

CHAPTER TWELVE

NFVCB'S BAN OF *FUELLING POVERTY* (2012): POLITICAL MOVE OR NATIONAL SECURITY?

AÑULIKA AGINA

Abstract

This chapter offers an account of the political, social and cultural contexts that led to the production of Ishaya Bako's 28-minute documentary, *Fuelling Poverty* (2012). With two awards and an official prohibition, *Fuelling Poverty* has redefined activism, enlarged the image of a repressed populace, and given a louder voice to the documentary filmmaker. Construed by the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) as a film capable of undermining national security, *Fuelling Poverty*, sets out to portray the conflicting narratives that followed the January 1, 2012, fuel subsidy removal and the consequent protests in Nigeria. The chapter suggests that the ban raises pertinent questions on censorship which, if critically examined, make the film incapable of undermining national security, as the government avers. It argues that the ban was a political move that was intended to cover up institutional corruption and to save the government from public embarrassment, rather than a concern for national security.

Keywords: Fuelling Poverty, NFVCB, censorship, national security, politics, fuel subsidy

Introduction

In 2012, the collaborative efforts of the 32-year old film director, Ishaya Bako, and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) resulted in the production of a 28-minute documentary entitled *Fuelling Poverty*. The film keenly reflected the sentiments and political mood of the people and government of Nigeria shortly after what was arguably the biggest civil protest in Nigerian history, which was organised and effected by the Occupy Nigeria Movement¹. When the documentary arrived at the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) for approval, it was said to contain elements that were capable of threatening national stability, and it was consequently banned from public exhibition. This paper reflects on the film, its contexts of production, censorship, and the question of 'undermining national security'. The major concerns of this paper are approached through journalistic writings about subsidy removal and the protests that followed, as well as reactions to the banning of the film that were published through social media. This is because social media caused the massive protests and the news of the ban to reach a wider audience faster than the traditional

media could have done. Semi-structured interviews with officials at the NFVCB and filmmakers were conducted to support the argument.

On the 1st January, 2012, the Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, announced the removal of the fuel subsidy which was originally paid by the government to reduce the price of premium motor spirit when sold to the end-users. This meant that the pump price of petrol was to increase from ₦65 (24p) to ₦141 (53p). At a public debate on the removal of the fuel subsidy in November, 2011, held in Lagos, it was generally agreed that the subsidy would be removed in April, 2012. So, the announcement of its removal three months before the expected date was greeted with resistance. Dissatisfied with such an abrupt decision, and overwhelmed at the poverty that the increase would further plunge them into, Nigerians took to the streets to demand a return to the *status quo* or to a more responsible course of action by the government. It was clear to educated Nigerians that the subsidy scheme, originally designed to shift the burden of oil importation from the populace to the government, was being abused by independent oil marketers and government officials. Huge sums of money were received from the government under fictitious corporate entities without importation.

Retaining the subsidy would continue to enrich the oil marketers, while repealing it would impoverish the masses. The first option, retaining the subsidy without unduly enriching the importers, would necessitate a judicious and sophisticated level of record-keeping and integrity, which appear to be absent in any sector of Nigeria's economy. The state-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) was indicted in the 2010 report that was prepared by KPMG Professional Services and S.S. Afemikhe & Co. According to the report,

The FGN has also noted that despite the increase in international oil prices and Nigeria's export volumes, there has not been a commensurate improvement in the country's external reserves position. This has been further aggravated by allegations of unauthorised changes made in the management of the foreign bank accounts used for the receipt of the nation's crude oil and gas sales proceeds by the NNPC as these sales proceeds are said to be received into NNPC-managed foreign bank accounts (KPMG & SSA 2010, 10).

The second option was sure to make Nigerians fractious, and to deal an additional blow to their national image, given that crude oil was extracted in large quantities from their own land. So, either way, there were fundamental problems of governance and financial recklessness that had to be addressed. The civil society and the media and government agencies provided conflicting reports on every aspect of the oil and gas sector. Supposedly factual details obtained in the media were subsequently proven to be false or incomplete within very short periods of time.

This led to the production of the documentary, which was a search for truth in the face of falsehood and plummeting disposable income. Nigerians were being deceived by conflicting

data regarding expenditure on oil importation, and the source of the untruths was unclear. Ishaya Bako reasoned that if people asked the right questions; if they were informed, then they could debate the subsidy scheme, the scam and its removal, and could extract a measure of accuracy from the ruling class. As revealed on the official website of OSIWA, the NGO that funded the film, the objectives of the documentary are:

- to educate Nigerians and the international community on the oil subsidy scam and the ensuing probe;
- to provide easy to understand information on the cost of the oil subsidy scam on Nigerians;
- .to ensure that a process of house-cleaning is started and an implementation of the subsidy report or policies that curb this level of corruption (www.osiwa.org).

The documentary was banned by the NFVCB on 8th April, 2013, in a letter to Ishaya Bako. This was done on the basis of its potential to “encourage public disorder and undermine national security”. Ekwuazi (1991) lists the five criteria which foreign or local films must not violate in order to gain approval by the Board. The first is that such films should not “undermine national security” (p. 158). The action by the NFVCB thus raises some pertinent questions which this paper seeks to address: To what extent is *Fuelling Poverty* capable of undermining national security? Was the ban a political move by a government whose ego the film had dented, or was it genuinely in the interest of national security? Given the incessant criticisms against the NFVCB, which are later outlined in this paper, how does the 2013 ban respond to the fulfilment of its core mandate? What insights on film censorship in a democratic context can be drawn from the action of the NFVCB? To respond to these questions, attention must first be given to the contextual background of the film.

Fuelling Poverty

The 28-minute documentary, written and directed by Ishaya Bako through The Alliance Film Company and Amateur Heads Media, was produced by Oliver Aleogena and funded by OSIWA. It opens with Femi Kuti’s song, *Truth Don’ Die* (1998). The sound track constitutes a blatant allegation of the fraudulent practices surrounding the oil subsidy scheme. Considering that Anikulapo-Kuti belongs to a family that has a history of confrontations with the government, the film is an audacious reminder to the government of its dishonourable practices. *Fuelling Poverty* portrays the town hall meeting of November, 2011, where the subsidy removal was debated, the state-indicted scam, the subsequent removal of the subsidy, the protest against the removal, and the marred investigative panel that was headed by Farouk Lawan, the Chairman of the Subsidy Probe Panel.

Establishing shots of Lagos and the Abuja metropolis cut to close-ups of ruined infrastructure, thus depicting contrasting views of major cities in the opening of the film. A prologue to the documentary is narrated by Nigeria's Nobel Laureate, one of the most vociferous government critics, Wole Soyinka, hence underlining the protesting character of the film. The beautifully narrated film combines a series of interviews with petty traders, political activists, lawyers, musicians, social media activists, shots of newspaper headlines, television footage of national debates on subsidy removal, and the House of Representatives' sessions on the subsidy investigation process. An interesting section of the documentary is the inclusion of a 3-minute animation (4:45-7:02 minutes) which was used to summarise the history of oil subsidy in Nigeria. The animation, Bako affirmed, was inspired by Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) (Ishaya Bako, in discussion with the author, 21 August, 2013). It is a film that intends to encourage further debate and the quest for accountability, as well as to expose the lack of integrity that is evident in the discrepancies in the reports on crude oil subsidy among certain government officials. The thematic orientation of the documentary positions the Nigerian government as stoking the fire of poverty among its people. This is not surprising given the "recent reports of possible inaccuracies in the crude oil and gas revenues remitted to the Federal Account by the NNPC" (KPMG report 2010, 10).

Bako asserts that the film cost about ₦5M (£20,000) to produce over a period of four months, with crew members working simultaneously in Lagos and Abuja. *Fuelling Poverty* was premiered at the Silverbird Entertainment Centre in Abuja on November 29, 2012, which was followed by a roundtable discussionⁱⁱ. The dignitaries in attendance lauded the project which, in spite of its subject, failed to attract a huge audience (Oge Ekeanyanwu, in discussion with the author, 19 August, 2013). Ekeanyanwu, a journalist working for *Premium Times*, an online news platform, affirms that about 100 guests were at the venue to see the documentary. She observed that the turnout indicated a mild lack of interest in the film (interview, 19 August, 2013). However, interest in the film rose dramatically after *Premium Times* obtained from OSIWA, and published, a section of the official document from the NFVCB restricting the exhibition of the film in Nigeria. The letter, published above, was signed by Effiong Inwang, Head of Legal Services at the Censors' Board, acting on behalf of the Director General.

In the documentary, images of Nigerian protesters are juxtaposed with the President's claims about efforts to defuse national tensions over the subsidy, to eliminate the pain and losses suffered by indigenes. While petty traders bemoan the loss of income brought about by the 150% price increase for fuel, footage of an address by President Jonathan, in which the President states "that this government will not inflict pain on ourselves (14:32); we will offend God if we do things to bring perpetual pain to Nigerians," cuts to another in which

protesters claim “we have never been as insecure as we are now...there is no time Nigerians are unsafe as this time; there is no time we have experienced hardship as this time” (14:56).

Jonathan’s assertions are no less paradoxical than those of Farouk Lawan, Chairman of the Fuel Subsidy Probe Panel, who, it was alleged, received bribes from oil marketers, notably from Femi Otedola, in order to expunge his company’s name from the subsidy defaulters’ list. The documentary featured one of the panel’s hearing of witnesses, during which Lawan said, “[we are] desirous to provide in a factual manner a report to reveal ... the efficiency, transparency, accountability and openness of the entire system...” These cases of flagrant deception are in tandem with the filmmaker’s reflection on a culture of greed and corruption. The institutionalisation of corrupt practices in governance is unsettling and is capable of provoking violent eruptions among the citizens, not merely a documentary that simply depicts bits of information which had daily graced the front pages of national newspapers several months before the film was madeⁱⁱⁱ.

The combination of footage from the Occupy Nigeria protests, ministerial speeches, probe panels, long automobile queues at petrol stations and the narrator’s commentary makes a rich blend of evidence on the government’s role in igniting the fires of poverty. The protests left casualties, one of whom (Ademola Abe) was mentioned in the documentary. Abe was a young apprentice who was murdered by the police during the protest. The film is brought to an end with Femi Kuti’s song *Dem Bobo* (2004), pidgin and slang for ‘they told lies’.

Fuelling Poverty is a bold step in a new direction in Nigerian filmmaking. It is a clear example of activism taken one notch higher by bringing critical national questions to the public space – through the audio-visual medium – for debate and commentary. The film lightly portrays a history of Nigeria in its post-colonial, nationalistic conditions: a culture of reckless spending, flagrant disregard for public trust, an ocean of corruption and impunity. The film is not without its flaws: the selection of interviewees (young social activists) is suspect; it does not cut across the broad spectrum of stakeholders, even though Ishaya Bako said efforts to reach government officials for commentary failed (interview, 21 August, 2013).

NFVCB and Film Censorship

The National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) was established by Decree No. 85 of 1993 and it began formal regulatory operations in June, 1994, although film censorship began during the colonial regime. Ugor (2007, 2) notes that the British colonial government had consciously begun to erect a stifling regulatory environment for the nation’s film industry through “The Theatre and Public Performance Regulation Ordinance”. Film censorship in

Nigeria has received scant attention in the growing body of film and video literature. It is often embedded in journal articles or textbooks with other concerns (Popoola, 2003), but there are a few exceptions, notably Hyginus Ekwuazi (1991) who dedicates the ninth chapter of his book, *Film in Nigeria* to censorship, Paul Ugor (2007) in a *Postcolonial* article dedicated to the subject, and Carmen McCain (2013) whose contribution to *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship Around the World* deals with the censorship of films on religious and moral grounds in northern Nigeria. Ekwuazi in his book notes:

In Nigeria, film censorship is operated under the Cinematograph Act of 1963. The Act is a carry-over from the colonial times and for a long time was the only existing legislature on cinema in the country. Under the Act, the Minister is empowered to establish for the Federation of Nigeria, a Federal Board of Film Censors, comprising fit persons and organizations representing the thought and opinion of persons resident in Nigeria (1991, 155)

Ekwuazi also makes a distinction between open and hidden censorship; the first he refers to as conventional censorship, such as that imposed by the government, whereas the second belongs to the domain of the film producers, marketers and audiences, as well as the environment of production and consumption. This is a point which Ugor (2007) draws on to de-emphasise the NFVCB's involvement in determining film content. Undoubtedly, and as Ekwuazi aptly noted, "the film as an audio-visual broadcast medium has immense potential for good and for evil" (1991, 153), hence this is the primary reason why government agencies are weary of films targeting government policies. Ugor is of the opinion that there are market forces and cultural dynamics that influence the content of Nigerian video films, rather than the film censorship institution itself. This, and other factors including the geographical and demographic spread of Nigeria, render the NFVCB a powerless and ineffectual institution. Ugor acknowledges the value of regulation in much the same way as Chibita (2011), who claims that the local content industry in Africa warrants a degree of policing (p. 276).

However, more relevant to this paper is Ekwuazi's recognition of censorship "as a weapon of state control [...] used to make people conform ideologically within the socio-political community" (p. 154). The restriction on *Fuelling Poverty* was a political move taken to compel popular media to conform to state ideology. The regulators ignored the sources of the film's content to privilege political correctness. Ekwuazi, himself a former Managing Director of the Nigerian Film Corporation, revealed to me that it needed to be on record that the film was banned. He notes:

The DG has a boss who would query him if he didn't do that. In fact, his subordinates would not allow him be. They would bring the film to his attention for a ban. Besides, the ban simply means it should not be exhibited publicly, not that it should not be distributed. Remember that the government was still uncomfortable with the fuel subsidy issue when the film came out (interview, 5 February, 2014).

Ekwuazi's comments reveal that, as an agency of the Federal Government, the NFVCB is largely a weapon of state control and not necessarily a regulatory agency that is concerned with national security. It should be observed that the same agency has seemingly done little or nothing to the filmmakers who bypass the classification procedure (Ugor, 2007), or those who equate visual storytelling with crass immorality and excessive nudity. Lamenting the excesses of some such filmmakers, Richard Nzeamaka writes in *The Guardian* newspaper, p.67, "...most recent movies start with the display of half naked ladies whose underwear could be easily accessed from the screen of the television. The ladies [...] sit round a table, holding a glass of wine each, flaunting their exposed breasts and laps [...]" While calling for inspiring storylines, he continues, "The Nigerian movie industry should exterminate the culture of nudity in movies that promote immoral behaviours" (Nzeamaka, 2013). These comments suggest that the Board may not be performing its regulatory functions satisfactorily, or, as Lobato (2008) observes, many filmmakers circumvent the licensing procedures. According to the NFVCB's own second regulatory criteria, films should not "induce or reinforce corruption of private or public morality" (cited in Ekwuazi 1991, 158). Yet, the sheer volume of films depicting moral depravity and nudity – even under the guise of didacticism – is lamentable.

Ugor's persuasive arguments on the powerlessness of the NFVCB need repeating, since they highlight the implications of the ban imposed on Fuelling Poverty. As discussed below, one of such implications is the unintended switch from 'policing' the film to promoting it. He attributes the nature and frequency of certain themes in Nigerian films to other environmental and economic factors, including marketers, producers, religion and audiences. Similarly, Chibita (2011) argues that "neither the state nor the market is the best or the only agent for the regulation of the media. Citizens can and should play a role in policing their own popular media" (p. 277). To Ugor's (2007: 12) submission that the "board remains largely handicapped in determining the content of video film in the country" due to an interplay of the factors mentioned above, this author adds that the board is equally, if not more, handicapped in accounting for what happens to a film after its classification, approval or ban. Ugor's agitations over the non-performance of the board are echoed by other scholars. Popoola's work suggests that a heavy dose of violence is fed to Nigerian youths through the films, much to the chagrin of the Censors' Board. He asserts that:

...violent films pose a serious danger to the Nigerian society. This calls for definite intervention by the National Film and Video Censors Board to provide and enforce regulations concerning the portrayal of violence in films so that the crop of the nation's future leaders would not become armed robbers and heartless people (Popoola 2003, 139)

The NFVCB has been variously labelled 'a dog that barks but is unable to bite,' or as a toothless bulldog^{iv}. Filmmakers who defy the pronouncements of the board on their films

lose nothing (Ugor, 2007), so the effectiveness of the NFVCB is called into question as regards censorship, particularly when its actions are solely politically-motivated. On their part, the officials of the Board claim to be short-staffed and ill-equipped to perform their roles.

The role played by the Censors' Board has been variously perceived by civil servants, scholars and filmmakers alike. Rosaline Odeh, Director General of the Board (2001-2005) was described as being a high-handed. Nigerian filmmaker, Tunde Kelani, notes that, because she banned everything, he resorted to disguising characters and events in his films to avoid such restrictions (interview, 12 February, 2013) as those placed on *Fuelling Poverty*. This is a move described by Ekwuazi as a 'game of wit' (1991, 181), wherein filmmakers use analogies and metaphor to depict real life political persons and events.

During his tenure as Director General of the NFVCB, Emeka Mba concentrated on the battle against piracy, which the filmmakers complained incessantly about. He emphasised at various meetings that the duties of the Board he headed did not include legislating film content (McCain, 2013). However, filmmakers were also sceptical about Mba's agenda. They questioned the sincerity of the Board's battle against piracy when, according to them, they had not seen anyone prosecuted for pirating video films.

McCain maintains that censorship in Nigeria, and especially in the northern city of Kano, was largely on moral grounds. She notes 'the stakeholders in the Kano film industry [...] took measures to address concerns about morality' (McCain 2013, 228). Islamic leaders are concerned about preserving the cultural mores and values of the religion, and of guarding it against ridicule, even when hypocritical behaviour by Muslim fanatics was decried in the films. Similarly, Akpabio (2007, 91-92) records the banning of eight films by the NFVCB due to excessive depictions of violence, pornography, rituals and fetishism, while Ramon Lobato, in providing statistics relating to films approved by the Board, observes that many more films circulate without official approval (Lobato 2008, 351).

Reactions to the Ban of *Fuelling Poverty*

Ekeanyanwu, writing online for *Premium Times*, observes that the prohibition "was a setback for Nigeria's democracy and freedom of press as it signified a descent to ... clamping down on the media; adopted during military regimes" (interview, 19 August, 2013).

For the filmmaker, Ishaya Bako, the letter he received from the Censors' Board was his first award (interview, 21 August, 2013). The ban implied that the film had struck the right notes. The film was uploaded onto YouTube and within a month there were 497 views for the online channel. After the ban was made public, viewership rose from 5,000 to 46,397 in

August, 2013, and then 67,761 by 25 October, 2013. The government, through the NFVCB, inadvertently became the film's promoter, driving traffic to the YouTube channel to which the film was uploaded. Twelve days after the receipt of the banning letter, the African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) awarded the film the best documentary for 2013 in its category. This was after the jury, which was comprised of nine members, viewed the film in Lagos and Bayelsa States and debated the wisdom of elevating a film that had been banned by the Federal Government. In an interview with Hyginus Ekwuazi, who sat on the jury, he observed that "only one Nigerian, Steve Ayorinde, was reluctant to concede to the award; the Americans were very excited about the film and would have been upset if it was denied the first position" (interview, 5 February, 2014). On July 16, 2013, the film received the African Film and Development Award (AFDA), and has gone to film festivals, among them, Film Africa, a London-based African film festival, and the African Film Festival in New York.

Varied reactions regarding the film and its prohibition have emerged on the Internet. Most of the reactions were taken unedited on 13 April, 2013, from YouTube and from the website www.nairaland.com, which retained the comments for a longer period. Alexis Onome Egborge, a film editor, said with an air of indifference "it wasn't a great film... he (Bako) was just being opportunistic" (interview with author, 23 August, 2013). The comments below were taken from nairaland.com:

Afrinolly: The ban placed on the documentary, Fuelling Poverty (2012) is unnecessary, improper, repressive, unimaginative and counter-productive.

Bobola Oniwura: A government bans a documentary of events that actually happened not a fiction. What a laughable thing...

Chukwuma101: The banning of the documentary ...is further evidence of Nigeria's creeping descent into dictatorship...

Redfly: The fellow should take it to TV stations on Satellite TV. Let's see how dem wan ban am (Apr 13, 2013)

Omo_Tier1: Satellite is even going too far, just put excerpt on YouTube, Facebook and get the Twitter song going. FG will realise that in this day and age, censorship is almost a waste of time.

Ypzilanti: YouTube it and render FG powerless. Somebody say 'Amen'

Solomom111: *Very good move by the FG. The FG are doing their best to promote Nigeria's image, some idiots are trying to destroy it. Nigeria is not the only country with poor people.*

Phineas: *The board is trying to do its job so the records show it was censored. That said, I know this documentary is on the AMAA 2013 nomination list so the censorship thing is just an “eye service”*

Sannei: *Is this the so-called freedom that the constitution allows...*

Riba_man: *This is a worrying situation; where and when is this going to end? So free speech is gone to the dogs, all this in a civilian regime???*

Akpa Ife: *Abeg make them ban love film becous 2 much love n sex don dey 2 much 4 Ghana n Nig movies*

Okiki Oluwa: *Truth is always bitter. In Nigeria, the FG bans various things but the ban is always like an advert. People still do movies on poverty, corruption and other ills...*

Anonymous: *In fact, I wish it was my work – censoring it has already made it sell out. It will surely go viral...*

4_Play: *Lol, didn't realise it's already front page. How does exposing poverty and corruption undermine national security?*

The comments above reflect the variety of opinions that trailed the ban. The respondents recognise that opposition and the quest for accountability are essential aspects of a democracy. However, repression has become typical of, not just Nigeria, but also other African nations where opposition is openly stifled.

Exactly what is meant by ‘undermining national security’ is not clear to filmmakers, nor to the respondents above, and especially not in the case of Ishaya Bako and *Fuelling Poverty*. The expression, which is contained in the official documents of the NFVCB as well as in the letter addressed to Ishaya Bako, is indeterminate. Although films have the potential to agitate viewers and rouse them to individual or collective action, there is as yet no evidence in Nigerian filmmaking history to suggest that a film has disrupted national peace and security. Given the surge in national security problems that has been witnessed in Nigeria in the last ten years, a film of this nature is incapable of harming anyone, as the last comment shows. By its action, the film agency has undermined the democratic principle of freedom of information and expression, in addition to the public trust put in the government by Nigerians. The ban is clearly the weapon used to protect the government’s warped agenda, rather than portraying genuine concerns to preserve national security. It is not surprising that there is also comment in favour of the ban since, as one commentator notes, it is necessary for the records of the Board. Undoubtedly, the majority of the comments above support the argument in this paper.

That *Fuelling Poverty* can weaken national security in the case of the fuel subsidy remains to be proven. There was no case of defamation, nor misrepresentation of facts or ridicule by the filmmaker, which would naturally invite protests from concerned parties and their allies. The filmmaker confined the contents of the documentary to newspaper reports, television footage and free opinion, none of which were incendiary. In an interview with Eddy Eddion, Lagos Zonal Coordinator of the Board (5 February, 2014), he defended the ban by citing the case of a Danish cartoonist, Kurt Westergaard, who depicted the Prophet Mohammed irreverently, which sparked religious protests in September, 2005. What Eddion ignored is that Westergaard neither represented factual information nor respected Islamic sensibilities. His portrayal of the Prophet Mohammed wearing a bomb in his turban, however creative or metaphoric that might be, was fictional and flagrantly insensitive to Muslims' feelings. Eddion's analogy cannot therefore be held to be parallel to the subsidy story that *Fuelling Poverty* is.

Further, an acquaintance with the recent history of Nigerian oil politics reveals that the volume of fraudulent government expenditure and financial malpractice is staggering^v. It appears that it is the government who threatens people's security in Nigeria, not a documentary: the people who have to drink polluted water from the creeks of the delta, pollution which is caused by the unprincipled alliance between the Nigerian government and oil companies, the people who pay taxes, electricity, water and other bills to the government. Yet, the same people have to purchase candles to light their homes at night, or provide generators to power their residences and work places; they have an erratic water supply, an unreliable transport systems and bad roads. An examination of the glaring threats to national security would be useful to further prove why NFVCB's banning letter is more of a political move to shroud official wrongdoing than a security-conscious regulation.

On National Insecurity

Chibita (2011) rightly observed that "governments and business interests might hide behind claims of protecting national cultural values, freedom of expression or consumer choice to close out oppositional voices" (p. 279). Such a strategy is easily uncovered since it reveals what the real insecurity is: the 'insecurity' of the ruling class and a government which consistently fails to meet the expectations of its citizens. There are multiple causes of national insecurity within the Nigerian space, with most bearing religious or ethnic colourations. Undeniably, they pose various challenges to governance, including the depletion of resources allocated to the maintenance of law and order. A brief look at some of these factors is necessary so as to dispel the assumption that *Fuelling Poverty* has the potential to 'undermine national security'.

Adelugba states:

It has been observed that over the years insecurity has prevailed because different governments, individuals and institutions have systematically entrenched a culture of marginalisation within the social order. This has led to the reproduction of widespread violence, arbitrary hierarchies and avoidable deprivation. This situation has often led to the perpetuation of poverty, widened material inequalities, sustained militarism, fragmented communities, subordinated groups and fervid intolerance (2008, 3).

Chibita (2011) acknowledges inequalities such as those articulated by Adelugba, above, while arguing for a proper regulation of popular media. Her concerns are based on the potential consequences of allowing a widening of such inequalities, especially when they are magnified through the lens of popular media. Adelugba's observation is in consonance with other indices of national insecurity that are proposed by Olawale Albert, Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies. Olawale has identified key security problems, among which are communal violence, political assassinations, electoral violence, youth militancy, oil theft, illegal bunkering, sea piracy, kidnapping, Sharia crises and the Boko Haram insurgency. Only a society that promotes equal rights amongst its citizens can be assured of its own stability. Ohwojeheri (2012), blogging on the key points made by Olawale at a Muslim Lawyers' Forum, maintains that "religious groups just like ethnic groups turn to violence when they notice that the conception of national security does not capture their interests. In this case, terrorism is an extreme case of the psychological warfare involving both the terrorist and the state." <http://naijainfoman.wordpress.com/>

In addition to these, the United States Institute of Peace, in an article entitled *The Security Challenges Facing Nigeria*, has also listed two main threats to national security in Nigeria. These are the Niger Delta protests, with all the consequences of the unrest in the region, including kidnapping and fire explosions, and Boko Haram (United States Institute of Peace, 2012). Several bombings of churches, private and public buildings, notably the UN building in Abuja in August, 2011; the This Day offices, also in Abuja in April, 2012, the kidnapping of 276 school girls in Chibok, northeastern Nigeria, and monthly bombings that have escalated since January, 2016, and that have been attributed to the activities of the Boko Haram group. The group constitutes by far the biggest threat to Nigeria's stability and security. Unsurprisingly, the government's efforts to tackle the scourge of this terrorist group are less than sufficient, if not actually unproductive. Andrew Walker's observation in that regard is significant:

Tactics employed by government security agencies against Boko Haram have been consistently brutal and counterproductive. Their reliance on extrajudicial execution as a tactic in "dealing" with any problem in Nigeria not only created

Boko Haram as it is known today, but also sustains it and gives it fuel to expand (Walker 2012, 1)

On the scale of instigators of national insecurity in the country, Nigerian filmmakers have no place. This is due to the weightier issues of governance that have yet to be squarely and honestly tackled. The ban implies that censorship in this context is indeed an attempt to conceal official wrongdoing and a needless weapon of state control. Not only did Bako's letter prohibit exhibiting the film, it also 'threatened' him under the pretext of national security with the inclusion of the last paragraph: "All relevant national security agencies are on the alert. A copy of this letter has been sent to the Director General, Department of State Services and the Inspector General (IG) of the Police for their information." Should the IG of the Police ignore the regular bombings by the Boko Haram group in pursuit of a young and harmless filmmaker?

Conclusion

This chapter began with an overview of the factors that led to the production of Ishaya Bako's documentary, *Fuelling Poverty*. It is an anxious filmmaker's response to the prevailing and repressive circumstances of managing national wealth derived from crude oil. Bako's anxiety, shared by OSIWA, the media and indeed Africans, finds expression and solace in his documentary, following the undulating voice of the January 2012 protests. After descriptions of the film and the regulatory body's dismissive role, attention is drawn to popular reactions to the ban, which as has been argued above, reflects state corruption and cover-up. Prohibiting the film yielded the most undesired effect and enlarged the image of the people, revealing them as being more powerful, in the sense of being more capable to determine who sees the film and who does not, than the government. In the same vein, Bako's 'voice' is louder than the censor's miscalculation since viewership was broadened by the ban.

In addition, the chapter has highlighted, among other evidence, few cases of national insecurity in Nigeria to refute the claim by the NFVCB on the rationale for banning *Fuelling Poverty*. What has been demonstrated here is that, rather than being a threat to national security, the documentary created an avenue for dialogue between the government and the people, although the former preferred a monologue. It needs restating that *Fuelling Poverty* should not have been banned because it did not depict erroneous and fictional content. It contained no inflammatory messages since the filmmakers' sources were based on publicly-held information. Even if some government officials share the plight of the poor masses brought on by the subsidy removal, the ban on the film discredits the vestiges of probity and

security concerns that might have been left for the world to see. It is certainly a political move that cut off the nose to spite the face.

I. Occupy Nigeria, following the original Occupy protest in New York in 2011, is a protest movement that rallied Nigerians at home and abroad through the use of social media in January 2012 to resist the increase in petrol price resulting from the oil subsidy removal in the same year.

II. Panelists at the roundtable are Clement Nwankwo, Executive Director, Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), Abuja; Otiye Igbuzor, Executive Director, African Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development; Ifueko Omogui Okauru, former Head, Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS); Okechukwu Ibeanu, Chief Technical Adviser, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Oby Ezekwesili, former Vice President, World Bank's Africa Division, spoke at the event before the roundtable commenced.

III. Some newspaper headlines on the fuel subsidy which featured in the documentary are The Punch, 19 April 2012: NNPC, PPPRA, 72 firms stole N1tn subsidy money; 20 April 2012: Subsidy fund'll finish before year end; Daily Sun, 23 April 2012: Subsidy cabal desperate; The Punch, 20 May 2012: Subsidy scam report on Jonathan's table; ThisDay, 29 June 2012: Major marketers cited in widespread subsidy abuse.

IV. In the African Film and Politics Conference at the University of Westminster, Nov. 2013 where this paper was first presented, Mustapha Koiki, Adepate and Aledoh, Khadijat referred to the same idea in their paper titled 'Role of the NFVCB in Correcting Obscenities in Nigerian Movies'. They argued, 'Many films in Nigeria have been observed to be awash with undiluted obscenities. Viewers have been subsumed in different forms of sexuality which leaves one to wonder if the films ever passed through the corridors of the regulatory body'.

V. See Ogundiya, Ilufoye Sarafa (2011). Beyond the "Geography of Terrorism and Terror of Geography" Thesis: Corruption and the Development Tragedy in the Niger Delta Region. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 27(1): 57-

91

References

Adelugba, Dapo. 2008. Introduction. In: *Rethinking Security in Nigeria: Conceptual Issues in the Quest for Social Order and National Integration*. Dakar: CODESRIA, pp. 1-4.

Chibita, Monica. 2011. Policing Popular Media in Africa. In *Popular Media, Democracy and Development in Africa*. Edited by Herman Wasserman, 269-281. Abingdon OX: Routledge

Ekeanyanwu, Oge. 2013. *News, National: Banned by Nigerian Government, Fuelling Poverty Garners More Accolades*. [Online] Available at: <http://premiumtimesng.com/news/142168-banned-by-nigerian-government-fuelling-poverty-garners-more-accolades.html> [Accessed 4 February 2014].

Ekwuazi, Hyginus. 1991. *Film in Nigeria*. 2nd ed. Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation.

McCain, Carmen. 2013. Nollywood, Kannywood and a Decade of Hausa Film Censorship in Nigeria. In: *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship Around the World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 223-240.

Nzeamaka, Richard. 2013. Nigerian Movies Should Inspire. *The Guardian*, 28 February, p. 67.

Ohwojeheri, Igho Hakeem. 2012. *naijainfoman.wordpress.com*. [Online] Available at: <http://naijainfoman.wordpress.com/2012/07/02/summary-of-a-paper->

presentation-by-a-christian-professor-at-the-muslim-lawyers-association-of-nigeria-6th-annual-conference/

Popoola, I. S., 2003. Nigeria and the Challenges of Violent Video Films. In: F. Ogunleye, ed. *African Video Film Today*. Manzini, Swaziland: Academic Publishers, pp. 129-140.

KPMG Professional Services, & S. S. Afemikhe & Co. 2010. Current State Assessment Report on the Process and Forensic Review of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Abuja: Federal Ministry of Finance.

Ugor, Paul. 2007. Censorship and the Content of Nigerian Home Video Films. *Postcolonial Text*, 3(1), pp. 1-22.

United States Institute of Peace, 2012. *The Security Challenges Facing Nigeria*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.usip.org/olivebranch/the-security-challenges-facing-nigeria> [Accessed 24 October 2013].

Walker, Andrew. 2012. *What is Boko Haram?*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR308.pdf> [Accessed 25 October 2013].