

## Dramatic Literature and the Fight against Terror, Insurgency and Insecurity in Nigeria: Yerima's Vision in *Heart of Stone*

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### ABSTRACT

Issues of security of lives and property flood the news in Nigeria with focus on mayhem, bombings, brutality and mind boggling killings of persons. The fear has gone beyond that of armed robbery gangs to fear of kidnappers, political assassins and insurgent bombings which have become daily features of our news and social landscape. This paper takes a critical excursion into Ahmed Yerima's *Heart of Stone* and explores his angst against insurgency and its causes in Nigeria highlighting religious intolerance and hate as well as poverty as strong reasons for this trend in Nigeria. The study uses content analysis to extract key issues captured by Yerima and discusses these issues in relation to socio political happenings in Nigeria. Findings reveal that, religious clerics abuse their place of authority by instigating and influencing innocent followers to commit violent acts of terror. It was also found that poverty is a strong force in influencing young people to seek better lively hood thereby becoming vulnerable to easy recruitment as terrorists. The paper submits, among others, that the disrespect to life occasioned by religious violence and insurgency places a demand on us as artiste and writers to arouse social conscience as we search for peaceful existence within the realities of our new modernity. This calls for a return to the core values of promoting love, tolerance, peace and above all, respect to life. Our writing as dramatists is called upon to throw its searchlight and prod conscience as it speaks to these issues. The paper concludes that, Nigeria's unity is threatened by religious intolerance and hate and has led to threats of regions breaking to form independent states like Biafra, *Oduduwa*, *Arewa* Nation, Middle Belt and several others. A focus on the socio economic wellbeing of the poor and less privileged in our society and provision of basic amenities will go a long way in curbing this menace.

### INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is Premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience (Brian Whitaker Cited in Bharucha, 2014:4)

The above quote by whitaker establishes a base upon which we will be discussing terrorism and its impact on our society. In Nigeria today, news headlines speak mayhem, screaming tragedy and commotions that threaten our existence as individuals and as a nation. Our news and social media platforms are bombarded with stories about armed violence, brutality and bloodshed bringing untold hardship and pain to families and nations across the globe. Suffice it to say, security concerns and insurgency has brought uncertainty to our daily living as religious fanaticism and bigotry breeds social and political upheavals that lead to loss of lives and property.

Nigerian citizens have being pushed into a vicious circle of bloodletting and violence. The masses are held bondage in fear and uncertainty. Bombs have become a daily manna delivered on the streets of Nigeria where several states

including the capital city Abuja have witnessed bomb blasts and acts of terror by the dreaded Boko Harem, an Islamic Sect.

These incidents present a reality that the value to human life is placed on a cheap scale by these terrorists. The disrespect to life occasioned by religious violence and insurgency places a demand on our art to arouse our social conscience as we search for peaceful existence within the realities of our new modernity.

The spate of religious violence and acrimonious relations between Christians in Nigeria and Muslim population in the northern part of the country can be traced to ethno - religious discrimination and incompatibility in the structures of the Nigerian state since the colonial era.

Innocent Odey (2015:38) writing on this submits that,

In 1931 for instance, the colonial administration under the leadership of Governor Donald Cameron did not encourage intermingling of religions. The governor advised the Christian missionary to thread softly in Muslim areas so as to maintain the stability of indirect rule. The political events of the January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966 coup and

the July 1966 counter-coup further entrenched ethno – religious configuration in Nigeria. This is because, the killing and counter killing that followed the coups which had ethnic and religious coloration as the Muslims dominated tribes of the north were set against the Christian dominated tribes of the southern region

This set the agenda and established the foundations for subsequent conflicts by various groups and resistance movements as well as criminal syndicates. Salawu cited in Author (2012: 2 - 3) chronologically trace a history of the religious crisis in Nigeria from which we would quote extensively. He submits that;

Before the present democratic experiment in Nigeria, there were ethno – religious conflicts that claimed so many lives and property. Notable among such crisis are the Maitatsine religious disturbances in parts of Kano and Maiduguri in the early 1980s; Jimeta – Yola religious disturbances (1984), and Zango Kataf crisis in Kaduna State (1992). Others are Kafanchan College of Education Muslim - Christian riots, Kaduna Polytechnic Muslim - Christian skirmishes 1981, 1982); and the cross versus the crescent conflict at the university of Ibadan (1981 – 1985). Yet, other early ethno – religious conflicts include the Bulumkutu Christian – Muslim riots (1982); and the Muslim – Christian clash during a Christian procession at Easter in Ilorin Kwara state (1986).

This establishes the Maitatsine, an Islamic fundamentalist group, as the originators of religious insurgency in Nigeria. The sect which was founded by Muhammed Marwa, an emigrant from Northern Cameroun who is believed to have settled in Kano around 1945. His teachings were provocative and projected hate and violence against anything considered to be un - Islamic. Falola (1998:143) succinctly describes Marwa and his teaching when he submits that;

He (Marwa) was a Qur'anic teacher and preacher. Forceful, persuasive and charismatic, he rebelled against many popular opinions among Kano Islamic circles, denouncing certain parts of the Holy Qur'an and even criticizing Prophet Mohammad. At one stage in his career, Marwa granted himself his most prestigious credential when he revealed himself to be an *annabi*; a prophet with divine power and a mission to save the world ... He was alleged to have replaced the name of the Prophet Mohammad with his own in personal copies of the Qur'an ... He was opposed to most aspects of modernization and to all western influence. He decried such technological commonplace as radios, wrist watches, automobiles, motorcycles, and even bicycles. Those who use these things or who read books other than the Qur'an were viewed as hell – bound pagans.

The above history, aptly captures the origins of religious insurgency in Nigeria and gives credence to the fact that, when we don't know our past nor what has been transacted, the tendency to continue in ignorance and childish play becomes obvious. The cases highlighted above beyond the historical origins, offer a great deal of understanding, not just the formation of Boko Haram as an armed group in Nigeria

but helps us understand the basic underlying philosophy and nature of the group aimed at Islamizing a secular state as Nigeria. Insecurity due to the activities of the Boko Haram has reached a record high with thousands displaced and lives and livelihood destroyed.

This paper seeks to explore issues of terrorism with focus on religious insurgency, fueled religious intolerance and hate. The study aims to show how Ahmed Yerima as a writer has responded to the issue of terrorism in his play *Heart of Stone* by showing how terror groups recruit members and how religious leaders are complicit and indicted as their teachings are seen to fuel and influence innocent children through Koranic teachings that ferment hate and violence. The paper also shows how armed religious insurgents use technology to link their cells and command networks and shows how armed groups have transformed by globalization.

### HEART OF STONE: ADDRESSING INSECURITY AND INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA

Security of life and property is crucial in any given society as it determines peace and progress of that society. This is why, nations across the globe spend billions of dollars and set up various security outfits to ensure safety of their citizens and people living within their borders. Abdusalami Notes that; "There have been several ethno-religious conflicts in the history of Nigeria, but in recent times, these problems appear to be escalating at an intolerable scale. Ethnic and the foregoing problems and criminal activities individually and collectively create insecurity and breach of the peace that are likely to or indeed affect legitimate social and economic activities in the country. These problems also have the very damaging consequence of giving the signal to the rest of the international community that Nigeria is not a safe and secure place and as such not suitable for economic investment and activities" (2005:1)

The above implies that, businesses and economic activities are grossly affected by the bombings and activities of terror and or armed groups. In Nigeria, the Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria and Movement for the emancipation of Niger Delta in the south continue to hamper business activities in the regions and adversely affect the nation's economy as bombing of pipelines thereby affecting the production and exports of crude oil.

In *Heart of Stone*, Yerima creatively scrutinizes happenings in the Nigerian society as he engages issues of insurgency, terrorism and religious extremism and the search for peaceful existence, which has remained a serious problem in Nigeria and the world at large because governments across the world have been tackling this menace.

The play presents a narrative on Musa a well digger who gets recruited and trained by Boko Haram the dreaded, armed Islamic group in Northern Nigeria. Yerima in this play, makes firm statements on insurgency and insecurity of lives and property, focusing how these affect our relationships in contemporary times. He uses the family, as the slice from which this menace is depicted. This is probably because, values and influences on child behavior begin from role models in the family.

In the world of the play, Musa has a strong hatred for fellow Christians because he believes Christians insult Muslims in their songs and mode of worship. In his words,

Musa: A song eh? Satan don fall for gutter. Match am, match am. That's me. That's us. The song is saying that all Muslims are siblings of satan, who should be trampled upon. We? Who did we ever hurt? I mean who are the peace – loving cursed docile illiterates? Us!

Amina: us?

Musa: Yes... us Muslims. All songs ... all their prayers insult us. They brand us as the children of the most evil spirit, the devil. *Shetani!* They want hell fire to burn us to smithereens. And yet they want us to be one. To be friends. They say we worship the same God. How can? I swear I will not go for the wedding if this is the kind of songs they will sing at the wedding. Even their prayers are so militant, aimed at us described as blind '*gambari*' beggar children of the devil. (Heart of Stone 38 – 39)

Here we see the reason for the hatred. Musa feels the Christians are singing consciously to insult Muslim's and feels the name of Satan in the song connotes a liking of Muslim's to Satan or evil. This fuels his anger the more. It is imperative to note that, Musa disappears for six weeks a poor well digger and reappears with a lot of money. He does not want to talk to anybody and his body language speaks volumes of hate for Christians. These images are clear submissions that he might have been recruited and trained within the six weeks by terrorists. His hatred for fellow humans as a result of their religious practice breeds a preparation by Musa to perpetrate a crime against them that is injurious and causing lasting damage to lives and property.

His interaction with Ali confirms this fear as Ali brings the improvised explosive device and materials for bombing the church and activates Musa by directives from their commanders to execute the deed. In his words,

Musa: Yes, I am in front of the house. You can take the stream path. It is lonely at this time. Alright, I shall wait outside. I thought I will have some time to say my farewell. If only. If I could hold. No. I would have. No. I should have... but no. by Allah, my mind waivers. Not now. Not me. Not here. Too late... Ali you came.

Ali: Ssh! No names. I did. Here. The stuffs are in the bag. (Musa tries to open the bag.) what are you trying to do? We wear them only moments to the time.

Musa: do you know the target now?

Ali: No. they will call us on Saturday.

Musa: Tomorrow? I thought...

Ali: Don't think. We are not trained to think. Are you alright? Um? Remain focused on the course. (Heart of Stone, 47)

This incident clearly shows that, Musa on leaving his well digging was recruited by terrorists and is awaiting a command. Which eventually came. However he waivers and his heart fails him because he felt he will have time to enjoy the money given to him and suddenly realizes that it is too late. He has to execute a suicide bombing the next day with no questions asked. Ali his accomplice noticed the unstable nature and reminds him that "No waiver, um? Remember,

the course is our respite. The great source of our hope for a change. A flash, a pinch, then perfect stillness and then heaven"... The Suratuh instructs us to defend ourselves against the infidels. The non – believers. Remember? (48)

The religious belief that if you commit suicide bombing by killing infidels – unbelievers in Islam is considered to be a death of honor which is believed to be honored by God in heaven. As such, suicide bombers are brainwashed into believing they will be given 70 virgins as a reward by God in heaven, if and when they commit this killings. The reference by Ali to the *Suratuh* which is the book in the holy Koran links terror to holiness.

Rustom Bharucha describes this as, "the mediation of the holy, a holy terror... with the incursions of the noumenal, the sacred, and the metaphysical" (2014:12). Several reasons can be attributed to this relationship of terror to holiness. These include the need to defend God, sacrifice and cleansing of perceived evil from unbelievers which strongly connects theological teachings or religious misrepresentations articulated by religious heads and teachers to justify the violence by adherents and armed groups. Terrorism and terror acts that are religious inclined stem from this ideology. The doctrines of a holy Jihad are strongly projected and instilled in these recruits of armed insurgents who through a conspiratorial practice, calculatedly demonstrate violent action against civilians without moral restraint.

This tactic of a holy Jihad is used by terrorists to instill fear and generate coercive submission in their target subjects. The target being to crumble the rule of law, human rights and happiness. As the play progresses, the church is bombed by two suicide bombers. The words of Amina in the play succinctly express the horror.

Amina: they killed them all. Two men came into the church. One ran as soon as he was identified, but the other man took off his jacket, screamed *Allahu Akbar!* And the whole church was blown to smithereens. Not one soul was spared. (Heart of Stone 51)

The choice of attack on the church and subsequent deaths of persons in the church is strongly tied to the belief of religious terrorists or suicide bombers in killing infidels – unbelievers, which was reiterated by Ali in his interaction with Musa. Evil is perpetuated here in God's name. A good reflection on Musa's action reveals misunderstanding as key to his hatred of Christians in the world of the play which is a reflection of what is obtainable worldwide.

The question of faith and our understanding of teachings by our religious leaders is another issue questioned by the playwright because misunderstandings and intolerance strongly influence relationships among people of different religious backgrounds. These 'misunderstandings' precipitate religious riots and leads to killings in our societies that are justified on the altar of religious allegiance and loyalties. The dialogue between Musa and Sani who was his Koranic teacher is very revealing. In his words;

Musa:... As *Almajiris* you used us. You exploited the faith. You told us one day to burn the churches. That Allah said so. We could not doubt a man of God, so we as little boys burnt churches.

Sani: It is such a long time ago.

Musa: But the scars are here. To the Christians we became the devils. Satan. The prayers and songs became chants and evocations commanding their God to destroy us. (Heart of Stone, 58)

In the above dialogue, we see an indictment of religious leaders who fuel hate and religious intolerance by deliberate teachings that mold young innocent children in the Koranic school to become agents of death and mayhem. These crimes are committed as a direct command from *Allah* – God. Yerima incisively unveils a challenge to security as ‘respected men of God’ whose word is believed verbatim as oracles of God can cause more damage than good in their teachings. Within Islam, the Koranic teacher is revered and taken to be the representative of God on earth and anything he says is accepted by the teeming adherents. The contribution of religion to lethality of armed groups is strongly projected here. It is believed that each member of armed groups has religious affiliations that connect to life and death. This religious identity defines the beliefs of terrorists and influences justifications for actions and provides the needed zeal for insurgents. It plays a role in justifying the ‘cause’ and giving credibility to actions of terrorists and armed groups. Terrorist groups such as Isis, Al Qaeda on the international scene, Sunni and Shiite as well as Boko Haram in Nigeria all operate under this umbrella of using the influence and power of religion as they operate within countries and communities.

The words of Pauletta Otis (2009:219) establish that; “the ‘religious factor’ for armed groups can be overestimated or underestimated. Religion is overestimated when it is assumed to have predictive capability- “religion explains everything”. It is under estimated when it is either ignored or misunderstood”. Law enforcement officers and institutions believe that acts of terror can be excused or explained by theology. Often, religious motives are misinterpreted especially regarding motives of why terrorists act the way they do.

Another dimension that can be deduced from the above dialogue is an understanding that terror is ambivalent because the terrorist can be terrified as well and must not necessarily be judged as a demon. Musa commits an act of terror but tells us how terrified he is of Christians. This view is reiterated strongly by Bharuca when he submits that; “Terror is at once ‘the state of being terrified or extremely frightened’ as well as the state or quality of being terrible or causing intense fear or dread. Terror can be felt, experienced, embodied, but it can also be inflicted and imposed... “(2014:9).

Musa as a character in the play is branded as a terrorist alongside his friends because he inflicts terror but he exhibits this ambivalence of terror as his fear and dread of the satanic brand by Christians fuels his anger and hatred and eventually influence his actions. This in no way is a justification of his actions but an objective view to how we can see both sides of terror and how the act of terrorism operates.

Also, the dialogue between Musa and Sani reveals the deceit of political and religious leaders who exploit the innocence and poverty of their followers to their own selfish end. In Musa’s words;

Sheik Sani in the world of the play represents religious leaders politicize issues that are sensitive by attaching

religious sentiments and selectively dishing half - truths to gain advantage and political favour and score political points. This indictment is explored by Yerima in the interaction between Musa and Sheik Sani in the following dialogue;

MUSA: And politics came. And the new politicians like Danladi your son came. They promised to take us away from our failures, but instead they reminded us that we were the failures. (*Chuckles*) they even designed special school system which would keep our cattle rearing brothers on their trail. (*Chuckles again.*) Jokers! That was when we proclaimed death to all... (*Chuckles.*)

SANI: If only you had said a word of dialogue. An exchange of demands...

MUSA: A word? With who? You the clerics were busy fighting to be the leaders of the Islamic delegation to Mecca? Amirul hajj were more interested in making sure their great, great – grandchildren would never lack till they died. So who was going to listen to our sighs? (*Whispers*) No one! (*Heart of Stone, 58 - 59*)

The above exchange shows how religious clerics for selfish gains neglect the needs of their followers. It also shows how these religious leaders use their positions to empower their children, hence Musa’s reference to ‘politicians like your son’ who come with fake promises of liberation only for the masses to discover, they were pawn to be sacrificed on the altar of the desires and ambitions of these self-serving clerics. Several reasons can be attributed to why the clerics exert this control on followers, this includes the fact that, religious clerics speak as the representatives of God on earth. This authority makes their word law and they must not be questioned. Secondly, they are seen as men who are righteous and without sin. This stance places them above the average men and breeds strong influence and submission from the masses.

It is imperative to mention the exploitation of globalization by armed groups which Yerima aptly captures in his play *Heart of Stone*. Several opportunities exist in our globalized world and armed groups which include terrorists, militias, criminal organizations and insurgents exploit these opportunities to their advantage. Musa in Heart of stone uses his mobile phone to communicate with Ali in the world of the play. Yerima inserts this in the stage direction thus; “dark stage. Spotlight on the door. Front of KAKA PATU’S house. The door opens slowly. MUSA alights. He wears a *jellabiya*. He holds a phone to his ear as he comes on stage” (47). What transpires in the conversation between the two terrorists is the activation to commence the bombing of the church in the village where the Christians worship. The two friends used electronically operated jackets that can explode. These jackets as described in the world of the play are only worn when the suicide bomber is ready to detonate the jacket on his person.

Querine Hanlon (2009:124) aptly captures how armed groups are transformed by globalization thus;

Armed groups exploit the opportunities in a globalized world in ways that states, particularly weak states, cannot. Connected by the instantaneous and virtually untraceable communications technologies of the modern age, armed groups find refuge in the weak and

ungoverned spaces between states, while directing operations at the heart of the globalized world

The use of technology that links the cells and command networks of these groups is what we are talking about here. Beside orders and instructions that pass through untraceable communication channels, Billions of dollars that aid terror groups are moved around the world electronically. Terror groups and terrorists use drones and sophisticated gadgets and machines in their operations.

## CONCLUSION

The play *Heart of Stone* explores issues related to Violence by armed groups. Yerima in looking at the subject of terrorism sets the story in the present Northern Nigeria weaving a tale of hatred that breeds acts of terror with serious consequences on the persons involved. His depiction of how terrorists are recruited and trained in the world of the play as well as the psychological brain washing of the mind of recruits leaves the reader with no doubt how master minds of terror acts think and influences on their actions. The basic theme been, religious intolerance and misunderstandings as a result of wrong teachings by religious teachers. His comment on life is simply the respect to the dignity of human life.

The study discovered that, terrorism brings sorrows, tears and destruction upon humanity. It is deployed as a political weapon to fight against governments and societies. The study also discovered that, religion and religious beliefs are exploited by clerics who in their selfish desire for power and political gains use their influence to recruit followers to become agents of destruction through their false teachings.

Yerima's submission through his dramaturgy succinctly establishes that, terrorism in its nature targets persons, countries or organization's in a bid to intimidate and coerce people to submit to their dictates. The study has shown that terrorism is a tactic of violence by armed groups to generate fear in non-combatants without moral restraint. In the author's note, Yerima reiterates that,

I am not sure if I achieved what I wanted with this play. I wanted to raise a number of issues; the strength of beliefs, the disrespect to life, becoming heretical about the sociocultural things we hold dear, and how easy it is sever the inter- links of lives in contemporary times. The new reality in my country constantly confuses me. The insecurity contrasts so well with our search for the meaning of new and more peaceful existence, and our place within our own new modernity. (Heart of Stone 6)

Surely, the playwright achieved these as his creative outing has created consciousness and placed the issue of

terrorism on the Nigerian dramatic stage for criticism. His drama indicts religious clerics as persons who sow discord and aptly presents religious factors as influences in terror acts. His dramaturgy in this regard is a compelling chronicle of terrorism and its impact on our society and families.

The way forward to curb this menace is by creating Jobs for the teeming youths and engaging them so as to remove the current deep chasm between the extremely wealthy and extremely poor in our society. Addressing the economic wellbeing of the masses will go a long way in reducing temptations to become terrorists.

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