

Impact Partners, Screen Pass Pictures and Whitewater Films

Present



99 min.

Tribeca Film Review: 'Big Men'



APRIL 25, 2013 | 02:14PM PT

Rachel Boynton's extraordinary docu untangles the knotty saga of an American petroleum company's entrance into Ghana

Scott Foundas (<http://variety.com/author/scott-foundas/>)

Chief Film Critic

[@foundasonfilm](http://twitter.com/@foundasonfilm) (<http://twitter.com/@foundasonfilm>)

Like a number of recent hot-button docus, from “Crude” to “Inside Job,” Rachel Boynton’s extraordinary “Big Men” should come tagged with a warning: The side effects of global capitalism may include dizziness, nausea and seething outrage. Using razor-sharp journalistic skill to untangle the knotty saga of an American petroleum company’s entrance into the West African republic of Ghana, Boynton’s film also poses a series of troubling philosophical questions: Is unchecked greed an intrinsic part of the human character? Is “the greater good” ever more than a convenient euphemism where big business and big government are concerned? Wide fest exposure and ancillary sales seem assured for this Tribeca world premiere, which also richly deserves a theatrical pickup.

“Big Men” reps Boynton’s first feature docu since her acclaimed 2005 debut, “Our Brand Is Crisis,” which looked wryly upon the intrusion of American political spin doctors (including James Carville) into the 2002 Bolivian presidential election. (The docu was subsequently acquired by George Clooney for a narrative remake.) In her new film, Boynton again charts a fascinating and often fractious collision between First World and Third, beginning with the discovery of a large offshore oil field (named Jubilee Field) 60 kilometers from the Ghana coast. The find is the handiwork of Kosmos Energy, a Texas-

based oil startup, which begins rapidly working toward the pumping of “first oil” from the Jubilee site.

We are still in the salad days of 2007, before the Dow — and the price of oil — took their calamitous 2008 tumbles. And Kosmos has a friend in the Ghanaian government, or at least in a hapless go-between, George Owusu, whose local EO Group first obtained the lucrative exploration rights from the Ghanaian national oil company, GNPC, and who literally cold-called Kosmos CEO Jim Musselman while searching for an American backer. Owusu goes on to become one of “Big Men’s” most absorbing and representative characters — a modest man, ill prepared for the machinations of venture-capital America, whose own motives may be less pure than they at first appear. If he didn’t exist, Graham Greene would have had to invent him.

Boynton structures “Big Men” as a series of revealing comparisons and contrasts. While in Ghana, she makes a side trip to nearby Nigeria, a country whose own oil reserves (first discovered in 1956) have been responsible for a vicious cycle of exploitation with little appreciable benefit for the country itself, save for the well-lined pockets of a few bureaucratic fat cats. Boynton even secures access to a group of masked paramilitary rebels who call themselves the “Deadly Underdogs,” who have taken to sabotaging sections of the Nigerian pipeline in an effort to bring attention to the country’s plight. (A bit more terrifying in name than reality, one Deadly Underdog speaks enthusiastically to Boynton about his hope that, by appearing in her film, he might be recognized on the street — no matter that he’s wearing a ski mask.) Still other pirates, we learn, some of them oil company employees, have taken to siphoning off (or “bunkering”) oil from the busted pipeline and reselling it as a low-cost gasoline alternative.

Nigeria becomes the film’s cautionary tale — a vision of what Ghana, without careful government controls, might become. But the film’s most telling juxtaposition is that of Ghana itself — with its dirt roads, colorful tribal couture and low cement buildings — against the steel-and-glass cage of Wall Street (and, specifically, the offices of Kosmos funder the Blackstone Group). The visual textures couldn’t be more different, but what Boynton finds in both locales is surprisingly similar: a merry-go-round of investors, subcontractors and sub-subcontractors looking to turn national resources into personal wealth with little regard for collateral damage. Multiple times, the point is made that, because Kosmos spearheaded the research that led to the Jubilee discovery, they expect to receive unusually favorable terms from the government in return. Then a national election ousts Kosmos-sympatico President John Kufuor, and the plot thickens like a pool of bubbling crude. By the time all is said and done, Owusu and Musselman have both found themselves ousted in a mercenary corporate coup.

“Big Men” digs in deep and spins a sprawling tale — a real-life “Chinatown” or “There Will Be Blood” that stretches across five years, all the way up to Kosmos’ 2011 IPO on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Along the way, there are remarkable meetings with tribal kings and captains of industry alike — the aspiring “big men” of the title — who answer Boynton’s tough, smart questions about their (profit) motives, and occasionally turn them back on the filmmaker herself. Would she, after all, be making this film if Jubilee Field had turned out to be barren? Perhaps needless to say, even as the end credits roll, the economic future of Ghana remains shrouded in doubt.

Tech package is uniformly superb, especially Jonathan Furmanski’s crisp HD videography, which captures Jubilee Field in all its imposing majesty and menace, and editor Seth Bomse’s tight structuring of a potentially unwieldy narrative.

Los Angeles Times

Review: 'Big Men' hits a gusher of oil and greed

Rachel Boynton's compelling documentary follows what happens when Texas oil exploration firm Kosmos Energy makes an enormous discovery called the Jubilee Field off the coast of Ghana.



By Kenneth Turan, Los Angeles Times Film Critic
June 13, 2013 2:37 p.m.

No single resource is more essential to modern life than oil, and no film offers a more incisive look at how the enormous wealth oil creates subverts the morality of individuals, corporations, even entire countries than Rachel Boynton's compelling documentary "Big Men."

Those who remember Boynton's excellent previous film, "Our Brand Is Crisis," an examination of political consultants working at the highest levels of Latin American elections, know this director's specialty is the kind of insider access filmmakers dream about. In "Big Men," set in the world of oil capitalism in the West African nations of Ghana and Nigeria, that is true with a vengeance.

Working only with director of photography Jonathan Furmanski, Boynton spent seven years on this project. She made seven trips to Nigeria before even starting to film, six more to shoot, seven trips to Ghana and seven to Texas, the home base of oil exploration firm Kosmos Energy.

The connections Boynton made, especially with Kosmos CEO Jim Musselman,

became critical when Kosmos made an enormous discovery off the coast of Ghana. Christened the Jubilee Field, this deposit had the potential to return a staggering \$2.2 billion to investors.

Because of all the work she put in before the camera rolled, as well as all the years she put in filming, Boynton was perfectly positioned to go behind closed doors. "Big Men" is a story told as it happens, not reconstructed once all the dust is settled. The result is not only an examination of the inner workings of international capitalism but a look at the vagaries of human nature as well.

For it's not just oil that everyone is dealing with in "Big Men," it is the universality of greed. As one interviewee puts it, "to become big is the prayer of everybody, an instinct in every human being." It's not only that everyone wants a share of this enormous money, it's also that everyone thinks that they truly deserve it. There are not heroes and villains here so much as people who are sure they are right and determined to look after their own interests.

While the discovery of oil is a new experience for Ghana, it is old news in nearby Nigeria, and "Big Men" goes back and forth between these countries, in part because the mess that is the Nigerian oil situation is very much viewed as a cautionary tale by politicians and bureaucrats in Ghana trying to figure out how to deal with this potential windfall.

For though Nigeria's oil has created enormous wealth, hardly any of it has reached the people of the country, creating resentment that is as towering as the riches. The fury and frustration of impoverished Nigerians is so great that it has resulted in systematic sabotage of the pipelines.

To better understand this part of the oil equation, Boynton managed to get access to the camp of one of the key militant groups, the Deadly Underdogs, interviewing ski mask-wearing leaders as inebriated followers shoot off automatic weapons in the background.

What Ghana should do with its enormous oil wealth soon becomes an issue in that country's presidential elections, with the opposition insisting it will do a better job than the incumbents in making sure that the money is used for education and improving living conditions, not to line the pockets of politicians.

Watching all this and hoping that their interests will not be disregarded are the principals of Kosmos Energy, who remind everyone that they took huge risks with no guaranteed reward and spent hundreds of millions of dollars in preparation expenses without immediate recompense.

One of the most interesting things about "Big Men" is that the ultimate outcome of this situation is unknown. Will Ghana make good use of its revenues? Will oil companies feel so disrespected that essential capital will be driven out of the country?

The only thing that's sure is that when on-the-ground reality is conveyed with the complexity and fascination it is here, unforgettable documentaries are always the result.

kenneth.turan@latimes.com

THURSDAY, MAR 13, 2014 11:00 PM UTC

How big oil destroys the world: A real-life saga of greed

Rachel Boynton's brilliant muckraking doc "Big Men" goes from Manhattan to Dallas to the Niger Delta

ANDREW O'HEHIR



If you want to know how the world works, as opposed to how we are told it works – or how we wish it might work – you need to see “Big Men,” a remarkable new investigative documentary about oil, money, Africa and America that comes with Brad Pitt’s name attached as executive producer but was directed by Rachel Boynton. If Boynton is not yet as well known as Laura Poitras, the fearless documentarian closely associated with Glenn Greenwald and Edward Snowden, she belongs in the same company as one of the world’s most intrepid filmmakers. In “Big Men,” she gains access to the corporate boardroom of the private equity firm Warburg Pincus, where guys in suits sit around discussing a \$2 billion oil deal, and to the camps of armed militants in the Niger Delta, where guys with Kalashnikovs, wearing ski masks and castoff NBA T-shirts, vow attacks against the corrupt Nigerian government.

Boynton’s previous movie, “Our Brand Is Crisis,” explored how a little-noticed presidential election in Bolivia became a chance for American campaign consultants, including James Carville, to road-test their tactics and messages (on behalf of a pro-

American, pro-capitalist “centrist” candidate, to be sure). George Clooney is now developing a fictional version of that story, reportedly to star himself and Sandra Bullock, and “Big Men” may have similar potential. Although I suspect I know where Boynton’s political opinions lie, she’s a rigorous straight shooter who isn’t naive about the inner workings of the capitalist world order and does not seek to demonize anyone. It might be fair to describe “Big Men” as a tragic fable about how an event that should have made things better for many people – the discovery of an immense underwater oil field 35 miles off the coast of Ghana – wound up doing no one any good. But it’s more like a Russian novel than a straightforward morality play, and the question of who the heroes and villains of the story may be is left up to you.

Indeed, Boynton always seeks to return the story to a human scale, even when it’s a story of skulduggery, corruption and international finance (three interchangeable terms, one might say), a story that leaps around, soap-opera style, from New York to Dallas to the Niger Delta to the Ghanaian capital, Accra. For instance, it would have been easy for a certain kind of left-wing muckraker to render Jim Musselman, the CEO of a small oil company called Kosmos Energy (does that sound like a CIA front group or what?), as an inherently bad person: He’s a bald, rich, white guy from Texas who stands to become a whole lot richer after Kosmos’ gamble on Ghanaian oil turns into a winning lottery ticket. When he shows up to greet a Ghanaian tribal chief bearing bottles of Scotch and Hennessy and a \$10,000 donation for an educational charity (whether or not this is a bribe remains unclear), it’s pretty easy for the viewer to start edging toward contempt.

But Musselman comes off here as an essentially decent person, raised on a ranch where his parents and grandparents are buried, who genuinely believes that Kosmos’ huge offshore oil project will benefit Ghanaians as well as his investors. But of course Musselman’s personal qualities don’t matter; like everybody else in the story, he’s a prisoner of money. (Somewhere Karl Marx makes a similar point: Under capitalism, human beings are supposed to be the masters of capital, but in practice it’s the other way around.) Boynton opens her film with ruthless quotations from Milton Friedman and from John Huston’s “Treasure of the Sierra Madre,” and those are exactly the right touchstones, both for this story and for the larger sphere of international capital it represents. Greed is not exactly a new feature of human society, but in our current dispensation it has been elevated to the level of a theological virtue. With this much money on the table – Kosmos was at one point valued as a \$5 billion company – it’s every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost.

Musselman is really nothing more than a well-compensated employee of the nameless investors at Warburg Pincus and Blackstone who bankrolled Kosmos in the first place. As Warburg Pincus partner Jeffrey Harris explains in passionless terms, they are interested in only one thing: a sizable return on their high-risk investment, which was somewhere in the high hundreds of millions. Those faceless 1-percenters (more like 0.1-percenters, to be fair) are the real “big men” who stand behind all the others in the story. The phrase is self-explanatory Nigerian slang, often applied to politicians, clan leaders, businessmen and criminals alike. If Musselman dreams of being a big man, so does a charismatic Ghanaian businessman named George Owusu, who sold Kosmos the oil rights he held after cold-calling everyone named Musselman who lived in Dallas. (In this tale of betrayals, switchbacks and double-crosses, it’s a phone call they will both live to regret.)

As for the nested levels of officialdom who have reportedly siphoned \$400 billion-plus in corruption out of the oil economy in Nigeria (Ghana's next-door neighbor) since the 1960s, they're big men too, who have enriched themselves and their cronies while driving the country's overall standard of living down even as it has become a major petroleum exporter. As for those guys in the ski masks along the Niger River, who call themselves the Deadly Underdogs – are they really political rebels with an agenda of economic justice, or just wannabe big men? One tells Boynton that he wanted to help her make her film because he dreams of becoming famous on television, which is somewhat unlikely given that we can't see his face. One reason “insurgents” blow up the Nigerian oil pipelines, it turns out, is because they've been promised payoffs by local contractors from the ensuing cleanup.

But “Big Men” is more than a roundelay of hopelessness or cynicism, since Boynton makes clear that there are activists in both Ghana and Nigeria who are struggling against the cycle of corruption and greed. Corruption in Africa is often described in the West as if it were an endemic condition, rather than one that has been deliberately induced. Imperialism in the 19th-century sense no longer exists, but the neo-imperialism of the current age rests upon oil companies and other outside corporate interests who have found that breeding and nurturing a corrupt and semi-Westernized local elite is the easiest way to do business in the developing world. As one Ghanaian activist tells Boynton, any attempt by Africans to resist this system leads to ideological pushback. When a newly elected Ghanaian government decided to exercise its right to take a second look at the Kosmos contract in light of the oil field's massive value, the Wall Street Journal described its decision as “local thuggery.”

It didn't have to be this way, and still doesn't. Yes, I'm aware that the era of African nationalism and African socialism in the 1970s had grave problems, some of which stemmed from its status as a zone of proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union. But almost everything about this situation was accurately predicted, years ago, by Frantz Fanon, Patrice Lumumba and others: Any time people in the developing world allow their natural resources to be exploited according to rules of the “free market,” rules written by Western corporations and/or Western governing elites for their own benefit, they will come away worse than they were before. Is there an exception to this to be found anywhere in the world? Fanon would have said that eventually “the wretched of the earth” will wake up and learn their lesson. If this vivid, compassionate but unstinting film is any indication, Rachel Boynton is not convinced.

Oil Money, and Where It Flows

'Big Men' Looks at Ghanaian Oil Discovery  NYT Critics' Pick

By JEANNETTE CATSOULIS MARCH 13, 2014

Not for nothing does “Big Men,” Rachel Boynton’s astonishing documentary about the 2007 discovery of oil off the coast of Ghana, open with a quotation on greed from the economist Milton Friedman. Dropping us into a perfect storm of avarice, this cool and incisive snapshot of global capitalism at work is as remarkable for its access as for its refusal to judge.

Tagging neither heroes nor villains, Ms. Boynton wonders instead who benefits from, and who is harmed by, the billions of dollars in play. Should the enormous risks and staggering costs of getting to “first oil” guarantee its finder — in this case, a small Texas start-up called Kosmos Energy — a sweetheart deal from the Ghanaian government? The amiable chief executive of Kosmos at the time, Jim Musselman, certainly hopes so; eager to satisfy his corporate backers, and with Ms. Boynton’s camera in tow, he schmoozes with West African royalty and glad-hands middlemen.

Back home, the 2008 financial downturn throws a wrench in the deal making (and in Mr. Musselman’s career), and new leadership in Ghana necessitates frantic renegotiations. While the big men fight for percentages, we travel to Nigeria to witness firsthand the trickle-down consequences of more than 50 years of oil extraction — and an estimated 400 billion petrodollars stolen or wasted. Apocalyptic scenes of poverty, corruption and violence greet us, a fever dream of Ghana’s possible future; but it’s here, amid the chaos of destroyed pipelines and polluted townships, that the film’s disdain for overt blame pays off, turning what could have been a standard fat-cat shaming into a more nuanced portrait of universal self-interest.

Through it all, in comfortable offices and on dirt roads, at lavish dinners and in crummy encampments, Ms. Boynton is there, her pointed off-screen questions revealing a swarm of competing concerns. As we saw in her first feature, “Our Brand Is Crisis” (2006) — about the involvement of American spin doctors in a Bolivian election — her style is careful, her mind curious and her approach open-ended. Vilifying no one, she and her wily cinematographer, Jonathan Furmanski, nevertheless nudge us to notice telling details: the heavy gold rings adorning the fingers of a Nigerian government official during a discussion of corruption and Mr. Musselman’s smooth deflection of a thorny taxation issue.

Bringing to life a netherworld of shifting agreements and shuffling allegiances, “Big Men” unfurls a complicated story teeming with masked militants, well-fed politicians,

reassuring suits and the desperate poor. To the film's major players, whether the development of Ghanaian oil will be a boon or a curse to the nation's citizens seems irrelevant; when money is talking, those who have none also have no voice.

Big Men

Opens on Friday in Manhattan.

Produced, written and directed by Rachel Boynton; director of photography, Jonathan Furmanski; edited by Seth Bomse; music by Nathan Larson; released by Impact Partners, Screen Pass Pictures and Whitewater Films. Running time: 1 hour 39 minutes. This film is not rated.

Big Men Reveals How the World of Oil Actually Turns

By Alan Scherstuhl Wednesday, Mar 12 2014



Courtesy Tribeca Film Festival

Militia men in the Nigerian delta.

Here's the rare current-affairs documentary that doesn't just show us something gone wrong in some part of our world. Rachel Boynton's first-rate *Big Men* instead peels the skin off the world itself, revealing the gears as they grind away, casting familiar doc scenarios in shades of illuminating gray: The heroes and villains in global business aren't always easy to suss out, but it's never hard to spot the victims.

Her topic is one that you might think you already have the gist of: the effects of international oil companies on the African countries whose resources they suck. But *Big Men* is no simple screed against tick-like profiteers growing fat on malnourished hosts, which is fine — you either know that story already or you've chosen to live in denial of it, and no new doc is going to change your thinking.

Big Men is a richly detailed portrait of a small American oil company's quest to begin drilling a deepwater oil field off the coast of Ghana. It's also a richly detailed portrait of Ghana's attempts to lure foreign financiers to help exploit the find — and, after elections

install a new populist president running on an anti-corruption platform, of Ghana's determination not to see oil become another gold or cocoa, resources the world has long wrung from the country without its people seeing much benefit.

"Developing nations can't get greedy," says Jim Musselman, CEO of the Texas-based Kosmos Energy, as he explains why Kosmos won a hugely favorable deal with the government of Ghana. As he sees it, Kosmos, being the first company in, should see greater rewards than the industry standard — it's a start-up taking risks. To his credit, that's the most alarming thing that comes out of his mouth in the movie, despite the impressive access Boynton seems to have been given to Kosmos and its management. He also bristles, hilariously, when a Norwegian tells the Ghanians at a conference that they must aggressively tax whatever foreign company extracts the oil; afterward, he smilingly presses his government contacts. Surely they would only do that to the next company, right?

A banner outside that conference proclaims "Oil — A Blessing, Not a Curse." Telling the extraordinary (yet entirely ordinary) tale of disparate parties attempting to secure that blessing for themselves, Boynton scores interviews with kings and presidents, with venture capitalists and gun-toting rebels in the delta region of Niger, a country that serves as nearby Ghana's great cautionary example. In the 50 years of Nigeria's oil boom, some \$400 billion have been stolen by corrupt officials. In bracing, upsetting scenes, the masked rebels complain to Boynton that everyone gets rich but them, that the delta is kept in wretched poverty as a matter of practicality — people who are scrambling for the next meal aren't likely to be concerned with which party is highjacking the pipeline.

These militants fire their guns in the air and climb into boats to attack oil infrastructure in a region that suffers from no shortage of spillages and collateral devastation. Late in the film, one admits that the vandalism isn't always principled: A contractor from Shell, he claims, has promised that if there's enough damage done — and, presumably, environmental disaster — that young man could score work on a cleanup crew. The implications sting. From Wall Street to Africa, personal gain triumphs over any idea of the greater good. (Boynton's one misstep: cutting from broke Nigerians arguing about oil to red-black wasps swarming about on a pump.)

There's hope that Ghana might be different. Boynton interviews many officials in the new government, then led by now-deceased president John Atta Mills, who speak passionately about preserving Ghana's wealth for Ghana. "You can live in relative comfort," Mills promises a crowd in the run-up to the election. That means, of course, getting "greedy," as Musselman would have it — "They're just as crooked as they can be," he says of Mills's administration — but not getting as greedy as almost everyone else in the world has. Will Ghana succeed? This film, a great one, demands a follow-up.

The Washington Post

Movies

'Big Men' movie review: Pandora's Box filled with black gold in Africa



While illustrating the situation in Ghana, "Big Men" exposes how oil riches haven't trickled down in Nigeria, leading to groups of bandits sabotaging oil production and selling oil on the black market. (Tribeca Film Festival)

By **Stephanie Merry** March 27

Documentarian Rachel Boynton must have some serious powers of persuasion. Not only did she get remarkable access to the employees and boardrooms of an oil company on the cusp of a massive discovery, but she also interviewed masked, armed bandits in Nigeria, corrupt government officials in Africa and dealmakers at the Blackstone Group investment firm.

But Boynton's most impressive feat in "Big Men" is how she takes an impossibly convoluted scenario, makes sense of it and tells a story that's riveting on its own but also serves as a parable about greed and human nature.

If "Big Men" were a fictional movie, it would be something akin to "Syriana," with characters from all corners of society demonstrating how a big oil discovery affects their lives. The most prominent player is Jim Musselman, the founding partner and chief executive of fledgling Kosmos Energy. His company, with the help of Blackstone and

other investors, has taken a huge risk betting on oil fields off the coast of Ghana when the movie opens in 2007. With big risks come the potential for big rewards: As the pioneering exploratory company, Kosmos secured a sweet deal from Ghana's government (and its state-run oil company) should the Jubilee oil field pan out.

Jubilee turns out to be a trove of black gold, which is good news and bad news for Kosmos. Once a new president takes over in Ghana, the favorable deal the company struck with the previous administration isn't quite so iron-clad as it seemed. It's Ghana's oil, President John Atta Mills reasons, and the people of Ghana should be the ones to prosper from the discovery. Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Justice starts asking Kosmos some pointed questions about bribery, which Musselman, an affable Texan, greets incredulously. Welcome to the big leagues.

To give some additional context to what's at stake, Boynton travels to Nigeria, another African country blessed and cursed with oil resources. The discovery, initially made in the 1950s, has been a boon for corrupt politicians, who have embezzled hundreds of millions of dollars. But much of the rest of the country has remained in stark poverty. Groups of desperados have responded to the injustice by either sabotaging oil production or draining pipelines and selling the oil on a thriving black market.

Wrangling so many stories and all of the necessary information into one documentary is an incredible feat, and editor Seth Bomse pieces it together in a way that's both informative and surprisingly suspenseful as the discord between Musselman, his investors and government officials in Ghana grows. To her credit, Boynton doesn't seem to have an agenda here so much as a desire to explain what's happening and letting each participant tell his or her story. What she makes clear, though, is that the possibility of disaster is very real for everyone involved.

"Big Men" harkens back to such mythology as King Midas and Pandora's Box. But unlike in those fated tales, Boynton has the foresight to see the potential tragedies before they become a reality.

□□□½

Unrated. At Landmark's E Street Cinema. Contains nothing objectionable. 99 minutes.

Brad Pitt and Rachel Boynton Reveal the Backstory of African Oil Doc 'Big Men' (Q&A)

12:45 PM PDT 3/31/2014 by Scott Feinberg



4



20



0



1



0



Email



Print

Comments

Made over seven years and in partnership with Pitt's production company Plan B, Boynton's film tracks American oil company execs and African politicians as they negotiate a drilling deal that could benefit everyone except the local population.



On Wednesday night, following a Los Angeles screening of **Rachel Boynton's** documentary *Big Men* -- an edge-of-your-seat film that offers an unprecedented inside look at how American oil companies and African governments interact when oil is discovered in Africa -- The Hollywood Reporter [2]met up with Boynton and one of the film's executive producers, **Brad Pitt**, to discuss how the project came together and what they hope people will take away from it.

Boynton spent seven years of her life making the film, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in April, screened theatrically last year (unfortunately rendering it ineligible for Oscar consideration this year) and is now playing in select theaters across the nation.

It seems to be the hope of Boynton and Pitt -- whose Plan B production company champions films of social value, such as this year's best picture Oscar winner *12 Years a Slave* -- that *Big Men* will raise awareness and bring about reforms that will benefit the people of African nations who have heretofore rarely shared in the profits of the discoveries of oil within their borders.

Here is a transcript of our conversation.

Rachel, how did you get onto this subject matter?

BOYNTON: I made a film called *Our Brand is Crisis*, which I finished in 2005; it premiered in 2006. Then I started thinking about making a film about oil because oil was on the news every 30 seconds, and the prices were going through the roof and everything that I was seeing about oil was very partisan and very frightened about this crisis. But there was nothing from inside the industry. I'm always very interested in perspectives that I'm not seeing. And I thought, "Well, I can get access to that. I can do that. I was very proud of my first film, but I felt I could do better and I wanted to push myself to do something harder. And I decided that the most difficult thing I could do would be to make a movie about the oil business. And then I decided to do it in Nigeria. And my initial intention was to do it in Nigeria. I did it to prove something to myself as much as anybody. And then, I also did it because, of course, I like to work on films that I feel are emblematic of something fundamental about the way we're living.

How did you gain the sort of access that you did -- with the oil execs, with the African government officials and with the resistance fighters? That's what everyone came out of this screening asking...

PITT: I asked her that. I asked the same thing -- it's mystifying.

BOYNTON: I did a PowerPoint presentation -- I mean, that's the very short answer. I spent about a year pursuing Kosmos [the American oil company], managed to get them to finally return my emails and then, ultimately, went to their office and did a PowerPoint presentation. And they said yes to it.

PITT: And a year and a half in Nigeria before you even started filming!

BOYNTON: Yeah. I went to Lagos for the first time in August of 2006. And then I shot the very first material in 2007, but we really started shooting in earnest in early January 2008. That's when like, the serious shooting began.

And what do you feel these various parties felt they had to gain from cooperating with you?

BOYNTON: "Movies are good for your reputation." That was the first line of the PowerPoint. I think, you know, they hoped that it would be a good news story about oil. I think they knew that I was sincerely interested in their perspective and interested in listening to them. And I think they felt like they had a story to tell.

Do you think that being a female worked to or against your advantage in those situations?

BOYNTON: I never think of being a woman as a disadvantage. It just wasn't based on that. You know, I was raised by a single mother, I never had a dad around and I kind of never really thought about it. I just don't think about it. I do what I want to do.

Were you pretty much out there by yourself?

BOYNTON: It was a two-person crew. I did all the sound and I shot some of it. The great stuff was shot by other people. [laughs] But it was always a two person crew; it wasn't just me. And I carried all the luggage.

PITT: I will say -- I didn't mean to interrupt you.

BOYNTON: No, no, don't be silly.

PITT: I just want to say this: I might easier tell you [Rachel] how I feel; I'll rarely tell you [Scott] how I feel. [Suggesting that men have a greater level of comfort with women than men.]

BOYNTON: Well, I say that, too. I'm being a little tongue-in-cheek here. I mean, the truth is, of course it makes a difference that I'm a woman. Of course it does. I don't think of that, but of course it doesn't—

PITT: Right. I just think it's wrong to characterize it in just that way because it minimizes a year and a half of developing those relationships and knowing that you're in good hands. I mean, for Musselman [an American oil exec prominently featured in the film] to be that open and that kind of candid? I mean, he's got everything to lose. I mean, starting the film, in most of our minds, he's going to be the bad guy, you know? But the point is is that to get that kind of trust, as you know, it's not every day, male or female. So, yes, I agree with you.

Right. And I didn't mean to—

BOYNTON: No, no, no, everyone asks me that question, and it's a very understandable question because the movie's called Big Men, I think there are two women in it and I'm a woman. So, it makes sense, as a question.

So when you put in that kind of time-- You said six years?

PITT: Plus.

BOYNTON: It premiered at Tribeca last year. I went the first time in August of 2006. So however long that period was—

PITT: She filled up two passports.

BOYNTON: Yes.

PITT: And she made two babies.

BOYNTON: That's true.

Wow. You were certainly busy. Were your kids born there?

BOYNTON: Oh no, they were born in New York. My youngest has a passport. I thought about taking her to Ghana, but I didn't.

Rachel, how did you first hook up with Plan B? And how important was it to have champions like that to make sure that your efforts of the past six-plus years found an audience?

PITT: I first want to say it's such a small part of the story. We were very fortunate when Rachel called us, having been a fan of her first one. And the fact that she was taking on this difficult subject matter, we, you know, felt fortunate to ride piggyback on. And it's complicated material. It's important material for our time. It speaks to us. And we felt very lucky if we could help, you know, push a door open or something. This is her singular endeavor, six years plus, and it's no small feat.

BOYNTON: I think having Plan B's support early on, as I did, was really essential to being taken seriously by a lot of people.

PITT: I don't know. People in the know certainly know that our brand is crisis. So it wouldn't matter—

BOYNTON: I think you're selling yourself short, Brad.

PITT: No, no, but when you get into the outer reaches and—

BOYNTON: No offense, but there are people in Nigeria who don't know who you [Brad] are. So it's true.

PITT: No, I know that. That's why we love to go there. [laughs] But if they do, they'll know, like, Troy or something I'm least proud of. But the things that get there, that have that reach, become a conversational point. Like guy said in the film, "I saw him on TV!"

BOYNTON: Yeah. He [Brad] is trying to sort of push me into the foreground and put himself in the shadow, which I appreciate very much. I appreciate it. I totally appreciate it. It's very generous of you [Brad]. But I want to be clear about this: having the support of somebody like Brad Pitt on a film like this makes a world of difference, it does make a difference. It makes a difference in terms of being taken seriously. It makes a difference in terms of people wanting to be involved in the project. Does it give me access to things? Absolutely not, but it does help me get the film made, and I'm incredibly grateful for their support.

PITT: And I want to be clear and say that it was just a pleasure getting the call. It was no sweat. I did very, very little, as far as actual work -- in fact, nothing -- and it was all Rachel's heart and sort of tenacity to get the film done.

But it fits the Plan B model, right?

PITT: Yes. What I do feel very fortunate about and what I'm very proud of at this point is being able to sit in and see where you can help nudge complicated, complex, worthy material. I loved the story. I thought the story was worth telling. And if Rachel calls again, it'd be a pleasure to do something again.

If you guys could have it your way, what would you like the impact of this movie to be? What would people leave it thinking or doing differently?

PITT: Well, I mean, there's multiple stories going on here. There's the oil industry itself. There's our understanding of the development of the third world nation. And there's a bigger human story at play here, and, you know, the guy says it: "We need to be more focused on what unites us than what divides us." That gives me chills. Like, that's the summation of everything. That's 12 Years a Slave. That's it. And that message, it just, it's the biggest thing we need to get across. I'm going to go on further. I'll start to go on a bit of a rant here about responsible capitalism, about, you know-- Now, I'm really breaking out. The film also, you know, presents this idea in what I call, for lack of a better term, responsible capitalism, where everyone can be a winner; it doesn't have to be just, "How do I put in the smallest and make the biggest gains?" Everyone can be responsible for each other. Everyone can live better. And that's where I want to see capitalism go.

BOYNTON: Well, the problem comes when we start thinking about maximum profit, which is really one of the questions I'm asking in the film. And this notion of maximum profits. It's not about profits. It is a question about what's fair.

PITT: Yeah, the question of fairness. Can there be such a thing as fair distribution and profit?

BOYNTON: It depends on what we value. I mean, for me, I have to say, going to Nigeria and spending the time I did there really changed the way I see things. When you see people living without drinking water-- I mean, they don't have water. And it's very hard to understand what that means, but think about that for a second. You can't brush your teeth without the risk of getting some disease that might kill you. Like, it's a problem. And it's a problem that causes people to die young, that causes people to not live. No one should be living that way. It sounds like it's unrelated, but it's not unrelated. To me, it is a film about capitalism, and it's not a film that's calling one set of people good and one set of people bad, but it is looking at the fundamental conflicts in the way things work today. I'm not really an advocacy filmmaker. Do you know who Marcel Ophuls is?

Of course...

OK. Well, I'm a big fan of his. The Sorrow and the Pity, that's his best film. The reason I'm a fan of his is because what he did -- what he does in all of his films, which is really rare -- is he manages to ask these questions that are very fundamental to how people are living in the moment. So, he makes these movies, and then you watch them, like, 40 years later and you're like, "Oh, my God, these films are amazing. They're like these treasure boxes that preserved a way of thinking." And that was how I was approaching this film. I was trying to look at something that I think is fundamental about the way we live now and to preserve it. I wanted the film to get at that. I want people to watch it in 50 years time and say, "Oh, my God. That was how we were living." And I hope it will make people think, now, about how we might change it.