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Absurdism of terrorism: Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* and sola Balogun's *the withered seed* in focus

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Abstract

Terrorist attacks have done immeasurable and unquantifiable damage to lives and properties of Nigerians, especially in the Northern part. The high level of insecurity is palpable and has expectedly affected all spheres of the people's life. This unfortunate incident is responsible for the death of millions and the exodus of countless Nigerians from communities and lands they have inhabited for centuries. The ugly incident, no doubt, has put the country in a bad light in that it has rendered the country unsafe for life, living and business. Most unfortunately, the government has spent humongous amount of money in stemming this tide, but, due to high level of corruption, insensitivity and ability of terrorist gangs to quickly regroup, possession of highly sophisticated weapons through alleged sponsorship of attacks by some well-meaning and wealthy Nigerians, terrorism is still hunting the country with many recent attacks, especially in Jos, Maiduguri, Benue State, to mention just a few. This research aims at looking into the likely causes of terrorism, the extent of damage and consequences for Nigeria and Nigerians, and more important how literature has extenuated this present quagmire for diagnosis and solution. Those in the IDPs are also within the periscope of this discussion. The primary materials, Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* and Sola Balogun's *The Withered Seed* will yield their meaning for the benefit of the research.

Keywords: Absurdism, terrorism, frustration-aggression theory

Introduction

Just few months ago, precisely October, 2018, the last of the three girls working with the International Committee of the Red Cross Society, kidnapped by the Boko Haram insurgents was killed in cold blood. It sent chagrin down our spines as these girls who have committed no sins were murdered because of the failure or refusal of the Federal Government to provide ransom for their release. This is just one of the too many killings that have been carried out in the country by the insurgents as killings are still taking place in Benue State, Jos, Kaduna and most of the Northern parts of the country on daily basis.

The damage that has been done to Nigeria by the terrorists' attacks has been innumerable, unquantifiable and vicious. Lots of people have been murdered in cold blood and properties worth billions of Naira lost and millions who fled for safety live in Internally Displaced Persons' camps. Those who are dead, though painful and catastrophic, have gone to rest. Those alive have lost so much too; their loved ones, houses, properties, educational certificates, precious items, cars and other valuables.

The situation rendered some parts of the country unsafe for life, living and business. One can just imagine the gargantuan amount of money lost due to these unsafe environments orchestrated by the insurgents. The most appalling of all is the amount of money allocated for the purchase of arms and ammunition which was embezzled and from reliable sources, some well-meaning Nigerians have hijacked the protest to their own advantage to the extent that it has become political. The Boko Haram issue has put the country in the full glare of the whole world. Despite fortunes reportedly spent on armaments, it is clear also that our military lack enough personnel and fire power to eliminate Boko Haram once and for all. This research is geared towards looking at the causes of these incessant attacks, the extent of the attack, and the likely solutions.

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Explanation of the keywords

Absurdism: Is defined as an intentionally ridiculous or bizarre behaviour or character. Another definition sees it as a philosophy based on the belief that the universe is irrational and meaningless and that the search for order brings the individual into conflict with the universe. Relating absurdism to theatre shows that it was from a form of drama that emphasized the absurdity of human existence by employing disjointed, repetitious, and meaningless dialogue, purposeless and confusing situations, and plots that lack realistic or logical development (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com> accessed 26/10/18). The type of theatrical spectacle presented by the incessant insurgent attacks and killings by the notorious terrorists are indeed very absurd, ridiculous and bizarre. Or how on earth will one describe the slaughtering of human beings by fellow human beings, probably for an offence committed by another human being? This dastardly and barbaric act has rendered the Northern part of Nigeria unsafe and has sent worrying and negative signals to the people of other parts of the country, with the gruesome murders and arsons they see on the TV, internet and also read in the newspapers on daily basis.

Terrorism: Is defined as the use of intentionally indiscriminate violence as a means to create terror among masses of people; or fear to achieve a financial, political, religious or ideological aim (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org> Accessed 26/10/2018). The underlining factors of terrorist attacks have been brought out in that definition as financial, political, religious or ideological reasons. However, a United Nations (UN) document describes terrorism as any “act which is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or noncombatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act”. From the above, it is clear that the mode of operation of terrorists (typified by Boko Haram in this case) is unforgivable – causing *death or serious bodily harm to civilians or noncombatants* (Emphasis mine). It is a misnormal that people will kill fellow humans just because of greed or personal aggrandizement. It is quite unfortunate and disheartening that Africa (Nigeria in particular) is “where the world’s contradictions are being staged and human tragedies remain rooted ... where African elites are engaged in maniacal, fierce and intense wars to capture state power for control of treasuries for selfish power and self-enrichment” (Hagher, ix).

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research is the Frustration-Aggression theory. This theory was developed by John Donald, Neal Miller and others in 1939 but was later modified and explained by Roger Banker and Leonard Berkowitz in 1941 and 1963 respectively. The theory says aggression is the result of blocking, or frustrating a person’s efforts to attain a goal. The theory believes that frustration causes aggression and that when the source cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced out to an innocent target. It is also used to explain reasons for riots and revolutions. Both are caused by poorer and more deprived sections of the society who may express their bottled up frustration and anger through violence (Zillmann, 1979) ^[17].

The above theoretical framework is arrived at due to recent information from General Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria. Obasanjo states the following, during an interview, as the cause of the insurgence in the Northern part of the country:

In 2011, I went to Maiduguri. This was after Boko Haram had attacked the UN building in Abuja and I just want to know who they were and if they had leaders and what their grievances were. I found out that these elements of Boko Haram had been there even while I was in government. And they, through their intermediary, said they were there and I didn’t disturb them so they didn’t disturb me. They were preaching Sharia and that was what they wanted. But according to them, when I left government, they were being chased and haunted and they lost a number of their adherents and they decided to fight back and even the leader of their sect, Muhammed Yusuf, was also killed. They went to court to try and get compensation which was granted to them but the State government did not pay (Akinkuotu, The Punch, October 20, 2018) ^[10].

From the above statement, certain issues arise. First, that the insurgents have been around longer than when they commenced the attacks. Second, that they were aggrieved due to the failure of the government to pay compensation for the loss of their members and property even when a court of competent jurisdiction ordered the government to do so. Third, that they are preachers of Sharia until the government haunted them and killed some of their members. The deductions showed why the adherents of Boko Haram and preachers of Sharia are aggrieved. This leads naturally to pent up anger. This pent up anger is eventually directed against the innocent people because the source of their anger cannot be reached. They believed that by causing mayhem in some Northern parts of the country, the government, which is the source of their grievances, will feel the heat. Unfortunately, in the real sense of it, it is the ordinary citizens in the troubled zones that are feeling the heat rather than government. Sadly, what started as an insignificant affair has become a grave affair to manage by the federal government. The issue is no more a regional affair, but a national one, because the federal government is committing the resources meant for the development of the whole country into tackling the menace. Apart from the financial resources, the number of human resources being wasted on a daily basis is marrow chilling. This is so because the federal government of Nigeria believes that matching force with force will solve the problem and that hopefully the “superior” force of the Nigerian military will force the terrorists to beat a retreat, however, in this case, it has not. This is not to say that the federal government has not looked for alternatives, but the fact remains that the alternatives cannot be too many in order to save the country and hasten its development. Dialogue and other mechanisms for peaceful settlement should be embraced in order to bring a lasting solution to this sinister trend of willful killing of innocent Nigerians.

Textual explorations

Ahmed Yerima’s *Pari* gives a grim reflection of the Islamic extremist group’s raiding and hostage taking of over 200 girls that were kidnapped in Chibok, Bornu State in 2014. The play shows the complicity of religious leaders, government officials and other individuals in the Boko

Haram insurgency that has turned the Northern Nigeria into ghost land.

The play revolves around Tada and Ama, whose only child, Pari, is kidnapped by the insurgents. Ama decides to abandon Christianity for Islam in order to speak to the God who allows her only daughter to be kidnapped for two years running:

Ama: From now on. I swear by Allah this is what I want to do. I believe it is the right thing to do. If you take what is mine forcefully, and claim that it is right in the spirit of a god... your god ... and you get away with it, then I want to know why? I want to know what language your god understands... when he sleeps, ... when he eats. I just want to know what humanity they stand for, (*close to tears*) I just want to know, Jacob. Am I wrong, Husband? Am I wrong? (p. 9).

The play shows Ama's despair, hopelessness and state of mind during the absence of Pari. The angst, melancholic and despondent entanglement that embodies Ama after she receives her daughter back and the consternation that follows due to the incoherent behaviour and the attitude of Pari is quite disturbing. Pari herself mentions all that she and her colleagues suffer in the hands of the insurgents: killing of those who refused to either accept Islam or to be married off, rape and hunger. In fact, some died of heartache and pains and there are those living like walking corpses. Ibrahim, a member of the insurgent group, marries Pari who bears a twin for him, a boy and a girl. She strangles the girl and escapes with the boy. All these put together, show the condition of families whose children were kidnapped and that of the victims. One wonders if there is any justification for treating people in such an inhuman way. Unfortunately, some people are benefitting from this ludicrous insanity in the name of religion and personal aggrandizement. Ama retorts thus:

Ama: I swear, the whole world has gone mad (p.19).

Ama: We hear that even some, who do not know how we feel, who have never stepped one foot here, afraid of being kidnapped, go all over the world, taking photographs and begging for money in the name of our daughters ... I tell you, someone somewhere is benefitting from all this madness (p.30, 31).

Ibrahim alleges the complicity of the local government chairman in the following words:

Tada: And the government? They deny knowing anything about you. The former local government chairman says you even killed four of his brothers.

Ibrahim: (*Gives a wild laugh*). Did he really say that? Well, this is a different story from what really happened. The irony is that they created us, nurtured us for their own good at first and after they dumped us. Where did we get the arms? Where? From them, the military and black market. Where did we get the money we spend? Who fuelled our anger? Who? (*Chuckles*). See how well they lie now that they do not know how to quench the fire they selfishly lit. Pity (p. 48).

Sola balogun's the withered seed

The *Wildered Seed* by Sola Balogun chronicles how incessant the insurgent attacks in the Northern part of

Nigeria is. At the center of the play are two Corps members, Adepeju and Aliyu, serving in the North, who agree to marry despite their cultural and religious differences. Despite all outcry and advice against such development by Adepeju's mother and another Corps member, Ishola, Adepeju refuses to leave Aliyu. At the end, as they are attending a birthday party, the insurgents strike again, Aliyu survives, but Adepeju is not that fortunate as she dies with her unborn baby. The agony and distress of Adepeju's mother and Aliyu are indescribable. She languishes in pain and deep sorrow as the "agents of darkness", as the playwright refers to the insurgents, murder her only daughter, in cold blood.

The playwright feels that one of the reasons for this dastardly act is religious intolerance on the part of the Black Hermit:

Ishola: I think religion plays a major role in this menace. Many of them are extremists who take delight in violence rather than resorting to peaceful dialogue to claim whatever they call their rights. So, killing people in the name of religion has become a culture here (p.5).

The above is quite unfortunate because in the right sense of it, religion should unite people and not the other way round. It should provide succor in times of distress, pandemonium, upheaval and mindless killings. The playwright makes recourse to the harmonies that Nigerians used to enjoy in the past:

Emeka: Gone are those days when our fathers and mothers from different parts of the country saw themselves as brothers and sisters. Today, same people claim that higher education is a threat to their life, that western education is injurious to their religious doctrines (p.5).

Ishola: In the past, not too long ago, we had a sweet culture of unity and togetherness. Then, our people from the North, South, West, East and South saw themselves as brothers and sisters. I have on several occasions followed my parents to different places in the North. As a young trader, my father told me how he went to Enugu, where he met my mother (p.6).

The play ends by enjoining all to be their brother's keepers, to be vigilant and to report all threats to lives and people of the community to the law enforcement agents. The hard truth is that Adejoke and others killed by the bomb blasts are gone and those they left behind will continue to mourn their demise, in despair.

The use of ICT for information dissemination

Beyond the use of radio, television, video and literature, Information Communication and Technology (ICT) could be employed as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) technique to reach the insurgents with short drama skits that may appeal to their minds and hearts. This is very important because ICT has turned the whole world into a global village, hence the opportunity of dissemination of information, even to volatile areas and at the speed of light is achievable and guaranteed. Because of the unsafe terrain, mayhem and insecurity being experienced in the Northern part of the country, dramatists "can send pictures or videos of theatrical pieces created in their sitting room or any 'safe' place away from the volatile regions... as email attachment to multiple email addresses which can be generated through

some service providers” (Julius-Adeoye, 61, 62). Dramatists can make use of video sharing through *YouTube*; pictures, chatting and messages could be sent through *Facebook*, blogs and these could be used to pass commentaries, show graphics, as well as videos. After all, the terrorists send full details of their inhumane and nefarious activities to the whole world through *YouTube* and videos. In other words, the well-packaged theatrical pieces could also be sent to them through the above-mentioned means. Once the message in the theatrical piece gets into the heart of very few of them, the bond uniting them has been cut.

For the Internally Displaced Persons who are in camps, recorded drama pieces could be packaged and shown on TV sets or projected for viewing pleasure. Apart from the fact that it will entertain them, it will also pass across valuable messages on how to cope with their present predicament and many other social problems they are facing. Those in the IDPs have suffered and are still suffering, especially psychologically, due to their innumerable losses. Their minds and hearts are truly wounded; therefore they needed something to assuage their ill-feelings.

Through these drama pieces, the IDPs can come to terms with their present predicament, understand that they cannot change the past but they can strategize to free themselves from the shackles of doldrums and despondency for a life of freedom and dignity.

Findings and observation

Findings from our primary sources which reflect the true picture of the happenings in the Northern part of the country is quite revealing. Our primary materials, Ahmed Yerima’s *Pari* and Sola Balogun’s *The Withered Seed* highlight some issues that are germane to our discussion:

The complicity of the political class and the military is mentioned to be one of the reasons why the insurgence has lasted this far. Both plays chronicle the suffering of those kidnapped, their state of despondency and hopelessness as they are dehumanised, raped, molested, deprived, impregnated and killed at will. The agony and state of despair of those who lost family members are also reflected in the plays.

It is also gathered that some people used this precarious situation to dupe unsuspecting members of the public who willingly contributed money to support the families of those kidnapped and support the cause of rescuing the girls. Those who are able to escape like *Pari* and Ibrahim find it difficult to readjust quickly to the normal society due to the level of inhuman treatment meted on them.

Conclusion and recommendations

From the look of things, it is certain that Nigeria is facing a hard time in respect of incessant terrorists attacks. Terrorism is regarded as absurd because those who die from such attacks are innocent citizens. It has continued unabated and nobody knows when this will end. Despite the financial commitment of the Federal and State Governments in putting an end to the wanton killings of Nigerians, it has continued to claim more lives of both civilians and military personnel. If waging full and conventional military wars against the insurgents is not winning the war, we suggest that surreptitious means, through dialogue, be employed to solve the problem. It is obvious from all indications that the military is not able to quell this insurgence with all the resources the country has put in place, therefore we think it

will be wise for us to employ other means of bringing it to an end. If need be, they should meet the demands of these insurgents, so that we can have our peaceful nation back. Having dialogue with insurgents is not an impossible endeavour and not new at all. Several countries faced with insurgency have taken the needed steps to dialogue insurgents, though not with huge but referential success. Such countries include Philippines, where it was mentioned that “while implementation has not been smooth, the agreement did pave way for a number of other advances” (Sarmiento, <https://www.c-r.org>, 2005). It should not be put aside that dialogue cannot work. It has worked in solving insurgency in other climes. What is needed is sincerity, especially on the part of government. The Negotiating Committee members on the part of the government should be respectable people in the society and those blessed with suave and persuasive acumen. This is obvious in the following quotation:

Fink Hayson sets out a number of considerations for mediators before and during negotiation involving armed groups. The mediator needs to build credibility with the conflict parties and change their mindsets in favour of the negotiation through confidence-building exercises, ensuring they understand their opponent’s need for tangible benefits. Negotiating the process that lies ahead is another important early task, and Hayson discusses, pre-negotiations, logistical arrangements, pre-arguments, and agreement of confidentiality, transparency and inclusivity ways to generate momentum and introduce compromise, and how to tackle difficult issues like a cessation of hostilities, international law and implementation.

Apart from dialogue with the insurgents, government should embark on employment and economic revamping. There is huge unemployment in Nigeria, with the youths being the worse hit. It is more complex in Northern Nigeria due to low level of education and educated youths. As a precaution to youth’s involvement in insurgency, attention must be shifted to empowering the youths through gainful employment. Once the youths are gainfully busy, it may be difficult for them to be lured into becoming insurgents. The focus should not be on white collar job but also on different vocations that can fetch sustenance for the teeming youth. The economy of the country has nosedived and needed to be revamped. This is important because those who could not be accommodated in white collar employment can engage themselves in different sectors of the Nigerian economy. Once the youths are busy and can fend for themselves, the lure to join the bad train will not be impressive.

In resolving the issue of insurgency in the country, religious traditional leaders have roles to play. Religious and Traditional leaders are more or less mind molders. This is important because more than anything else, religion has divided the country along religious line and ethnicity. Religious and traditional leaders therefore, have the prerogatives to preach peace and advise their congregation on the importance of shunning violence and embracing peace. It is also important that such religious leaders walk the talk; they must lead by example and be seen as lovers of peace and they must be unequivocal about this. The example of 83 year old Muslim cleric readily comes to mind here. Alhaji Abdullah Abubakar, an Imam from the village of Ngher in Plateau State hid about three hundred Christians in the mosque and his house during ambush by Fulani Herdsmen who wanted to kill them. The Muslim Cleric, in

June 2018 deceived the Fulani Herdsmen that all those in the mosque were Muslims, and upon hearing this, the attackers left him and continued with their killings elsewhere (*Christian News*, August 3, 2018) [3]. Since this novel and brave act, the Imam has received many awards, among which was the National Honour by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Such selflessness and sacrificial spirit is expected from religious leaders, traditional rulers and all sundry.

The dramatists are seen as possessing healings balms to soothe the pains of those in the IDPs. They have in their kitty “the embodiment of the creative essence whose powers over societal ills range from the preventive to the curative” (Osundare, 9). Therefore, we suggest that dramatists should be deployed to orchestrate such assignment. Our major concern in this research is targeted at those who are able to escape to IDP camps. Beyond food and clothing, these ones are already devastated and enveloped in gloom and hopelessness. With the loss of loved ones, property, businesses and sources of income, they need succor that can be provided through interaction and reorientation through those pieces of drama, to assure them that all hope is not lost and that they can still pull their lives together and live a fulfilled life. The government should also play its role of keeping those in the IDP camps warm through the provision of food items, clothing, medicals and other means of livelihood.

Some insurgents come from outside the country, believing that our borders are porous and that they can make good money through the proliferation of arms and ammunitions. It is imperative, therefore, that the country takes practical steps urgently to ensure that the country's borders are secured against invaders and intruders.

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