the failure of state to combat and vitiate insecurity, the Igbo people resorted to self-help through the establishment of a local ethnic militia group called *Bakassi Boys*. Hence, the film, *Issakaba*, titled almost in a reversal of *Bakassi* which anchors on the exploits of vigilantism in Igbo land replicates the security challenges in eastern Nigeria. Ajibade (p. 184) maintains that in pursuant of their security responsibilities, “the militia arrested and publicly executed suspected criminals in direct contradiction of the Nigerian law and independently of the state's police and judiciary. Victims are youths that purportedly engaged in criminality of sorts, aided in many instances by unscrupulous elements within police itself”.

Evaluating the impact of *Issakaba* in the Igbo society, Ajibade recognizes its success by explaining how the vigilante, was able to solve the ravaging security problems which could not be abated by the state. He also emphasizes how the successful abatement of insecurity in the land enabled the impoverished people of Igbo to take charge of their own lives. *Issakaba* is a film of four parts detailing the activities of the local vigilante in addressing security challenges in the land.

In one of the sequences in part one, Ajibade (p.187) draws attention to an action in which a young beggar sitting by the street is apprehended and beheaded by the militia group which briskly arrive the scene in a van. While this action stirs up protest by a distraught bystander who queries *Issakaba* for the killing of a presumably innocent poor beggar, Ajibade notes that the beggar's culpability to the crime is confirmed when the militia search the belongings of the decapitated man and to the surprise of all, several guns are found. This search

which shockingly traces some incriminating exhibits to the slain victim was significant in justifying the vigilante's action and restating the fact that their action does not include shedding of innocent blood. "Issakaba has never shed innocent blood and never will" says Ebube (Sam Dede), the leader of the vigilante group. Ajibade (p.186) explains that the beggar was a notorious armed robber who was masquerading as beggar but was engaged in the business of distributing guns to other armed robbers in town. Apart from being endowed with physical might in leading the group, Ebube is described in Ajibade's analysis as "a spiritual leader of the militia on the battlefield, next to "the wise one" and "crippled generalissimo", Nkemka the medicine man. Nkemka is responsible for manning the militia's bureaucratic headquarters from where he controls many outposts. Ebube is however, the custodian of the reserves of the magic thus having the ability to predict events before they come to reality. In fact, Ajibade testifies that the militia's infallibility and popularity in the film are greatly enhanced by this spiritual might which he beliefs "draws strength from Igbo's spirituality and communal affirmation of a cooperate *chi*".

He goes on to explain that "*chi*" as a word connotes the personal life force in Igbo while its compound form "*Chi*" stands for *Chukwu*, meaning God, the big God. He maintains that *chi*, as a personalized fragment of God, is the unique essence that determines the personality of an individual, be it success or failure. Thus, his argument that the coming together of the entire Igbo nation in absolute agreement to confer the cooperate *chi* on the Bakassi Boys makes *chi* become democratic and certain since it approaches the divine in quality. This justifies the use of charm by the Bakassi Boys as part of the weapons of warfare and the efficacy of the charm in the areas of defence and attack. Hence, the common yelling of the word *odeshi* interpreted by Ajibade as meaning "this body is not leaking" and used by the militia whenever they encounter gunshots is rooted on this unfailing and indestructible strength of the Igbo masses which they serve.

Ajibade explains how the promptness, effective information management and decisiveness of the militia in dealing with suspected criminals earn them trust from the public. Upon arrest of suspects by the Bakassi Boys, Ajibade notes that either of two traditional cultic methods is applied to establish culpability or innocence of suspects. One of such is identified as the ritual method involving a necklace of charms, usually hung around the suspect's neck. Ajibade notes that the necklace is known for momentarily disabling the suspect's ability to tell lies and thus, eliciting confessional statements.

The second, as he identifies involve the ritual cutlass usually placed across the upper chest of suspects and glows "red" when suspect is guilty of bloodshed. Ajibade notes that the militia's operation involves a hectic blend of tradition and modernity which he exemplifies through their use of magical charms and pump-action guns. He explains that this hybridization is a representation of "modern weaponries within the prescribed context of trusted Igbo traditions", noting that following the failure of state in offering effective western judiciary, the people lost confidence and placed more trust on sorcery and tradition over modernity and modern system. Thus, Issakaba was overwhelmingly accepted by the people, because of their effective system of justice administration.

Shaka (2011, p247) anchors the emergence of the vigilante as a film genre in Nigeria on the failure of the police and other federal government security agents to provide security for the masses. This was the period when the effects of the chaotic political cum economic problems in Nigeria had transcended different forms of illicit activities in the society. Shaka notes that at a time when the rise in criminality and armed robbery was high, police went on strike thereby leaving the people to take their destiny by their hands.

In his book entitled: *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres* (2014), Ayakoroma gives a detailed account of the genre. Recounting on its history, Ayakoroma (2014, p.191) states that the rise of vigilantism in its current form especially in the south East of Nigeria can be traced back to the explosion of violent crimes which rocked the city of Aba in Abia State and its surroundings in 1997 and 1998. He notes that the commercial city of Aba which hosts the popular Ariaria market was gripped by insecurity and lawlessness as armed robbery and other forms of violent crime reached unprecedented levels. He further maintains that during this period, robbery and extortions by armed gangs popularly known as *The Mafia* became a daily routine that constituted a big menace to the Aba society.

Ayakoroma further maintains that the frustration and anger encountered over the insecurity and intimidation suffered at the hands of criminals in Aba escalated when a pregnant woman was gruesomely murdered near the market in 1999.” He recounts that following these developments, the traders in Aba became incensed and mobilized people to hunt down the perpetrators, stressing that the Shoe Makers Association who occupied the Bakassi Wing of the market decided to form a vigilante group to defend themselves against criminals: “the vigilante group was to unleash its own killing spree, unprecedented in the history of Aba as they killed and burnt suspected criminals and their accomplices. With the considerable success at curbing the armed robbers, the vigilante group consolidated into a more permanent institution...,” he notes. Contextualizing this discourse with a critical reading of Lancelot Imasuen's *Issakaba*, (2000), Ayakoroma demonstrates how amidst serious combats, the vigilante groups jubilantly triumphs.

Furthermore, in a study titled: *The action film genre in Nigeria: A critical analysis of vigilante subgenre in Issakaba 11 (Lancelot Imasuen, 2001)*, Iloma, Shaka & Uwah (2018, pp299-313), explain how *Issakaba*, a vigilante outfit successfully rescues the land of Oshota in Igbo land from various degrees of crime and terror. They explain how the cases of armed robbery, incessant killings and ritualmurder are recurrent in the land, heaving a condition of fear in the hearts of people. They further explain how the exposition of the film reveals a gang of dare devil robbers who masquerade as preachers in a public bus where they also commute and engage unsuspecting co-passengers on evangelistic outreach. As they have gained the acceptance and trust of their victims, a prayer is said and at the echo of “amen”, they shockingly reveal their real identity as armed robbers and not preachers as the commuters think. They subsequently dropped their bibles and replaced with brandished guns. Subsequently, they dispose them of all treasured valuables.

Additionally, Iloma, Shaka and Uwah (2018, p.307) reveal another dangerous armed robbery gang led by Man of God MOG rob a family. They explain how Man of God disguises like a preacher wearing a white garment regalia to deceive the unsuspecting household who opens the gate to see who the wonderful preacher is. Taking advantage of the opened gate, this criminal gang gain entrance into the house and make away with looted bounty of different kinds of valuables including crispy Naira notes and at the end, the leader of the gang shoots someone he suspected had already identified him to death.

Similarly, another horrible shade of insecurity prevalent in the land as conveyed in the semantics of the film is brought to perspective. Iloma, Shaka and Uwah (p.307) explain how a prominent man in the land, Chief Edwin, in a bid to revive his ailing business goes to the shrine of Igboodu where the Chief Priest (Columbus Irisoanga) prescribes the sacrifice of three virgins as condition for eliciting the efficacy of the ritual. This leads to the kidnap and subsequent horrible killing of three young female virgins who go to the stream to fetch water and used for ritual.

Following this traumatizing insecurity and complete degradation of the sanctity of the human dignity, the people whose peace have now been overrun by insecurity become helpless and hopeless as they resign to fate in the absence of any rescuer. In view of this disenchanting experience, Iloma, Shaka and Uwah (p.309) explain how in a very serious meeting, the Igwe and his council of chiefs come up with the option of using *Issakaba*, a vigilante outfit to salvage the land. Consequently, Ebube, the leader of the vigilante group and his boys harken to the clarion call as they make their way to Oshata. Amid different scenes of heroic and triumphant exploits, the *Issakaba Boys* successfully engage the criminal elements in physical and metaphysical war fares. In the final analysis, peace, safety and civil stability are restored in the land.

Research Methodology

The research design that guided this study was the qualitative design in which some variables were examined over a period of time with the view to ascertain an in-depth knowledge about the main subject of discourse for the paper. A population of two films titled: *Ashes 1 & 11* (Andy Amenechi 2001) were evaluated. A purposive sampling technique in which the researcher selected the films under review on purpose due to their relevance to the main issue of discourse was adopted. This study also adopted both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The researcher embraced a textual reading of Andy Amenechi's *Ashes 1 & 11* to analyse its main subject of study. The instrument for this study was validated by the researcher.

Presentation of Data: A Critical Analysis of *Ashes 1&2*.

Ashes is a story of insecurity arising from high spate of ritual killings, armed robbery, assassinations and raping, amongst others in the land of Nkosi. The Igwe of Nkosi whose source of wealth comes from the gains of ritual killings and armed robbery, sponsors a group of armed bandits to execute criminal activities in the community. This group which is led by Derico Nwamama unleashes different kinds of agonizing mayhems such as wanton killings, raping and kidnap for rituals, amongst others, which make the community a theatre of insecurity. In one of their meetings, the women of Nkosi lament their ordeal as they agree to bring in the *Baka Boys*, a reputable vigilante group in the area to salvage the situation.

Women Leader: Great women of Nkosi, we are tired of the ritual killings in this land, and the rapes on our young ones and the armed robbery attacks. Now, we are going to support the efforts of our husbands to bring in the Baka Boys, no matter the amount.

This meeting which seeks to bring an end to insecurity is however greeted with tragedy as the armed bandits rush in on them and open live ammunition, killing several lives and wounding many more. Frustrated about the eminent reign of terror and maximum insecurity in the land, the people of Nkosi, led by Chief Nweke, defile the Igwe's show of levity to invite the Baka boys. Nweke, Chief Nkosi and a victim of armed robbery attack whom in the process loses his only son to a gunshot by the armed bandits explains to Ejima, the leader of the Baka boys why his group is needed to save the community.

Nweke: Is this not Ejima the son of Ukwudili from Nkosi?, You have been called by your people to come to Nkosi before the whole town is wiped away by ritualists and robbers.... Robbers are as well having a field day, killing, raping, and terrorizing the whole land. Please, Ejima, we know it is your group that can help us and that is why I have come. We need your assistance, please.

The Baka boys is a reputable vigilante group whose exploits against insecurity in Onitsha and beyond has earned them so much reputations. They are seen as the only group with the ability to combat insecurity head on and restore sanity in the land. One of the most proliferating crimes in the land of Nkosi is ritual killing. Reports and incidents of gruesome murder and decapitations of human parts are mostly rampant. People are slaughtered at will and used for ritual purposes. Hence, the horrors and terrific crimes

The ruthless slaughter of the two virgins in the shrine of *Agbalike* by Okwute at the order of Igwe of Nkosi exemplifies the incessant ritual killings in the land. The two virgins who have been tied to an alter at the shrine are stabbed to death at the heart region of their chests while the Igwe of Nkosi lies under the alter and drinks the blood that spill from the dying victims. "Drink, Your Majesty, drink and be full of life, for life, begets life. No one can kill you...", *Okwute*, the priest of *Agbalike* beckons as the Igwe conforms. Subsequently, the Igwe becomes very rich as he stashes his money in different bags of *Ghana must go*. He also assumes greater influence in his kingdom. This kind of recurrent pejorative incidents in the land of Nkosi constitute integral part of the insecurity in the land. Whereas, the Igwe of Nkosi, by virtue of his status as a traditional ruler, should be a man whose conducts reveal integrity, nobility, patriotism and duty to self and communal growth. It is therefore, disturbing that he champions the course that he does.

Furthermore, the activities of *Ejima Jesus* is another in focus in which, various shades of horrible crimes are unfolded. *Ejima Jesus* who is a false prophet in the film is revealed as possessing extra-ordinary magical powers with which he lures unsuspecting members of the public for solutions to their human problems. In the scene of his ordeal with the *Baka Boys*, he justifies his actions "They wanted progress, they wanted children, they had their heart desires". Unknown to everybody however, *Ejima Jesus'* source of power is in human

blood. He kills people at will for spiritual rejuvenations. As the *Baka Boys* attack him in his chamber at his home, two dead victims of his ritual killings are found at a section of his chamber as he engages in serious incarnations. This scene corroborates his confessional statement at the scene where he is to meet his jungle justice by the *Baka Boys*. In this scene, Ejima Jesus confesses to have killed a lot of people, burying some alive and inflicting evil on them through the holy water and religious substances that he gives to them.

In view of the recurrence of these horrible and human debasing crimes, helpless and hopeless members of the community seek help from the *Baka Boys*, a vigilante outfit in the land. Their choice of the Vigilante group over other forms of security outfits could ostensibly be occasioned by the scarcity of police presence in the community. The Nigerian police is widely reported to be shortstaffed. Most often, their response to emergency needs are hesitant. There are also allegations of compromise by some erring personnel in which performance is greatly affected. The police may also not be very knowledgeable of the topography of the communities of crime. The *Baka Boys*, a local vigilante group, swift in response and committed to duty therefore, becomes the option. The *Baka Boys* are a very powerful group that wrestles power with the criminals for the sake of justice.

This group represents agent of light. They are eventually invited to come and clean up the mess of insecurity in the land by meting out justice on culpable persons, no matter their social status. In one of the scenes where Ejima Jesus is to be attacked by the *Baka Boys*, Ejima, the leader of the group tells him that "Light shall perpetually shine over darkness, just as justice over evil and the master over the servant". In the cause of fighting criminality, the *Baka Boys* display both physical and supernatural powers in such a way that serious tensions are built.

The combats between the *Baka Boys* and the armed bandits in which serious chase, physical feats and exchange of firearms takes place, The *Baka Boys*, upon invitation to the land of Nkosi to combat crime in the land, engage robbers and ritualists in series of combats with the view of meting out justice to them. In the scene where robbers run into the *Baka Boys* and open fire on them, serious tension is built. In this battle which records no casualty, Ejima is seen suddenly perplexed in utter disbelief as he discovers that his own twin brother is one of the armed bandits that his squad has come to exterminate. Undeterred in his resolute to restore sanity in the land, not minding who the culprit is, in one of the raid scenes by the *Baka Boys*, Ejima apprehends his own twin alongside Derico Nwamama. While everybody thinks he would spare the life of his brother who has been beckoning on him not to spill his own brother's blood, Ejima rebuffs him as he severs his head by himself. This singular act justifies the impartiality and commitment of the *Baka Boys* in their exploits for justice.

An important fact to note, is the operational methodology of the vigilante group in their fights. In the opening scene of the film, a frantic chase is made by members of the *Baka Boys* to apprehend *Ejima Jesus* from a place suspected to be his spiritual abode in the forest. As *Baka Boys* suddenly get to their destination, they order Ejima Jesus to appear from his state of invisibility. As he appears as ordered, serious fight ensues between them. The nature of firearms exchanged in this scene calls for serious attention. It shows a fight which uses the *modus operandi* of spirituality and physicality in which magical powers are interfaced with physical powers. All firearms in this scene are exchanged by merely pointing towards the enemy's direction and then, amid horrible sounds, spiritual missiles depart to hit the target where it is directed at. In this scene, the second in command of the *Baka boys* (character's name not mentioned in the film but appears to be the second in command) shoots missiles at Ejima Jesus but Ejima Jesus blocks it with a counter power from his palms. In a fiercely fought battle in this scene, Ejima Jesus displays the supremacy of his metaphysical powers by ascending towards the sky, as he raises his hand up; the second in command is manipulatively lifted up and ordered to fall on the ground, hitting himself hard due to the gravitational force. Following the seeming defeat of the *Baka Boys* in this scene, they retreat to their native doctor who in anger reinforces their strengths in order to surmount every other power of darkness, including gun shots, as they boastfully shout *Odeshi* literally meaning, "it doesn't penetrate."

The film is set in Eastern Nigeria where the two communities of Onitsha and Nkosi are primarily involved. In part one of the film, the Baka Boys are predominantly operating at the commercial eastern Nigerian city of Onitsha where the activities of Ejima Jesus is highlighted. This city is presented in the film as a modern Nigerian city where man's inordinate desperation for signs and wonders becomes the bait that leads him to ritual killing by Ejima Jesus, a false prophet who displays great signs and wonders. Also in this film, the activities of the paramount ruler of Nkosi, and few of his chiefs, together with his self-sponsored criminal gang are presented. Nkosi, like Onitsha is also a modern Nigerian city with visible signs of modernity.

Like the thematic thrust of the film, a critical survey of character analysis in *The Ashes* reveals the characters' motifs as orbiting along the divides of crime and justice. Crime in the film is perpetuated at different levels by different characters. Firstly, no discussion can be made on the wave of crime and criminality in the land of Nkosi without mention of the Igwe. The Igwe of Nkosi as shown in the film is the architect of all criminal acts in the land. He is the sponsor of a nefarious criminal gang led by Derico Nwamama to carry out different forms of terror in the land. It is this group that terrorizes the community through armed robbery, kidnap for ritual killings, rape and all forms of insecurity in the land. In a scene before the coming of the Baka boys, Igwe gathers his boys and charges them to adopt new strategies on their expeditions. He brings them before the shrine of *Agbalike* for fortification against the impending powers that would soon confront them. The Igwe pretends to be caring and loving to his community, especially as he is always the first to show condolence whenever people gather in sorrow for lives lost. He always offers to take care of such burials thereby presenting himself as being good to the people he leads. Unknown to them however, he is the mastermind of that heinous crime.

In one of the scenes that open the film, the Igwe, in a bid to acquire more powers, influence and wealth, presents two virgins for sacrifice at the shrine of *Agbalike*. The killing of these virgins however translate to his geometrical amassment of wealth in such a way that monies are stacked in different bags of Ghana Must Go and distributed to different characters who play roles in the act. In a bid to conceal identity from being exposed, the Igwe shoots Chief Echendu to death while undergoing interrogations before the Baka Boys over the genocide committed at Chief Nweke's house. In one of the scenes, a metaphysically controlled necklace which helps Baka Boys to induce confessional statements on culprits is placed on the neck of a criminal suspect, Chief Echendu. As he tries to confess what he knows about the genocide in Chief Nweke's compound, Igwe who feels he might be indicted in the process shoots him to death. The essence of which is to protect the secrecy of his deeds from his people. The Igwe's role in the scene is exposed at the scene where Derico Nwamama is killed. He confesses to the crimes they have committed under the watch and sponsorship of the Igwe. At the scene where the Baka Boys move to carry out justice on the Igwe, they meet his absence as he has absconded his revered throne.

All the actions of the Baka Boys as analysed in this film are driven by the desire of fighting the cause of justice by wiping criminality in the land and restoring sanity and order. In the cause of carrying out this assignment, series of life-threatening encounters are experienced. Their triumphant deeds in the film justify the filmmaker's sense of poetic justice by allowing good to triumph over evil thereby conforming to the biblical injunction that "weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). At last, the Igwe whose nefarious deeds have been exposed absconds his throne as the land witnesses' total restoration of peace and order.

Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendation

From the contextual analysis in the study above, it is evident that crime rates in Nigerian communities are on astronomical upsurge. The fears, horrors, distress and anguish it drops on mankind are unbearable. The unabated situation in spite of existing presence of state controlled security leaves the hopeless people with the only option of local vigilante group whose gallantry exploits yields positive results.

Conclusively, in line with the people's expectations, the coming of the *Baka boys* to Nkosi land yields so much result in the fight against crime, terror and distressful occurrences in the land. The conquests and total decimation of criminal elements at various instances of the film narratives reveals the efficacy of vigilante groups in the fight against crime and total restoration of sanity in Nigeria.

The study was able to contextualize its theoretical framework by bringing to bare, how the category of vigilante films under review was able to rid society of the tormenting crimes and criminality through various forms of combatant exploits. Given the successful exploits of the *Baka Boys* as delineated above, this study recommends amongst others, the institutional recognition and further encouragements of vigilante groups in the fight against crimes in Nigeria.

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Filmography

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