

**Exploring Terrorism in Nigeria: Iyorwuese Hagher's
Mulkin Matasa as Paradigm**

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Abstract

This paper discusses ethnic terrorism in polarised Nigeria highlighting different reasons as been responsible for the uprising of this deadly insurgency. The paper establishes the fact that in most cases, the struggle for the control of resources, political factor, religious fundamentalism, intolerance, and many other reasons are responsible for the emergence of different sects in the country. The paper identified the Boko-Haram sect as well as the farmers/herders as the most recent and deadliest terrorist groups that are truncating the peaceful coexistence of the country. To successfully discuss the subject matter under review, the paper uses Iyorwuese Hagher's *Mulkin Matasa* as paradigm to show the functionality of drama and how drama can be used to draw attention to ethnic terrorism in Nigeria. The paper unravels the polarised nature of Nigeria and the contradictions that characterise the country, which cut across the diverse interests of groups. The paper concludes that, drama such as the one discussed herein, has the potential of bringing forth workable ways of ending many of the lingering crises of all kinds across the country which has continued to mar the growth and development of the nation.

Key words: Discerning, Ethnic Terrorism, Polarised Nigeria and Drama.

Introduction

Nigeria as a nation is a conglomeration of different Ethnic groups. The nation has over the years been put under siege by different violent conflicts orchestrated by different terror groups. It is regrettably appalling to note that, the country has not been able to take advantage of her multi diverse nature for the growth and development of the Nigerian society.

For several years now, the uprising of the Boko Haram activities in the North East region of the country as a terrorist group has actually crippled and grounded the country's development. In recent past and a continuous rise in the dreaded Fulani herders terrorist activities within the middle belt region of the country and by extension to some of the regions in the South-South, South East, South West, North East and North West regions of the country has called for serious attention to issues of ethnic terrorism, which has seriously permeated the country in the last decades.

The persistence of these violent conflicts over a relatively long period of time in Nigeria left a preponderance of the people (scholars in this context) to wonder if this case scenario is about conflicts of interest, conflicts of values or conflicts of identity.

Nigeria has in the last two decades witnessed severe terror attacks on her citizenry in virtually all parts of the country. The point to note here and very fundamentally is the fact that these terror activities within the Nigerian context have emerged taking different terror approach and dimensions ranging from coordinated armed assaults, rocket attacks, assassinations, kidnapping, use of improvised explosive devices, car bombings, use of child/female bombers, use of military uniforms and vehicle attacks on the high way. These activities within the Nigerian space

are conducted and coordinated by groups like the Boko Haram sect which is a terror group based in the North, the Tiv Militias in Benue State, the Bakasi Boys in the East, the Niger-Delta Militants in the South-South, the Oduduwa cult group in the West, the faceless Fulani herdsmen and many other terror sects under different guides have continued to unleash terror on innocent citizens in Nigeria.

The activities of these sects are ongoing in many communities in the country and the attacks on several communities like Dabchi in Borno North, Borno Central, Kajuru, Sanga, Jamaa, Kauran, and Chukun local government areas in Kaduna state, Guma, Logo, Gwer West, Gwer East communities in Benue state, Miango, BarkinLadi and other communities in Plateau State are all examples of places within the Nigeria space that have been affected by this terror activities inflicted on the Nigerian citizens by these sects with whatever name. More worrisome, is the recent form the insurgency have taken, the situation where innocent school children are being kidnapped recklessly by these bandits in different locations of the country without recourse to the principles of human rights and living.

According to world index rating of terrorist activities globally, Nigeria is rated the third in the series following the rising profile of terrorist activist in the last one and half decade in the country. No doubt, all regions of the country have received their own fair share from the terrorist activities in the country. In any case, the North eastern region comprising of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe are the worst affected by these terror activities in all aspects of life and living, this is because a good number of citizens within this region are region are displaced and made to flee from their places of abode to find succour in internally displaced camps in search of

new means of living. The same is replicated in other regions of the of country where citizens are forced into leaving their communities, farms and so on to find new places of living for survival. This unfortunate circumstance has brought untold hardship on so many communities and Nigerian citizens all over the country.

The above case scenario provides a baseline for us to also note that ethnic terrorism is expressed through various means such as: individual behaviour, exclusion and hostility accompanied by stereotyping, intolerance, prejudice and discrimination at all levels of engagements are possible reasons for escalation of terrorism in any country of the world and Nigeria in particular.

In the face of the foregoing, Akinola provides a perceptible example of the possible blowouts of terror activities in any nation of the globe. He notes succinctly that

Colonial heritage through resource exploitation, and inabilities of ethnic nationalities within African states to negotiate the terms of their statehood, inept political leadership, poverty and alienation, misrule and corruption and 'sit-tightism' has predisposed African states to the intrigues of violent conflicts (265).

The case scenario in Nigeria has made it possible for the creation of unity of consciousness and consciousness of unity amongst citizens despite ethnic lines so as to reduce the increasing level of terror activities in most regions of the country if not all.

To this end, the functional role of drama which is a branch of literature is employed. Ngugi WaThiongo provides very succinctly the role that literature (drama) and the writers play in reshaping and transforming the society. Here are his memorable words

Literature cannot escape from the class power

structures that shape our everyday life... whether or not he is aware of it, his work reflects the one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one of the other sides in the battle field, the side of the people or the side of those forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Everywriter is a writer in politics. The only question is whose politics (xi).

This shows that literature (drama) and writers (playwrights) have the power to transform the society and make viable comments on issues that affects mankind. It is in the light of the above that he paper examineslyorwueseHagher's *MulkinMatasaas* a viable play that could effectively aid in the discernment of ethnic terrorism in polarised Nigeria and enhance national unity.

Defining the Concept of Terrorism

Terrorism as an act is as old as man himself, it becomes increasingly difficult to stomach the deluge of delusory self-defence suggesting that terrorism does not exist in the world. Terrorism exist in the world, many countries of the world and Nigeria in particular have been prone to this dilemma called terrorism. The word terrorism is gotten from 'terror' and it implies the act of instilling fear in somebody. All the terrorist activities that have been taken place around the globe uses the instrumentality of terror to unleash fear on a people and demand for what they are yearning for. Brian Whitaker cited in Bharucha, aptly define terrorism as; "Premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub

national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (4).

This definition shows that a threat of violence used as a means of pursuing political aim or coercively cower groups or individuals is an act of terrorism. Suffice it to say that, the use of explosives and indiscriminate shooting of persons as well as killing of non – combatant targets to violently push a political motive is clearly an act of terrorism.

The first act of terrorism was the French revolution, the French mafias believed that the act of terror was the only way to initiate revolution and demand for social justice from the structures that supposedly dehumanizes the masses. These group of French revolutionist believed that fighting Guerrilla operations must be to destroy the government, government agencies like the police, military and the citizens that stands on their way to achieving their self-desired agenda. This trend of events metamorphosed into Russia in the sixteenth century. The Russian government on her part adopted a secret police. This secret police were meant to project and protect the interest of the government. The police adopted the terror approach of constantly instilling fear in the citizens and making them submissive to the dictates of the government.

Terror remains an indispensable instrument in the hands of terrorist group(s) who wants to use fear to molest the people. One thing of note however is that “terror” is a technique and “terrorism” is a belief in the value of terror. This implies that terror is employed by a terrorist group(s) who uses all the will power in their hands to undo a people. In an encyclopaedia of Terrorism and Political Violence, John Richard cited in Robert and Oladeji explained that: “ideology and ethnic nationalism have been the

two major engines of modern terrorism” (258). He takes the argument further by adding that “authorities on terrorism have identified state sponsorship, ethnic conflicts and religious fanaticism as the most likely sources of future terrorist violence” (258). Suffice it to say that ideology and ethnic nationalism is the driving tool that instigates a people for taking up arms against one another. The ideology of a particular sect might not go well with the ideology of another sect. This point of divergence in the views and values of groups often triggers a clash of interest that leads to acts of terrorism against other ethnic nationalities.

Throughout the world’s history, all the terrorist activities that history had recounted were built on ideology, ethnic nationalism and religious fanaticism, in Nigeria, the case is crystal clear, all the terrorist activities of varying sects been witnessed in the country thus far, are built on the above mentioned factors. In this same document, Robert and Oladejipresent a graphic illustration of what permeates terrorism. “Indeed, countries experiencing the highest level of terrorism are often among the economically and socially most advanced nations in their region or in the world” (258). This graphic presentation is quite true of all the nations witnessing terrorist activities. In the case of Nigeria, the country is the sixth largest producer and exporter of crude oil around the globe and the struggle for resource control have given rise to the emergence of the terrorist attacks that the country has been witnessing in recent past. The same document says “terrorism is a form of conflict and most people enjoy conflict for its own sake” (266). One is inclined to believe this position that terrorism is a form of life and that most people enjoy conflict. In the face of these reoccurring terrorist activities in Nigeria and the number of lives and properties lost, one would expect that the activities

would have naturally come to an end. But its continuity is a clear indication that most people enjoy conflict.

It is worthy to note that terrorism as an act comes in different shapes and forms. Several factors are responsible for the widening and continued activities of terrorists. Factors such as, ethnic identity, religious fanaticism, unemployment, lack of basic social amenities, uneven distribution of political offices, the increased gap between the rich and the poor, corruption and above all a failed system have continued to linger on thereby giving the aggressors the liberty to continue their criminal act. Once the system is made better, the country will witness relative peace in all parts of the nation. But this can only be achieved when the leaders are willing to make sacrifices beyond self, tribe, ethnicity and religion.

Thematic Thrust of *MulkinMatasa*

Playwrights are sensible people who continuously understudy society so as to reflect same in their works. In this play, Hagher looks at the theme of unity in the face of ethnic crises between the Uke people and the Lobi people in his crave for peace in Nigeria. It is imperative to note that Hagher in *MulkinMatasa* uses fictional characters to call for peace and settle the ethnic base terrorist activities that have lingered on for a long time between the Tiv people of Benue state and the Fulani herdsmen. In a conversation that ensues between the commandante, ArdoDanjuman and Tor-chembe discussing the root cause of the conflict between the two tribes, the Commandate, after carefully listening to the later, advises them in the following words:

Commandante:... Fellow compatriots, on my left and on my right stand our collective shame and disgrace. The past corrupt administration encouraged our people to fight over tribal and religious afflictions to cover their pathetic ignorance of the arts of leadership, governance and statecraft. Africa has come of age; we must begin to utilize the collective wisdom of the world to govern and lead Africa better. Here are two brothers fighting over land and water given freely to us by God. Global warming has intensified desertification. Corruption has put a spin on everything and exacerbated conflicts, poverty, disease, population displacement, economic dislocation, human capital flight, massive poverty, breakdown of law and order and death. Together... we shall solve our conflicts and live together. We need both the herders and cultivator farmers. We shall with one resolve push the Sahara and Kalahari deserts out of Africa and make the whole of Africa green again. We shall modernize our farms and make cattle and crops breeding a joyful occupation once more. My brothers and sisters this is our moment to make peace and to push Africa forward... (17-18).

In view of this aberrant ethnic terrorist activities that have displaced several thousands of people, left women and children volatile and prone to rape and abuses of all kinds; farmlands destroyed, properties worth billions and above all several hundreds dead. The commandante's speech is a clarion call and as a social mobilizer, infusing in the people a new hope for a better Africa and Nigeria in particular. The lines are not just meant to stimulate the masses, to rise up above the social structures that

fuel this crisis, the lines are a motivation to all and sundry, urging the people to shun violence and embrace peace.

The commandante is to visit Kalahari community and restore the peace that has been lacking in the community. In the same instance, Tor-chembe and ArdoDanjuma who are the representatives of the two conflicting communities holds brief as they reassure their people of peaceful co-existence. Tor-Chembe tells his people that:

Tor-Chembe: My Lobi people, we are gathered here in peace with our former enemies the Uke people. We are no longer to fight. Today, we have a government that listens, that hears and cares. We were fighting for water to drink as the past administration brought draught through neglect. All Lobi people should bring out our arms; we are brothers and friends with the Uke again, what do you say Ardo)... (19).

ArdoDanjuma in response to the treaty that Tor-Chembe has proposed is quick to agree by calling on his people in the following words:

ArdoDanjuma:All Uke warriors bring out your arms; let us surrender violence to reason. At least we have a government that listens. For the first time since creation, the leader of Africa is visiting us here in the Kalahari... without peace between our two tribes and with the kerero the metabele the shona or kalanga we will not develop. Constant conflicts have reduced our people to serfdom, to human pets and indentured servants (19).

From the above dramatic dialogue, it is imperative to note that the two communities in the world of Hagher's fictional creation are a reality in some Nigerian societies just like the on-going terrorist activities in the country. The play *MulkinMatasa* is a dramatic parable that calls on citizens to be patriot and shun any kind of unrest that will undermine the peace and progress of the nation. In like manner, Tor-chembe says: "We have agreed to end our rivalry over scarce water and land and instead agree to access, allocate and share in a peaceful atmosphere (19). Ardo takes it up by stating that "No longer shall our people watch in impotent fury, our wives and daughters carried away by the rich and powerful town dwellers" (19). Tor-chembe agrees further that "Never again shall the ruthless, dominant and domineering elites sneer us at. These people exploited our weaknesses, as we fought and killed one another while they fly in private jets, shared tax-revenues and grabbed our land (19-20). The above conversation shows that the people can actually discern their ethnic differences and build a unified nation devoid of terror.

The desire to educate the masses on the need to live in peace with one another made the Commandante in his assuring words to the people's welfare to emphasize that:

Commandante: Fellow compatriots, chiefs and leaders of the Kalahari region of Africa, we have come here to give you assurance that this revolution has come to usher protection, justice and equality to all of us. No African should shed the blood of his brother over anything that can be assessed, shared and enjoyed. Our revolution became necessary because it was not possible to change the corrupt African political system through the ballot box. We seek not to lead a

conquered people, but a convinced people. We are prepared to lead by example to show Africa that fine leadership is a revolution in thought and deed... the first lesson of our revolution is to overcome old prejudices and discover new experiences (23).

The above speech ushers in the consciousness of unity and the unity of consciousness. The people are made to understand that credible leadership is that which shuns all prejudices and discovers new experiences. In trying to discern ethnic terrorism in Hagher's dramaturgy, the Commendante sees the act of giving out young girls to marriage as the violation of the fundamental human rights of citizens. In his words:

Commendante: My people, our revolution cannot be complete without the full emancipation of women from slavery and oppression... My daughters I give you freedom over your lives. I give you each your dignity, honour, and right over your bodies. Your bodies are yours alone to make personal decisions about whom you want to share with. This is a fundamental human right. It is a highly prized part of your self-esteem and treasure. This revolution will defend your honour and the African prestige hidden between your thighs. Asmau, Dooshima and all women of Africa, the revolution will give you free education to your highest potential, restore your economic rights and power, you are today on equal footing with men at all levels and before the law. Africa cannot be free and cannot make progress until the last woman and girl child are free... (23-24).

The marginalization and molestation that women face during volatile conflicts is what propels Hagher's condemnation of such

unlawful acts. In Nigeria today, the women are so prone to all forms of molestation. In the last four to five years, over two hundred and fifty girls were adopted by the Boko-Haram sect at Chibok local government area of Borno state. Till date, majority of those school girls have not been released. This is what Hagher, is frowning at, he tries to open a new vista where women and young girls will be respected and highly valued. He upholds the value of women even in the face of conflicts and alludes that they should be protected at all cost if the nation most moves forward. In the Benue valley today, several women have been molested and made prey to the herdsmen. This terrorists rape women and devalue their fundamental human rights.

Hagher strongly advocates that the rights of women should not just be protected but every woman or girl should be made free from any bondage that puts her down. Peace and conflict management motif is the thrust of Hagher's *MulkinMatasa*, as well as the creation of credible characters such as the Commandante whose leadership quality is geared towards uniting the people and bringing back the lost memories that have been shattered away by greed, corruption and endless conflicts in the country caused by acts of terrorism. In another instance, the Commandante encourages the masses never to give up but to ensure that all the leaders who have left them to their fate are brought to book. He re-enforces the pillars with the following words:

Commandante:...To fully move forward, we shall have to swiftly deal with our sad and unfortunate past. We have to carefully review the charges against the past leaders.... All citizens will try them in the public square.... All those found guilty of corrupt enrichment, abuse of power, anti-people politics, and immoral acts

would face the death penalty by the guillotine. These communities will no longer exercise a death sentence by firing squad. Jerry Rawlings style; it promotes militancy and puts power in the barrel of the gun. The hangman's noose is too primitive and too colonial... lastly, I must warn that this revolution has been peaceful up to this point. But from this moment we are prepared to shed blood, any amount of blood, of enemies of the revolution. The guillotine has arrived and his sharp blades have been hungry for rivers of blood of those who will taste our resolve. We are all in this thing together... comrades, compatriots Aluta continua (24-25).

Interestingly, Hagher through the character of ArdoDanjuma stresses that "... Power is an aphrodisiac, keeping cattle is having power over cattle and not men" (26). In the instances cited from the play, one could understand that drama has the potency of creating social consciousness that is geared towards informing the society about the odious issue of ethnic terror and how it could be discerned. The connotative meaning of the above speech is evident in the continued raids that some communities in Benue, Taraba, Kaduna, Plateau, Kogi, Bauchi, Gombe, Maiduguri, Yola and Ekiti have been witnessing in resent past. These raids are not worth it, the government knows what to do, but they have folded their hands and allowed these herdsmen to continually perpetrate this evil on innocent citizens. Herein, the masses are made to be aware that, to tend cattle is to have power over the cattle and not over men. This explains why some states are calling for anti-open grazing ranches so as to restore peace in the country. The reality is that, if ranches are established, all cattle will be under watch

and there would not be blame games that this people kill my cattle and I want retributive justice.

Conclusion

The pattern of conflict that has engulfed Nigeria is one fuelled by multiple parties and interests. These multiple parties include war lords, politicians and civilian dictators who use violence and conflicts to further their agendas and strengthen their hold on power. The Boko haram sect, the Niger Delta insurgents as well as the armed Fulani herdsmen across Nigeria who constantly send waves of terror on communities and citizens are just a fodder used by these multiple parties. Nigeria as a nation has evolved into a militarised society where regions are terrorized by militias, armed herdsmen or war lords. Suffice it to mention that, unresolved conflicts that border on ethnic and religious differences abound in our land and these invariably create room for militias to breed effectively.

Hagher in this creative oeuvre pokes the conscience of our world and its ethical structures. He projects a moral vision and heralds a vanguard that arouses our sleeping faculties and demands for justice and hoping to make us realize the damage our demi – gods and civilian dictators have caused to our nation. Haghers MulkinMatasa lucidly presents an observation of our experiences as a nation by revealing truth aimed at teaching and correcting social anomalies and calling for justice. Iorwuese Hagher believes; “The writers business is to confront the gods of our society. In the process of confronting the omnipotent gods creatively, consciousness is born... the contemporary writer as artist, must encounter the oppressive omnipotent forces of modern day,

whether these are military or civilian dictatorships, the gods of apathy, materialism, corruption or exploitative power” (41) The above presents the writer as conscience of society as well as a rebel who uses his art to champion a rebellion against these forces. It therefore means, when a nation pays attention to its writers, it will find means of understanding itself and recreating itself will occur naturally.

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