

EXTRACTIVE VIOLENCE AND ECOLOGICAL RESISTANCE IN JETA AMATA'S *BLACK NOVEMBER*: AN ECO-CRITICAL MARXIST FEMINIST ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper analyses Jeta Amata's Black November (2012)'s portrayal of extractive violence and its impact on indigenous communities and the environment; examines the ways in which capitalist patriarchy perpetuates ecological destruction and displacement in the Niger Delta region; investigates the film's representation of resistance and activism, particularly highlighting the agency of women and marginalized groups and apply an eco-critical Marxist feminist framework to understand the intersections of environmental justice, feminist praxis, and decoloniality in the film. It examines this film through the lens of Eco-critical Marxist feminism, uncovering the intersections of environmental degradation, capitalist exploitation, and patriarchal oppression in the Niger Delta region. The film's narrative is analyzed as a powerful critique of the extractive industries' violent impact on indigenous communities and the environment. Through the characters and their struggles, the paper highlights the ways in which capitalist patriarchy perpetuates ecological destruction and displacement, particularly affecting women's lives and livelihoods. The analysis also explores the film's portrayal of resistance and activism, emphasizing the agency of women and marginalized groups in the face of environmental injustice. This eco-critical Marxist feminist reading of Black November reveals the urgent need for a radical transformation of the extractive economy and the patriarchal systems that perpetuate ecological violence. By centering the voices and experiences of Niger Delta women, the paper demonstrates the significance of intersectional and decolonial approaches to environmental justice and feminist praxis.

Keywords: Eco-critical Marxist feminism, Environmental Justice, Patriarchal Oppression, Resistance, Activism, Niger Delta.

Introduction

Jeta Amata's 2012 film *Black November* offers a powerful portrayal of the devastating consequences of extractive violence in the Niger Delta region. The film's narrative, centred on the lives of indigenous communities, exposes the brutal realities of capitalist patriarchy and ecological destruction. Through the lens of eco-critical Marxist feminism, this paper analyses the intersections of extractive violence, ecological resistance, and inter-sectional struggles in *Black November*.

The Niger Delta region, rich in oil and natural resources, has been ravaged by decades of exploitation, displacement, and environmental degradation. The extractive industries, perpetuated by capitalist interests and patriarchal power structures, have perpetrated violence against indigenous communities, particularly women. *Black November* serves as a testament to the resilience and resistance of these communities, highlighting the agency of women and marginalized groups in the face of ecological injustice.

This paper applies an eco-critical Marxist feminist framework to examine the film's representation of extractive violence, ecological resistance, and inter-sectional struggles. By centering the voices and experiences of Niger Delta women, this analysis reveals the intersections of environmental justice,

feminist praxis, and decoloniality in the film. Through this lens, *Black November* emerges as a powerful critique of capitalist patriarchy and ecological destruction, offering a vision of resistance and hope for a more just and sustainable future. The study therefore, takes same position with Lauretta Ngcobo's view cited in Olaniyan and Quayson, wherein she sets out:

looking for a self-defining image of women who win respect in their own right because they are strong and achieve things in their lives and triumph, not only because they are men's wives or mothers of sons but because they are valued members of their societies, outstanding in their societies (Olaniyan and Quayson 540).

More so, it upholds the view that:

women are human beings, that the two sexes are (at least) equal in all significant ways, and that this equality must be publicly recognized ... that qualities traditionally associated with women – the feminine principle – are (at least) equal in value to those traditionally associated with men – the masculine principle – and that this equality must be publicly recognized (French 7).

It is against this background that this paper attempts a critical appraiser of Jeta Amata's *Black November* from the standpoint of Eco-critical Marxist feminism.

Eco-critical Marxist Feminism: An Inter-sectional Approach

Eco-critical Marxist feminism is an interdisciplinary framework that integrates eco-criticism, Marxist theory, and feminist analysis to examine the intersections of social and environmental injustices. Among its key principles are: inter-sectionality which recognizes the interconnectedness of social and environmental struggles and highlighting the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities, particularly women; Eco-criticism which analyses the representation of nature and the environment in cultural texts, exploring the ways in which human relationships with the natural world are shaped by power dynamics and social structures. Rachel Carson and Vandana Shiva are leading proponents of this theory with the former as a pioneering eco-feminist who highlighted the intersections of environmental and social justice and the latter, an eco-feminist activist and scholar who has written extensively on the intersections of environmentalism, feminism, and social justice; Marxist Theory which examines the economic and material conditions underlying environmental degradation, emphasizing the role of capitalism and imperialism in perpetuating ecological destruction with Marx and Engels as its leading proponents; Feminist analysis which highlights the gendered dimensions of environmental struggles, recognizing the ways in which women's bodies and labour are often at the forefront of environmental resistance. Chela Sandoval, a feminist theorist, developed the concept of "differential consciousness" to describe the intersectional experiences of women of colour.

It has as its key concepts: Environmental Justice as it has to do with the struggle for fair distribution of environmental costs and benefits, with a focus on marginalized communities; Ecological Marxism, a critical approach that integrates Marxist theory with ecological concerns, emphasizing the need for a socialist alternative to capitalist environmental degradation; Feminist Ecocriticism, an analytical framework that explores the intersections of gender, nature, and culture in literary and cultural texts; Intersectional Environmentalism, an approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of social and environmental struggles, emphasizing the need for inclusive and equitable environmental policies.

***Black November* and the Constructed Social Struggle for Emancipation**

In line with the tenets of Historical Materialism, the film opens with brief background information of the country, Nigeria. This is done to perhaps let the viewer understand the root cause of the crisis that emanates in the story. In poetic-style-format, the viewer is led into the historical background of Nigeria. The first part of this poem-like-structure informs the viewer about the population, languages spoken and

ends up with the fact that in spite of the country's large population and its diversity, most of its citizenry live below the poverty line. The second part informs the viewer of how endowed the country is in terms of its rich deposit of crude oil and the devastation the land suffers from oil spills. This continuous oil spillage and poverty, according to the film, has led to a short life span for the average Nigerian. The arrhythmic nature of the poem and the fact that it has no definite rhyme scheme is indicative of the devastation and poverty in the land amidst abundance of oil.

An area view of the poverty stricken, dirty-structured, filthy, disease-pruned oil rich city of Warri, in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, is immediately contrasted with the well-structured, beautiful, clean and organized city of Los Angeles, California in the United States. Militants of the United Peoples Front for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta People of Nigeria kidnap and hold hostage Tom Hudson, the Chief Executive Officer of the Western Oil in the Niger Delta in the soil of the United States and threaten to kill him should the government of the Federal Republic of Nigerian carry out its planned hanging of Ebiere Perema. This scene incidentally marks the beginning of the film. The viewer is then taken through an extended flashback to the genesis of the crisis which resulted in the kidnap of Tom Hudson in the soil of the United States of America.

The Story of the Indefatigable Ebiere Perema

Tamuno, a Nigerian police officer, is used by the Government to lead the ambush that led to the death of his female cousin, Hosana. He quits the force after Hosanna's burial and joins the United Peoples Front for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta People of Nigeria. He subsequently leads the militant team that kidnaps Tom Hudson. He tells the world, through the help of a journalist, the altruistic story of Ebiere. Born in an unsophisticated maternity home, Ebiere grows up like every other child, in a deplorable environment with little social amenities. She wins a scholarship and furthers her studies in the United States. On the day of her return from the States, she loses her unflagging mother and entire family in a pipeline explosion.

Her mother, alongside other residents, had gone to scoop fuel from a burst pipeline. The viewer is made to realize, when the police arrive at the scene that the people had reported the leaking pipeline to the appropriate authority for urgent action. The authority, like other reports of leaking pipelines had done nothing. Hence the citizenry decide to scoop fuel for their survival, and to prevent further pollution of their land and waters. The cause of the explosion is not far-fetched; the leader of the police squad, out of insensitivity and verbal attacks from the vocal mother of Ebiere, decides to light a cigarette at the scene of a combustible leaking pipeline. This singular action of thoughtlessness causes the explosion that kills scores of people. Ebiere luckily escapes death by the whiskers as she is almost at the scene before the ill-fated explosion.

This singular event changes Ebiere's outlook. It is an event that takes her out of the world of silence to a world of social consciousness of the deplorable condition of her people. She becomes courageous enough to stand up for marginalized and oppressed people. She attends the meeting of the community with a delegation from Western Oil in attendance. In the meeting, Western Oil aims to use the issue of compensation to cause division among the people. Ebiere reads between the lines and decides to speak up for her people before the seed of discord is planted among them. At first, the elders attempt to stop her with the dogmatic reason that she is a woman and should not talk at a public gathering. She however refuses to be cowed to silence by an egocentric few individuals. Speaking in defense of her rights to talk on behalf of her family, she asked a rhetorical question from these selfish few, wanting to know if “men feel pain differently from women” (*Black November* 21:32-35).

This display of effrontery at challenging the existing status quo is the second in the story; the first being her mother's challenge to the security personnel at the scooping scene from the burst pipeline. In this

scene, Ebieri's mother verbally attacks the gun wielding security personnel in a conscious and constructed social struggle. However, Ebieri's confrontation of the status quo at the community's square signifies the beginning of a genderless society. Hers is significant because it is done at the village square in the presence of all and sundry. Her action gives other women the self-confidence to break away from their false consciousness and being labeled as subaltern into a conscious and constructed social struggle for freedom. Hosana, in a display of her newly found confidence, resists her husband's order not to join other protesting women. The women, through Ebieri's speech at the community's square, become conscious of the pollution and degradation of their land and come together in a show of constructed camaraderie to tackle the government and the oil company.

Ebieri, at the community's square meeting, courageously and verbally confronts Western Oil and blames the West for being the source of the plight of the citizenry and for causing division among the people. She notes:

You come here enriching yourselves from the spoils of our land ... In the process wiping out families and generations. Yet you keep the fire burning. Give the people unrest and they will rely on you. (faces her people) What they do is to give us sickness and then treat us. They make us hungry and then feed us. They kill our loved ones and then offer us money for burials. Can you not see their plans (*Black November* 21:54-22:28).

Ebieri, through this inspiring and soul-touching speech, blames the West and their cohorts/chiefs of the land for their role in the destitution and devastation of the land and people. She blames their liberal humanistic nature. She awakens in the people the will to fight and protest the continued devastation and degradation of the environment. The struggle for the emancipation of the Niger delta takes root at this point. She challenges the culture of relegating the female to the background. As the story unfolds, she proves her point by standing out and voicing for the oppressed. The work aptly debunks the notion of the essentialist view of gender. It proves that everyone irrespective of sex has a unique role to play towards the growth of the society. This is ably demonstrated especially in the characters of Ebieri's mother, Hosana, Ebieri, Dede, Tamuno and all those who fought against repression.

The staff-members of Western Oil Company meet and propose five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000.00) compensation to the community over the loss of loved ones and sets up machinery to win Ebieri to its side and silence her course of struggle. The CEO of Western Oil, Tom Hudson gives Gideon White, the brain-washed native the responsibility to look for Ebieri and bribe her into silence. The instruction in his own words is 'find ... Ebieri ... offer her anything' (*Black November* 24:55-58). The CEO definitely knows the dire consequence of allowing an enlightened mind like Ebieri pursue the cause of her people and exposing the havoc done by the oil company to the community. This apparently prompts the offer of money inducement and according to him, "We need her on our side before this thing blows up and gets out of control" (*Black November* 24:58-25:02).

The elders sell their conscience to money and are short changed by Gideon White; he deceptively collects one hundred and fifty thousand dollars of the money for himself. The four elders take fifty thousand dollars each and then agree to use the remaining one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the hospital project. However, Ebieri turns out to be different from persons who betray their conscience money-wise and jettison a just cause. She refuses to be bought over with monetary inducement and the offer of a mouth watery career in the company as would be seen in the following conversation:

Ebieri: I really do appreciate this; but I must decline your offer. If I wanted a

- lucrative job, I would have stayed back in the U.S. My desire to be here is for the people.
- Gideon White:** This is Nigeria. Think like a Nigerian.
- Ebiere:** Am I supposed to collect a bribe to be a Nigerian?
- Gideon White:** It is just the Company's way of saying "We appreciate your effort"
- Ebiere:** What effort? Effort that couldn't keep my family alive
(*Black November* 26:18-48)?

It would be recalled that it was the Company's negligence to seal up the leaking pipeline that eventually caused the inferno that claimed the lives of her entire family members and scores of others.

The women that make up the community, comprising Ijaw, Itshekiri, Urhobo and Isoko come together in solidarity and under one umbrella to protest the Western Oil Company and the Federal Military Government's downright neglect of their community. They planned a protest march to Abuja to drive home their cry against injustice, degradation and exploitation of their community. Sadly, Hosana, one of the leaders of this march to Abuja, as stated earlier, loses her life on their way to Abuja in an ambush by a military detachment. They are accused of planning to overthrow the Federal Military Government and in a struggle that ensued between Tamuno, leader of the military detachment/one of the sons of the community and Hosana, the latter is shot dead by one of the military officers. The rest are thrown into detention with the charge of treasonable felony.

In prison, they continue to chant protest songs in team spirit over their unjust arrest and detention. They are subsequently released and they return home to mourn and bury Hosana who died in the struggle. The death of Hosana and the ordeal of the women trigger the formation of a militant group by the men to protest and fight the degradation of their land. Ebiere pleads with them against any form of arms struggle albeit unsuccessfully. She, again, leads the women in a mass protest to Western Oil and they are manhandled and brutalized by the military. Subsequently, Western Oil in conjunction with the Military Government of the federation employs the stick approach on the citizenry. Soldiers are sent to kill, maim, intimidate, brutalize, rape and arrest innocent people all in a bid to cow them into silence. This action further angers the militant group who turns violent and kidnaps white oil workers for ransom.

The Consequence of Barbaric Force

The inhumanity of the Oil Company and the Federal Military Government is implicated in the people of the region in the form of militancy. They transform into militants after losing families and loved ones. These militants take upon themselves the inhuman actions of attacking oil facilities and blowing up pipelines in a fashion similar to the military raid of their community and rape of their women. These actions of theirs turn out to be a threat to the Western Oil Company and the Federal Government who make millions of dollars daily from activities in the area. In order to avert incessant attacks on the oil facilities, the Federal Government and Western Oil make use of Ebiere as bait to get the militants. Ebiere, ignorantly agrees to act as a go-between for dialogue between the Government and the militant group. She succeeds in convincing these militants to negotiate with the Government and regrettably, the militants are executed in the gun battle that ensued.

Ebiere makes an emotional and inspirational speech at the burial of the militants and this spurs the people again to action as they embark on a search for the corrupt elders who shared the compensation money among themselves. Chief Gadibia, one of these elders who illegally shared the compensation money, had planned to return his own share of the money and for this; he is poisoned by the others. Ebiere who leads the search team wants justice meted out on the elders for corruptly enriching themselves and for the murder of Chief Gadibia. These chiefs contributed in no small measure to the plight of the people because they are collaborators and betrayals to the people's right to decent living.

They aided and abetted Western Oil and the Federal Government in denying the people of their rights as well as the degradation of the community.

These chiefs are caught and put in Chief Kuku's car to be handed over to the law enforcement agency. Ebieri, as spokesperson for the exploited, tells Kristy, the journalist: "Our elders have failed us again. They collected a bribe from Western Oil and murdered Chief Gadibia because he wanted out" (*Black November* 1:11:55-1:12:01). As she is yet speaking, the aggrieved protesters, led by the late Chief Gadibia's son, set fire on the car killing all three chiefs.

Consequently, mass arrest is carried out over the killing of the elders. Ebieri, along with others is clamped into a waiting Black Maria and whisked to prison. She is charged for inciting violence and conspiracy to commit murder in the death of three Niger Delta chiefs. There is mass protest in the land over her arrest and for her immediate and unconditional release. She pleads guilty to the charges and everyone, including her counsel is surprised. Everyone expected her to plead not guilty like the others to the charges. She tells the court, "I see where all this is going. So I'd rather not waste my time as well as that of the court" (*Black November* 1:16:13-20). Her counsel immediately called for a recess and had a tête-à-tête with her. She advises her to implicate and indict others, especially Peter Gadibia, in the murder of the chiefs, in order to set herself free.

However, in the resumption of sitting, she yet again shocks everyone by narrating how she single handedly killed the chiefs:

Ebieri: I killed the men ... I poured petrol on the ... car that burned them to death. These people (indicating the other accused persons), they tried to stop me but I wouldn't let them. I killed the men and I did it alone. I killed them because they caused the circumstances that led to the death of my Dede (*Black November* 1:19:32-1:20:08).

She is consequently sentenced to death by hanging. She saves the others with her guilty plea. Hence, she becomes a sacrificial lamb that offers her life for the emancipation of the others. However, her action awakens the consciousness of the others to continue in the struggle for the emancipation of all freedom fighters and the Niger Delta from continued pollution of the land. There is mass outcry and protest against her planned execution by hanging; so much so that the militants had to find their way to the United States on the day Ebieri is to be hanged and kidnapped the Chief Executive Officer of the Western Oil and threaten to kill him should the Federal Government goes ahead to hang Ebieri.

However, the kidnappers are tricked into believing that Ebieri has been released and in turn they set their captive free. The Federal Government goes ahead to hang Ebieri. Her death by hanging did not, however, end the just struggle of the people. If anything, her death gives the people another justifiable cause to fight for what she stood for, lived for, fought for and died for. The deprived citizenry becomes fully awake to their plight and are prepared to fight with the last drop of blood in their system. Ngugi wa Thiong'o captures this better in *Petals of Blood*:

We, the workers, the poor peasants, ordinary people, the masses are now too awake to be deceived ... when we are starving and we are jobless, or else living on miserable pay. Do you think we shall let foreign companies ... These owners of stolen property continue lording it over

us forever (326).

Eco-critical Marxist feminism and *Black November*

The film, *Black November* toe the line of Eco-critical Marxist feminism in the sense that it reinforces the efforts and struggles of the downtrodden in the Niger Delta region and beyond. This is because, according to Marx and Engels, Art has a significant role to play in the conflict that arises between the bourgeoisie and proletariat; as it will either reinforce or weaken the efforts of the exploited and dominated people. The film helps to educate as well as develop the consciousness of the Niger Deltans as well as all oppressed people that have been reduced to a state of penury by the exploitative activities of its oppressors. It is also a clarion call for the Niger Deltans not to relent in its activism until the exploiters of their land turn a new leaf.

In other words, the film reflects the Niger Delta society as a capitalist society. It proposes that the Eco-critical Marxist feminist model is a more valid panacea to the degradation of the people of the Niger Delta. For instance, character in the film is a function of dialectical materialism. It is chiefly class based. The government, Chief Executive Officer of Western Oil, White workers and the Chiefs of Warri belong to, and represent the dominant, bourgeois class while the poor inhabitants represent the dominated class. Thus, we have a situation of masters and owners of property and impoverished, exploited people. Therefore, the battle line is between the former and the latter whose land is being polluted and degraded for selfish economic gains. These exploited people's course is being championed by people with progressive ideas and led by the indefatigable Ebieri.

Ebieri undergoes transformation in the film – from a lowly birth; she acquires formal education and gets a scholarship to study in the United States. Upon the completion of her educational pursuit and her return to the city of Warri, her native land, she commits class suicide. She decides to identify with her people whose land is being degraded, polluted and exploited by the government and the oil company. She has acquired western education that would have enabled her to get a well-paid job and live a comfortable and decent life. She even declines the offer of worthwhile employment with Western Oil. She expresses her desire to live with her people rather than with exploiters. This desire of hers can be translated to mean wanting to feel and experience the traumatic conditions that her people are daily going through. She has lived in the United States where the money gotten from her land is being used and has seen the difference and the hiatus that existed between both worlds. Hence, her return to Warri is to fight the capitalist system exploiting, polluting and degrading her land. Other characters in the film like Dede, Tamuno, Timi Gabriel, and Opuwei et al are pushed into the life of militancy as a result of the unfeeling attitude and antipathy of the government and the oil company to their plight.

The Western Oil Company is a foreign firm and a multinational corporation which controls virtually every sector of the nation's economy in the world of the film. This is so by virtue of its exploration and drilling of oil, the country's main source of revenue for running the socio-politico-economic affairs of the nation. It is for this reason that the militants kidnapped its Chief Executive Officer to use as bait for the release of Ebieri. Their action expresses optimism that the oil company can, with its influence, effect the release of Ebieri from the hangman's noose.

The chiefs, the supposed spokespersons for the people, sell their conscience by collecting bribes from the oil company and consequently betray the people. Other than the chiefs, there is also Gideon White, another traitor in the story. He collects money from the oil company just to enrich himself and to bribe his own people into silence and docility while the oil company continues to pollute and degrade the land. He is further portrayed as an alienated individual who foolishly apes the ways of the Whiteman and

sabotages the struggle with his fraudulent activities. He is a parasite and a real enemy to the struggle of his own people.

It should be noted that the people's demonstration is not in any way aimed at taking over and overthrowing the government as alleged by the government security operative during interrogation of Ebieri. Rather, their action is to awaken them to their responsibility to do the needful. That is, to stop further degradation and pollution of the land as well as exploitation and dying by installment of the people. Therefore, the conflict and protest of the people is aimed at making the people and the owners of the oil company live together in peace and harmony. In any case, what the protesters of this film want is for the provision of basic social amenities and services that would make the accumulation of personal wealth less necessary. The citizens protest because they have been unfavourably treated by the system. The government and Western Oil are unjust and uncaring to their plight and are denied a right to decent living.

The film explores the technique of realism as events in the story are represented to the viewer as real as possible. This technique is the most commonly used in films and has a kind of hypnotic effect on the viewer. Events are made to appear as if they are happening in the here and now.

Also, because of the hypnosis, realistic films such as *Black November* have a way of arousing empathy in the viewer to the events that are being unfolded and also, effective in holding the viewer captive in its duration. This technique also serves well in drawing the viewer into a conspiracy against the unfeeling government. In using this technique, the film captures the Niger Delta area and the plight of the people.

The film maker, Jeta Amata hails from the Niger Delta region. Little wonder that he is able to come up with a story and a film that effectively captures the protests and struggles of the people of this region. He demonstrates a consciousness of the crisis in the Niger Delta – the neglect of the area by successive governments and multinational oil companies. It is also a display of realistic historiography of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria depicting the devastation, pollution, degradation and neglect. He has been able to reflect and capture society “without dissociating his artistic reflection from his attitude to reality” (Vasquez 29). The film also seems to have a semblance with the life and times of the late activist, Ken Saro Wiwa. In sum, the film shows a “truthfulness of depiction and a concrete historical approach to the events described” (Krylov 24). What this means is that the film maker penetrates in this film the origin and essence of the conflict between the oil company and the inhabitants of the community.

Conclusion

Jeta Amata's *Black November* (2012) offers a powerful critique of extractive violence and ecological degradation in the Niger Delta region. Through an Eco-critical Marxist feminist lens, this analysis has demonstrated how the film exposes the intersectional dynamics of oppression, highlighting the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on women and marginalized communities.

The film's portrayal of resistance, led by women and indigenous groups, underscores the imperative of centering marginalized voices in environmental justice movements. By foregrounding the struggles of the Ogoni people, *Black November* challenges dominant narratives of extractivism and neoliberalism, instead advocating for a radical reimagining of human-nature relations.

This analysis contributes to ongoing conversations in eco-critical and Marxist feminist scholarship, emphasizing the need for: intersectional approaches to environmental justice, recognizing the

interconnectedness of social and ecological struggles; decolonial perspectives that prioritise indigenous knowledge and experiences; and, Critical examination of extractive capitalism's role in perpetuating ecological violence.

Ultimately, *Black November* serves as a call to action, urging viewers to confront the devastating consequences of extractive violence and join the struggle for ecological justice and feminist liberation. Finally, as the world grapples with escalating environmental crises, *Black November's* powerful narrative reminds us that ecological resistance is inextricably linked to social justice and feminist liberation. By amplifying marginalised voices and challenging dominant systems, we can work towards a more just and sustainable future.

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