HUNGRY PEOPLE

Written by

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Original Screenplay

FADE IN:

INT. HAVERSACK BOYS - NIGHT

We peer slowly through an upside-down military van. A walkie-talkie hangs at the front of the dashboard, glitching between static signal and a tactical communication:

“Bako command, do you copy? Bako command do you copy? Report back to base now!… Clear!”

As the camera reaches the walkie-talkie, an uprooted limb slaps on the side door mirror, splashing blood across. A ring with the Nigerian Coat of Arm hugs a finger on the arm.

Title card:

HUNGRY PEOPLE.

INT. DOMINIC RESIDENCE - DAY

AZUKA DOMINIC, a 12 years old boyish-looking girl with a low cut, sits, staring at a broken picture frame of President Nnamdi Azikiwe. She considers it for a moment until she is distracted by her two younger brothers who barge into the hut. They are **CHIDI DOMINIC and CHISOM DOMINIC.** They play-fight, knocking themselves down to the ground. Their mother walks in. She’s **ADA DOMINIC** (late thirties with a facial tribal mark).

ADA
(To her children)
Oya, everybody get ready! Chisom! Chidi! The demonstration will soon start.

Azuka shoots her mother a puzzling look.

ADA (CONT’D)
(To Azuka)
Azuka help your brothers get set.

The two boys proceed to select garments from a sack. Azuka strolls to a corner.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Outside is a typical Nigerian village in the late sixties. Round and rectangular flats with conical thatched roofs are scattered around. Dozens of families turn up all smiling and cheerful.

Everybody wears a variation of green, white and green in their attires, reflecting the colours of the Nigerian flag. They gather and mingle within themselves, everyone walking in unison towards the Village Square - an open field in the middle of the village market.

INT. DOMINIC RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Azuka looks at herself in the mirror. She wears a large white overall shirt reaching her knees. She looks at her reflection until she's interrupted by her mother who shows up behind her.

ADA
Ah, ah, Azuka. Why didn't you wear that blouse I bought for you on Independence Day?

AZUKA
Mama I like this one like this.

The two boys show up and begin to tease their sister for looking like a boy. Azuka just stares at them and shakes her head.

ADA
At least cover your hair. Wear a scarf.

Azuka gives her a mom a disapproving look.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

The Dominics - Ada, Azuka, Chisom and Chidi, flock out of their hut hand-in-hand. Ada gathers them together. From across the crowd, a man, **OHA** (forties, stoic) approaches and hugs them each. He kisses Ada on the cheek. Chisom turns to face his father.

CHISOM
Papa, what is the party for?

Oha kneels to his son's level.

OHA
The soldiers are about to enter Obigwe. We want them to know we are all friends.

AZUKA
We are?

A beat. Oha winces. He stands and pats Chisom on the head.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE ENTRANCE - DAY

About a dozen Nigerian military soldiers are stationed on an untarred road. A local charcoal-looking signage hangs valiantly with the inscription “Welcome 2 Obigwe. Home of the satisfied.” Two military trucks are parked by. The Nigerian flag hangs gallantly in the wind. A couple of soldiers do inventory on the available weapons while the others are standing at attention.

Behind the second truck, two soldiers count a bullet magazine while a senior soldier **LIEUTENANT BAKO** (32) observes. A telephone rings behind them and Bako instinctively steps back and answers.

BAKO
Doko Ground Assault Squad!
Lieutenant Bako, Nigerian Military Infantry!
(A beat)
Yes, sir!
(Another beat)
Crystal clear, sir. Negative!
(A beat)
Yes, sir! Over and out!

He drops the telephone and marches towards the first truck stationed at the entrance of the village. He meets **MAJOR STANLEY DOKO** (mid forties, lanky, afro hair spilling out of beret). Major Doko is the leader of the battalion and it shows. His voice booms with authority. He leans on his walking stick as he moves, fittingly as a third limb. Bako stands at attention over dramatically, and thumps Doko a salute. Major Doko nods at him.

BAKO (CONT’D)
Orders from above, sir!

MAJOR DOKO
Yes?

Bako ducks his head.

BAKO
Negative, sir! Procession is prohibited!

Major Doko conjures up saliva and spits it away in disgust. He waves Bako off.

He walks and stands right at the entrance of Obigwe and stares directly into the village. He raises his nose to the sky, closes his eyes and inhales the breeze of the village. He breathes out slowly, opening his eyes like he'd just had a eureka moment. The soldiers are fixated on their leader.

MAJOR DOKO
Cursed be our forefathers that we permit emotions to interfere with our national duty! We are where we need to be! At destiny's feet!

He walks to his soldiers and begins to inspect them as he talks.

MAJOR DOKO (CONT'D)
They made us powerless while our people were mutinied day after day! Tonight, Nzeogwu will feel the pain your comrades felt!

The soldiers exuberate. Doko points at the village.

MAJOR DOKO (CONT'D)
Inside that village lies freedom! Inside that village, we retake our dignity in battle! We will not be silenced by bureaucracy!

The troops cheer. They raise their weapons and stomp the ground.

A beat. He begins a roll call. They each answer with a thumping "Yes sir!"

MAJOR DOKO (CONT'D)
Onoja! Usman! Ojo! Salisu!

The selected soldiers form a line. They are **LIEUTENANT ONOJA, LIEUTENANT USMAN, LIEUTENANT OJO,** AND **LIEUTENANT SALISU.** All in their early to mid thirties.

MAJOR DOKO (CONT'D)
Tonight you will be remembered.

Major Doko walks and places his hand on the first truck. An inscription is amateurly designed boldly on the side of vehicle: "HAVERSACK BOYS." He traces his hand from the H to the last S, stopping at the door and then jumps into the front passenger seat. The selected soldiers follow suit immediately, with Usman assuming the driver's seat. All the other soldiers cheer them on valiantly. Bako hides his face and scratches his head.

Haversack Boys revs and the soldiers begin their invasion into Obigwe.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE - VILLAGE SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

The villagers have assembled around the village market square. They gather according to their families, men standing in front and leading. Azuka watches on with her brothers and parents.

From across the slopy road, Haversack Boys barrages forward towards the village square. Oha begins to chant “One Nigeria!” “One Nigeria!” and encourages others to join. A moment later, the whole village joins in the chant.

Usman pulls Haversack to a stop in a cloud of dust. The soldiers jump out and immediately start cocking their guns. Ojo and Salisu begin to secure the perimeter. Usman blasts two rounds into the air as Onoja jumps and salutes Doko, waiting for further instructions. Pandemonium.

The sounds of the rifle quiet the villagers. Major Doko steps out of the truck and observes the crowd. Oha makes his way through the crowd to the front of square. He puts on a smiley face.

OHA
Welcome to Obigwe. Home of the satisfied. We...

His voice tails out as Usman points a rifle right at his face, the barrel slightly touching his nose. He retreats back.

Doko walks majestically from one end of the crowd to the other. He studies the villagers - most of them still have smiling faces on but its obvious they’re terrified. Chidi’s eyes catches Doko’s gaze; the little boy hides behind his mother.

As Doko walks to the other end, out of the corner of his eye, an old wrinkly woman walks by slowly, hugging a walking stick, seemingly unperturbed by the soldiers’ presence. It takes her about 5 seconds to stop moving. Major Doko locks eyes with her. She raises and stretches her wrinkly hand as if she’s about to salute, then points directly at Onoja in the far end. She sways her hand to the next soldier, locking eyes with him before moving on the next. She finally stops at Major Doko. She brings her hand down but holds his gaze.

OLD WOMAN
Obigwe must eat.

A beat. Ojo points a gun at her. Doko watches her intently as she strolls away and disappears into the crowd. He turns and faces the villagers.

MAJOR DOKO
Split yourselves into two. Men and boys on this side. All the women and girls on that side.

The villagers stare at him confused. They begin to look and whisper between themselves, sensing an impending danger.

ONOJA
Are you people deaf? Oya separate yourselves now!

The soldiers begin to shove villagers around, separating families and lining them according to their genders.

Oha tries to protect his family. He hugs all of them together. Salisu shows up and drags Chisom and Chidi away from their mother's embrace. Ada struggles with him but he pushes her away. He then drags the boys and pushes them to the men's line.

Confused, Azuka begins to follow her mother to the girls line. Salisu notices and steps in her way.

SALISU
Where do you think you're going?

Azuka tries to speak is too terrified to muster any words. She points at the line meekly.

AZUKA
I'm a... I'm suppose to be...

ADA
Come here, Azuka!

Azuka begins to walk to her mother but Salisu stops her in her tracks. He holds her arm tightly.

Oha walks up to Salisu and tries to free his daughter from the soldier's grasp. They begin to struggle for a moment but all of a sudden- something jams hard into Oha's temple, knocking him to the ground. Major Doko stands tall over Oha, pointing his walking stick at him. Salisu finally shoves Azuka to the boys line. Ada bursts out in tears.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE - SAME TIME

Angle behind the second truck - the telephone rings violently. It rings for a moment unanswered until - Bako runs into frame and picks the call.

BAKO
Doko Ground Assault Squad!
Lieutenant Bako, Nigerian Military
Infan--

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. COMMAND ZONE - SAME TIME

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
--Shut up your mouth! Where is your commanding officer?

GENERAL ABDULLAHI (50, with a pot belly) is furious on the phone. He clinches a smokey cigarette in his other hand.

BAKO
Yes sir! Sorry sir!

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
What?

He looks around the room confused and impatient. Two soldiers **CAPTAIN BALA** (35)and **LIEUTENANT FASAN** (40) watch the general. They are in a situation room with archaic military technology littered around.

GENERAL ABDULLAHI (CONT'D)
Fetch your commanding officer at once!

BAKO
Sir, he proceeded on Operation Agama.

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
He what? Your last instruction was precise. Do not proceed! I thought that was clear!?

BAKO
Sir, I delivered the message as instructed sir. He proceeded on his own accord.

General Abdullahi drops the telephone from his face. He paces around for a second. Takes a puff.

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
I need a status report right now! How many men did he take with him?

BAKO
Sir, it was Captain Oj-

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
What vehicle did they use? How many artillery is left?

Bako is overwhelmed.

BAKO
Sir, I...

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
You WHAT!?

A beat. Bala and Fasan watch intently. General Abdullahi takes another puff.

Bako paces on the spot, deluged.

GENERAL ABDULLAHI (CONT'D)
Listen here, mister man. You need to run and stop Major Doko before he does something stupid. Tell him he's made a grave mistake and he should withdraw the troops or else!

BAKO
Yes, sir. I understand sir.

Bala and Fasan nod their heads in support of their General.

BAKO (CONT'D)
I'm on my way sir.

General Abdullahi is agitated.

BAKO (CONT'D)
I'm on my way sir!

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
You're still here!? Escape from this phone!

Bako drops the telephone and dashes off.

INT. COMMAND ZONE - CONTINUOUS

General Abdullahi drags his cigarette, trying to keep his composure.

CAPTAIN BALA
Permission to speak, sir.

Abdullahi nods slightly.

CAPTAIN BALA (CONT'D)
Sir, its too late.

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
What?

Bala looks to Fasan for support.

LIEUTENANT FASAN
Yes, General. Its already too late. The moment Major Doko and his boys stepped foot in that village, it was already too late.

CAPTAIN BALA
You must have heard the stories sir…

The general is perplexed.

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
I'm not sure I understand you. I'm not asking Doko to withdraw because I'm scared of an urban fairytale. He has seriously breached the line of command and insubordinated his superiors. This is about the military code of conduct!

Bala and Fasan are unsure.

LIEUTENANT FASAN
Sir...

He looks at Bala.

CAPTAIN BALA
Sir... They are forces that exist far beyond what our mortal minds can comprehend.

A beat. General Abdullahi stares at them.

LIEUTENANT FASAN
Sir...

CAPTAIN BALA
Sir... I don't think the Head of State gave a personal command to stay off Obigwe...Because of the code of conduct.

General Abdullahi locks eye with Captain Bala and walks to his face.

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
You better watch what comes out of your mouth. We are fighting for God and country. In the chaos of war, both sides pray to the same God for victory.

A beat.

GENERAL ABDULLAHI (CONT'D)
You do realise that village Obigwe, is the original hometown of Chukwuma Nzeogwu? This is more complex than you think.

CAPTAIN BALA
Sir... Obigwe is protected by Erimeri, the ancient goddess of appetite. Erimeri has protected her home for thousands of years, hiding in the shadows. It is rumoured that villagers in Obigwe have been immune to the famine due to provision from their goddess.

LIEUTENANT FASAN
I don't know what you've heard about Obigwe sir. But the forces behind that village are not a fairytale.

Off General Abdullahi's condescending look...

CUT TO:

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE ROAD - DUSK

Bako runs desperately through the untarred road into Obigwe. He stops to catch his breath and looks over his shoulder. The village square looms ahead in the distance. He takes a deep breath and continues to run.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE - VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Haversack Boys stands gallantly in the center of the village square. The invading soldiers have taken a formation, spreading themselves across the male lines, each with rifles pointed at the villagers.

Major Bako walks and stands in front of the crowd. He conjures saliva and spits it out.

MAJOR DOKO
People of Obigwe! Do not be afraid. I and my brethren are only messengers. Your leaders have failed you. The colonel made false promises from his selfish desires and doomed you all.

His gaze sweeps over the crowd. He turns and steps to the men's line. He lifts his head and looks up. Closes his eyes.

MAJOR DOKO (CONT'D)
God save your souls.

He points his gun randomly at the men and boys and begins to shoot. Instant chaos. The other soldiers join and open fire immediately, reigning bullets on the men and boys who scatter around trying to escape, but the soldiers down every single one of the them.

The shots echo around for a moment until Major Doko stops shooting and raises his rifle to the sky. He opens his eyes.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE - VILLAGE SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Bako stops in his tracks. The carnage stands tragically in front of him. He's dismayed.

He runs to Major Doko, teary eyed.

BAKO
(Sobbing)
Sir... What have you done?

Doko gives him a side look, barely acknowledging his presence.

BAKO (CONT'D)
This is unholy sir.
(Starts shaking his head)
There's no coming back from this.

Angle on the soldiers one by one; Fear slowly creeps into their faces.

The remaining female villagers mourn in unforgiving sorrow. Everyone cradles the bodies of their loved ones. The soldiers just stare at them.

Onoja removes his beret and scratches his forehead. He looks towards Usman - Usman looks like he's about to burst into tears. Off Usman's face-

CUT TO:

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE - VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

Its a bluey night. The moon emerges from the clouds. Piles of bodies lay stacked on top of each other.

POV - Staring straight up at the sky through two dead bodies lying on top of us.

End POV.

A section of the pile of dead bodies begin to make way as something emerges from beneath.

Azuka climbs out of the pile soaked in blood. She tries to walk her way down but trips and falls, rolling to the ground. She kneels on one leg and looks straight at us, the camera. Her whole body trembles in cold and shock.

Azuka begins to walk forward, away from the village square. She walks like a zombie, drifting ahead lifelessly. She takes a couple of steps but then stops abruptly when a bright white light appears in her path, floating in the air. Azuka is stunned.

CU: Through her eyes, we see the bright white light slowly come towards her, and then engulfs her.

She drops to her knees.

A beat.

She gets up slowly and looks straight up towards Obigwe's road. Her eyes look devilish.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE ROAD - NIGHT

Major Doko and his men are fleeing Obigwe in Haversack Boys. Bako hangs behind the truck. He looks defeated. The old vehicle tries its best to speed, but its just not working.

Usman is driving again with the major beside him. All the soldiers look terrified except for the Major. He sits still and unshaken. The soldiers look around, pointing their rifles in every direction as the truck moves.

Suddenly, a voice starts to echo around the vicinity. It's a child's voice. It repeats a phrase in Igbo language, "Nni bu ndu," which in English means "Food is life." The mysterious voice encapsulates them as they move.

As Usman drives, villagers begin to pop out of every corner. They all gaze at the vehicle as it moves, the headlight illuminating the women's angry faces. The terrified soldiers desperately point their rifles in every direction.

MAJOR DOKO
Stay put! Nothing will happen!

But the soldiers become even more agitated. The villagers seem to be getting closer to the truck as they pop out of corners randomly. Suddenly, Usman takes a bend and straight ahead in their path, the old wrinkly woman with the walking stick is seen stationed in the middle of the road, leaning on her stick with a death stare at the incoming vehicle. The vehicle's headlights illuminates her.

Usman tries to avoid the old woman. He takes a sharp turn and loses control of the vehicle. It looks as if they are about to crash, but then Major Doko stretches and swerves the truck and just as its about to hit a tree, Bako jumps out to save his life. The truck swerves back into the road and all of sudden, they are right back at the village square. Haversack Boys staggers to a halt.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

But Bako is all alone. Its as if everyone suddenly disappeared. He looks around desperately. He's back at the base, at the entrance of Obigwe. The other truck is still parked where it was. A couple of soldiers spot him and are also shocked and confused. General Abdullahi approaches Bako with Bala and Fasan behind him. They see the horror on Bako's face as he tries to catch his breath.

Bako shakes his head defeatedly. General Abdullahi kneels to Bako's level.

GENERAL ABDULLAHI
Well?

But Bako can barely muster any word. Bala and Fasan give each other a look.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE - VILLAGE SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

The villagers begin to encircle the truck with the terrified soldiers inside. They walk in circular motions chanting “Obigwe must eat. Obigwe must eat.” Major Doko blasts a round in the air to deter them but the villagers remain unperturbed. They continue their march and chant, their voices drowning out the sounds of the gunshots.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE - HILL - CONTINUOUS

Behind the village square, the villagers chant in the distance. Azuka is standing and watching the soldiers from high up a hill behind the village square. She looks ethereal.

EXT. OBIGWE VILLAGE - VILLAGE SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

The villagers continue to chant. They have completely surrounded the soldiers with just about 30 meters distance between them.

Pure dread is on the soldiers’ faces. Ojo is already sobbing. Doko starts to prepare for defense. He removes his hand gloves to reveal a ring with the Nigerian Coat of Arms as pendant. He picks up a magazine of bullets and begins to load up his rifle. Salisu and Onoja see him and also begin to strap up.

The mysterious child’s voice returns. The voice whispers something opaque and instantly all the weapons drop from the soldiers hands. Major Doko is dumbfounded.

The villagers chants slowly faded out. They all turn to look at something behind them. The soldiers watch curiously, wondering what the hell was coming. We wait in anticipation with the soldiers for a beat. The villagers part the way as Azuka gallantly walks through the crowd. They turn their heads in unison as Azuka walks and stops in front of the soldiers. She locks eyes with Major Doko for a moment. The voice comes back; “Nni bu ndu,” the child whispers.

With an aloof stare, Azuka casually walks to M, tak, takes his arm and bites a portion off effortlessly. Salisu stands motionless. He screams in horror as blood spews out of his detached arm. Azuka strolls away with the severed arm and a bloody mouth. She walks back through the cleared path as the villagers watch her but pauses at the middle of the crowd.

Everyone’s attention is on Azuka. Salisu screams in the background. Azuka turns and locks eyes with a terrified Major Doko one last time.

AZUKA

Eat.

She disappears into the crowd. The villagers descend on the soldiers. They bite into their flesh, ripping them apart bit by bit indiscriminately in a gory, bloody, gluttonous scene.

Azuka drags along but before going away, her eyes catches someone. It’s her mother, Ada. Ada looks at her daughter. There’s sorrow written all over their faces.

Ada nods at her. A tear drops from Azuka’s eye.

Azuka walks away and disappears into the shadows.

The end.