

Theatre Designs for Counter-Terrorism: Performances of Ojo Bakare's *Drums of War* as Paradigm

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Abstract

The fight against terrorism has been unabated because as military forces kill members of terrorists groups, the terrorists are recruiting new members. So, there is a need to imbue in every society's psyche, a strong revulsion to be conscripted for terrorism. This study, therefore, uses *Drums of War* performances which were staged at different times of groups and communal hostilities with a glaring atmosphere of imminent bloodbaths in Nigeria, as paradigms with which to investigate the potential of theatre designs (in rousing the stark horrors of war/violence) as a psychological strategy for engineering in a people, a mindset that eschews violence or terror against fellow mankind. This study adopts a qualitative research methodology (which includes: participatory observation, focus group discussions with members of the audience community and interviews with the playwright and play director) for primary data gathering; while secondary data are gathered from journals and other library materials. This study anchors its argument on the Hypodermic Needle Theory and submits that: if every society (especially ones that are easy targets for terrorist recruitment) is strategically and effectively saturated with dramas that arouse an anti-terrorist vibe, the people (who are potential recruits for terrorist's acts) would be indoctrinated against becoming willing conscripts into terrorism; hence, a dwindling in the manpower for the continuous proliferation of terrorism.

Keywords: Theatre design, Psychology, Horror, Terrorism, Hypodermic needle theory.

Introduction

Terrorism is gradually becoming a global menace. Though governments of different nations are using military might to eliminate terrorists, victory over terrorism has remained elusive because the terrorists are easily recruiting new members to further their course. The statement of the problem, therefore, is societies' lack of an effective approach in making it difficult or impossible for the terrorist groups to easily conscript new members to further-terrorism. As a way to discourage the resurgence of violence and terror, (through creative deployments of theatre design elements like music, lighting, make-up, special effects, etc.), *Drums of War* performances have been used to stir up the atmosphere of severe horrors of war; which imbues sobriety and circumspection that often culminate in calming frayed nerves of hostile factions. Encouraged by the impacts and overwhelmingly positive results of using the performance for conflict resolutions, different state governments in Nigeria have sponsored the re-enactments of the performance in their regions to douse imminent acts of violence and terror.

Such instances occurred in the heat of an imminent comeback attack (soon after the war) between the people of Ife and Modakeke in 1998 in Ife, Osun State; in 2004 in Abuja (the Nigerian seat of power), due to the political tension that was in the air in Abuja; in 2005 in Nasarawa (a north central region in Nigeria) to calm the political tension occasioned by a strong opposition to the political party in power; the performance was also sponsored by the Ondo State government (in south-west Nigeria) as a command performance during the 1st-anniversary celebration of Governor Olusegun Mimiko's tenure, to douse the political tension in the state between the supporters of the political party in power and those of the rival political party (Asuquo 160 -1). These repeated governments' use of this play as a command performance to douse tensions in times of imminent political disturbance, attests to its efficacy of drama and theatre in countering terror. According to Jones, ". . . drama and theatre are ways of actively participating in the world and not merely an imitation of it . . . within drama there is a powerful potential for healing."(3). In other words, drama and theatre can function as therapy. in corroborating this assertion, Jones avers that: "during the twentieth-century developments in many different fields such as experimental theatre and psychology have resulted in new insights into how drama and theatre can be effective in bringing about change in people: emotional, psychological, political and spiritual change" (3).

The study aims to project the design elements in drama and theatre as the core factor responsible for the efficacy of drama as a form of therapy; while the specific objective of this study is to examine the effects of deliberately and effectively deployed design elements (such as music, makeup, costume, lighting, and other special effects) in the theatrical performance of *Drums of War* as tools to arrest the human psyche, induce sobriety/circumspection, and assuage frayed nerves against violence and terror; thus, serving as a strategy for counter-terrorism. In a bid to validate and advance this investigation, this study hinges its argument on the principles of the Hypodermic Needle (Bullet) theory.

Hypodermic Needle (or Bullet) Theory: this is a media effects theory that claims that meanings (ideas) could be strategically placed into a media message that would be “injected” into or transmitted to the receiver. Media effects are the intended or unintended consequences of what the mass media does (McQuail 457). Chris Waldeck avers that: the media is extremely powerful and capable of swaying minds with the impact of a speeding bullet or a hypodermic injection (cited in functions and theories of mass communication by the University of Minnesota: An online publication. <http://open.lib.umn.edu/communication/chapter/15-2-functions-and-theories-of-masscommunication>). Self, Gaylord and Gaylord also corroborate the power of the media in swaying a viewer's mind, as they posit that: scholars believed that media messages had strong effects that were knowable and predictable. Because of this, they theorized that controlling the signs and symbols used in media messages could control how they were received and convey a specific meaning (cited in functions and theories of mass communication by the University of Minnesota - An online publication (<http://open.lib.umn.edu/communication/chapter/15-2-functions-and-theories-of-mass-communication>)).

From the above assertions, it can be deduced that the mass media can be used to strategically transmit idea(s) to the mind(s) of the viewer(s), to influence the attitude(s) of the receiver(s) of the message towards a particular phenomenon. Therefore, by using this theory as the framework for this study, this article is intended to show the effect and how ideologies and propaganda can be placed in a media-like stage to sway its audience to desist from violence and terrorism. But suffice to it say that the degree and type of effect the message can generate varies, depending on its construct. This is where theatre design elements become very handy for the expression of desired messages with desired impacts.

Conceptual Clarifications

The keywords in this study are: theatre designs, psychology, horror, terrorism, hypodermic needle theory, and counter-terrorism. Theatre Designs: are the composite of design elements in theatrical productions (Adesina Adegbite 80; Ayodele Vincent 23; Parker, Wolf, and Block 2). Therefore, the phrase is used in this study to mean the branch of theatre practice that involves set design/construction, costume design, make-up design, props design, light/lighting design, sound design, and other special effects. So, the term, theatre design is used in this study to mean the same thing as explained above. Psychology: Colman, defines psychology as: "...the science of nature, functions, and phenomenon of behaviour and mental experience" (3). This term is used in this study to explain how the behaviour and mental experiences of audience members can be influenced when design elements are effectively applied in theatrical performances. Horror: the *Merriam-Webster (electronic) English Dictionary* defines horror as "a very strong feeling of fear, dread, and shock" (par.1). Every human tends to feel fear, dread, and shock. It is an unpalatable state of mind (in humans) that can be induced by a certain external phenomenon, which man can perceive through his sense organ(s). The term is used in this study with the potency of design elements (creatively deployed) in evoking feelings of fear, dread, and shock in an audience; to achieve a desired aim. Terrorism: this is defined as the use of force or violence against persons or properties in violation of criminal laws . . . for intimidation, coercion, and/or ransom. Schinkel goes further to state that: "the term 'terrorism' means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience" (180).

Drums of War Performance and the Theme of Terrorism

The play (with a blend of acting, music and dance) tells the story of the people of Abakpa and Ibuji – two neighbouring communities where people of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds dwell together and are inter-married. As events unfold, Onome, the king of Abakpaland, is seen instigating his people to go to war against the people of Ibuji; simply because they do not practice the same religion as the people of Abakpa. He (Onome) asserts that the Ibujis must be forced to worship the way the Abakpas do, or be extinct. This reprehensible audacity ignites conflict between the two communities - so, the Abakpas challenge the Ibujis to

war. At the plea of the women of Abakpa (with the support of their queen) who can no longer endure the wanton destruction of their properties and the lives of their loved ones, the Abakpa warriors are talked into seeing the senselessness in the war. So, they decide to call a truce. But king Onome insists that they must resume hostilities at once. The Queen and Akogun (the war-general) try to plead with the King that the war is senseless; that the King should rather focus on meaningful developments. In response, King Onome orders the Queen to keep quiet and return to her room. He orders that Akogun be stripped of his rank, his possessions and his title. He re-emphasizes that the war is just. Hence, it must continue.

In the king's bid to get a new war-general, it dawns on him that no one (not even among some of those who were urging him to go on with the war) is willing to risk his life by taking on the role of the Akogun. But to save the king from the dilemma, his only son, Orighoye, volunteers to take up the task. King Onome immediately objects to the Prince's decision - saying that as a Prince, he cannot risk his life. But his chiefs and council of elders immediately point out that, since he (King Onome) claims the war is just, and the Prince has willingly volunteered to become the new general, the King has no choice but to make the Prince the war-general. For fear that the entire kingdom might revolt against him if he does not concede to the demands of the chiefs and council of elders, Onome makes his only son, the new Akogun. And the warriors resume hostilities.

Via the instrumentality of make-up, lighting, music, sound effects and other special effects; a most gruesome and horror-stricken atmosphere is created for the war scene - humans are beheaded, pregnant women raped to death, babies butchered before their helpless mothers and their blood sucked in a most cannibalistic fashion one could think of, and other gruesomely disturbing scenarios created. Amidst soul-touching, goosebumps-inducing dirges and dead bodies littering the Abakpa kingdom, a thick gloomy air pervades the atmosphere. And in the end, the lifeless body of the king's only son stares the mother in the face. She, in her heartbroken and hysteria, commits suicide - King Onome is left with no wife, and no son to succeed him. As a result of this, he is banished.

The Design Elements Employed in the Performance and their Psychological Effects

The common belief is that the prime functions of drama are to entertain and to instruct. But Phil Jones, adds that: . . . within drama there is a powerful potential to heal. . . During the twentieth-century developments

in many different fields such as experimental theatre and psychology have resulted in new insights into how drama and theatre can be effective in bringing about change in people; emotional, psychological, political and spiritual change (1). On the other hand, John Gassner, states that: “the actual concern of each professional theatre worker and the director is to be expressive. In so far as expressiveness is enhanced or made possible by unity, balance, harmony etc., the design is inevitable” (227). This is to say that before drama can effectively function as a tool of expression, design elements have inalienable roles to play; because they constitute the audio-visuals that the audience can read meanings. The design elements employed in the *Drums of War* performance included: sound (i.e., music, and sound effects), light, costumes, make-up, props, and other special effects. These design elements were all intricately interlaced with the artistic components of the performance to produce a unified and harmonious ensemble. For example, while the lighting is used to not just reveal performers and objects, (but what they are intended to communicate to the audience), sound (music) is used to evoke the right atmosphere that complements (in communicating) what is expressed by the actors and/or objects per time.

The Sound Design and Its Role: Sound design can be defined as a unit or a set of deliberately organized and arranged sound(s) to achieve a certain effect(s). In the theatre, music can be classified as an example of a design sound. According to Brockett, “music can be used to evoke an atmosphere of gaiety or somberness, just as abstract hollow sounds can be used to evoke mystery or strangeness. . . [sound can also be used to] reinforce the actions on stage as well as to comment on the actions”(415). So, apart from the actors’ dialogues, designed sounds like dirges and songs of merriment, gunshots, cries, wailings, etc., were used in the performances as integral parts for evincing the desired psychological effects in the audience. Examples of the songs used in (*Drums of War* 20:18:29-49) include:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. (A song in Hausa) | (English translation) |
| Nigeria cho okete kane o (2ce) | We only have one Nigeria |
| Uwe Hausa uwe doma | No matter your tribe or
tongue, |
| Dagba kechi igbo kpa Yoruba | Nigeria o, e Nigeria cho - |
| okete kane | Nigeria is only one |

The above was used to remind the audience that Nigeria belongs to every one of its citizens. Therefore, to engage in any activity that is detrimental to the well-being of Nigeria, is akin to one setting fire on one's self - that would be sheer senselessness.

(Dirge in Ibira)

Otubu mahi hi wu, ukawe vo (2ce)

Izeiza akozozini zo aitama yozi (2ce)

Eivo eivo ninio, Otubu eivo eivoni ni oh

(English translation)

Otubu, we called but you refused coming back

Is it true if one goes she doesn't come back

The above second song was deliberately used in the (*Drums of War* 63:24:23-53) performance to remind the people (aggrieved factions) of the irreversible and regrettable (but avoidable) damages that violence and terror culminate in. The Psychological Effects of Sound Design with the Dances: It is argued in the field of phenomenology (that is: a philosophy based on the intuitive experience of phenomena, and on the premise that reality consists of objects and events as consciously perceived by conscious beings) and in the field of aesthetics that kinesthesia (sensation of movement and position) is central to consciousness and to spectators' response, . . . that is, spectators can react in certain respects as if they were moving or preparing move (Asuquo 435). Asuquo explains further that: "when audience watch dance performance [laced with music] . . . , they can become so unconsciously carried-away; to the point that they begin to see themselves as the ones going through or doing what the dancers on stage are doing" (436).

According to Seyedeh Nasim, "...the psychological benefits of music can be powerful and wide-ranging and include but not limited to, relieving stress and anxiety . . ." (5). Asuquo, adds that: due to the cathartic effect of music, it can be used to manage [sway] the mood of the audience (438). Perhaps, this explains why a crying baby can change his or her mood to smiling or falling asleep when listening to lullabies. This buttresses the assumption that, by watching the *Drums of War* performance, the irate factions from Ife and Modakeke (who were bent on resuming hostilities due to the losses they suffered during the Ife/Modakeke crisis of 1998) were influenced into giving in to the voice of reason and resort to dialogue instead of continuing the feud. Rasaki Ojo Bakare, the playwright-cum-director (in an interview on the 12th of October, 2013) corroborated the above assertion as he averred that:

During the performance, they [the warriors] saw their stupidity in the unfolding actions and story on stage; and many of them were actually shedding tears, [probably as they recall the death of their loved ones and loss of property] and promised to sheath their swords. *That was where I first saw the play in action really; that beyond the rhetoric, on stage it can achieve practical effects of reconciling warring factions and restoring peace.* [words in italics are mine]

The Light/Lighting Design and its Role: Lighting design, according to Duro Oni, can be described as: “the arrangement of light to achieve particular effects” (31). Bentley states that: “light is the most important medium on stage . . . without its unifying power our eyes would be able to perceive what objects were but not what they expressed” (33). Wilson, also claims that: “light is to the production what music is to the score: the expressive elements in opposition to the literal signs; and, like music, light can express only what belongs to the inner essence of all vision’s vision” (383). Apart from the creation of visibility through light, other lighting effects, such as strobe light and smoke effects were used in the performances to create fast motions and psychedelic effects in the war scenes to build and heighten the sporadic and chaotic nature of a violent scenario. The smoke effects enhanced the illusion of a fire outbreak; while a combination of the smoke effect with the fast motion psychedelic effects of the strobe lights was deliberately used by the lighting designer to impair the audience from having a clear view of the ruse stabbings and shootings in the war scene. Then, dull ambience lighting was created as a complement to the background dirge, to induce a sober mood as well as to heighten the tragic effects occasioned by wailings and groaning of the wounded and the gruesome sight of littered dead bodies.



Figure 1(above - first used by Asuquo, N.B., in *Design Aesthetics . . .*): A frontal view of the man pierced with a sword in the violent scene

This is a reality-like feat (achieved by a creative combination of make-up, props, costumes and special effect) used to arouse dread in the audience; thus, reminding them of the agonies and horrors of war. As such, instil in them a condition of caution. After the gory sight of the pierced fellow, came the agonizing sight of dead bodies of pregnant women, innocent youths and babies; to remind the audience of the gloomy sight that awaits war and terror-mongering; thereby inducing soberness and circumspection in the spectators.



Figure 2 (above - first used by Asuquo, N.B., in Design Aesthetics . . .): Dead bodies of gruesomely murdered youths litter the land



Figure 3 (above - first used by Asuquo, N.B., in Design Aesthetics . . .): A merciless slaughtering of an innocent infant during the war scene



Figure 4: (Below - first used by Asuquo, N.B., in Design Aesthetics . . .): is a horrifying Sight of a Warrior Beheading a Woman during the War Scene

From observation by participation, the beheading of the woman was being carried out in the full glare of the audience, the act sent fear down the spine of the spectators; as most of the audience members screamed in fear. These visuals with horrifying scenarios seem to be therapeutic in dissuading the spectators from venturing into acts that would precipitate such occurrence: for according to Spectrio, ". . . two research studies . . . prove [that:] . . . in some way, visuals impact decision making. They can get us to act and think in different ways and control our behaviours without us even realizing it." (www.spectrio.com/marketing/two-studies-show-how-visuals-impact-decision-making).

Scenery as a Design Element: According to Frank Whiting, "as far as play production is concerned, the role of scenery in play production is inevitable" (290). Whiting also states that: "if we think of scenery in its larger sense, as the background against, upon and in which a play is produced, there is no escape... Actors cannot act in a vacuum. An environment of some sort is inevitable" (290). The scenery in *Drums of War* helped to establish the locale, mood, and important themes in the play – an aura of a typical traditional Nigerian setting (in terms of motifs, paintings, and props like the king's throne). All these sceneries/scenic

items helped exude the Nigerian milieu in the performance which makes it easy for the audience to psychologically identify and relate with the unfolding scenarios; thus, seeing themselves in the character portrayals/interpretations.

Drivers of Terrorists Recruitment

To effectively use drama/theatre designs to mitigate terrorism in our societies, it is pertinent that the root cause(s) of recruitment into terrorism be identified and addressed. According to the 2017 Global Terrorism Index report, although there are multiple paths to radicalization, studies focusing on particular organizations or recruits from particular regions or cultures have found some common characteristics among individuals. Recruitments into terrorist groups are often linked to exclusion, poor governance structures and forms of discrimination. It is explicitly stated in the 2017 Global Terrorism Index that:

A recently conducted analysis of 500 former members of various extremist organisations in Africa found that over half of the respondents were motivated to join an extremist organisation as they perceived their religion as under attack. However, 57 per cent admitted to having a limited understanding of religious texts.⁴ Former fighters continuously cited low levels of trust in government institutions and high levels of animosity towards the police, politicians and the military. Some form of 'government action' was the tipping point for 71 per cent of respondents joining an extremist organization. (par. 5).

An online article by Nick Grothaus also enumerates some root causes of terrorism including ethnonationalism, alienation/ discrimination, religion, socio-economic status, political grievances, etc. Therefore, to effectively tackle the issue(s) of terrorism, the construct of the storyline and the application(s) of design elements must have a theme or themes that address the causes of terrorism/recruitment into terrorism.

Conclusion

From the data gathered and analyzed in this study, humans can be swayed by what they watch and/or hear; which then affects how they feel or respond to situations. Secondly, the kind of music (and the messages of the lyrics) can make an audience member feel happy, excited, sad, or sober. That is, it affects their mindset. The fact that *Drums of War* performance, an anti-violence propagandistic piece, was used as

command performances at different moments of imminent civil crisis (examples of which include the use of the performance as propaganda to calm frayed nerves during the impending resurgence of attacks and counter-attacks after the Ife-Modakeke crisis, and during periods of political tensions in places like Ondo State, Nassarawa State in 2005, Abuja in 2004, etc.), it can be deduced that the design elements used in executing and arousing the horrors of violence, terror and death on stage; were effective in imbuing in the audience, a sense of sobriety that reminding them of the consequences of violence and terror; thereby eliciting the air of circumspection for ‘jaw-jaw’ instead of ‘war-war.’ Using the principles of the Hypodermic Needle Theory as the basis of argument, this study concludes that: if design elements are creatively and effectively utilized in theatrical performances to arouse anti-terrorist vibes; for an audience of people that are potential recruits into terrorism, there are great chances of discouraging the people from being easy conscripts into terrorism. Hence, a dwindling in terrorist's manpower for the continuous proliferation of terrorism.

Recommendations

To succeed in using drama with theatre designs to effectively propagate counter-terrorism, the content(s) of the message(s) (both in terms of literal construct and artistic embellishments, must of necessity address the root cause of the identified terrorist act(s), an ideology of the perpetrators, and identity of the group(s). Secondly, the technique(s) adopted for the dramatization should accommodate audience participation (i.e., participation by observation); which would give room for any questions to be asked; thus, creating a level playing field that encourages dialogue for amicable settlements.

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