

# **COUNTER-TERRORISM AND THE NIGERIAN SPACE: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF DANDAURA'S *THREE THINGS* AGAINST ORWELL'S REFLECTIONS ON *GANDHI***

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## **Abstract**

Terrorists and terrorism have become popular words on the global scene. The repeated activities of terrorists in several countries across the globe in the ensuing years after their appearance on the scene, has forced the introduction and activation of global response, one of which is *counter-terrorism*. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy on 8 September, 2006. The strategy is a unique global instrument to enhance national, regional and international efforts to counter terrorism. Counter-terrorism incorporates the practice, military tactics, techniques and strategy that government, military, law enforcement, business and intelligence agencies use to combat or prevent terrorism. The Nigerian nation, like several others, has over the years, had to contend for her sanity since she experienced the advent and growth of terrorist organisations like Boko Haram. The 'success' of Boko Haram may have been the door opener for other violent extremist groups such as the Fulani herdsmen to perpetrate their horrific acts within the nation's borders. Such horrific acts must be countered, even though unorthodox counter-terrorism methods like film. This paper seeks to examine the level of destruction caused by herdsmen and methods of counter-terrorism adopted in affected communities upon re-integration, if ever, via the film, *Three Things*, written by Rai Dandaura.

## **Introduction**

Terrorism is the deliberate commission of an act of violence to create an emotional response through the suffering of the victims in the furtherance of a political or social agenda. It can also be a psychological strategy of war for gaining political or religious ends by deliberately creating a climate of fear among the population of a state according to the *Oxford Learners Dictionary*. The use of terrorism to further a political cause has

accelerated in recent years. Modern terrorism largely came into being after the Second World War with the rise of nationalist movements in the old empires of the European powers. These early anti-colonial movements recognised the ability of terrorism to both generate publicity for the cause and influence global policy.

The attacks of 11 September, 2001, known as 9/11 marked a turning point in world history and the beginning of the 'War on Terror'. The attacks are estimated to have killed 3000 people making it the deadliest terrorist incident in human history. The subsequent war on terror led to the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. National Security Agencies have difficulty looking beyond their own cognitive biases, which can often produce intelligence failures (such as failing to anticipate the rise of the Islamic state in 2014).

Counterterrorism is very hard and it is unrealistic to expect a 100-percent success rate, but combined with learning from our past mistakes and the sharing of best practices among agencies and allies, our ability to track and fight terrorism has been much improved. There has been success in refusing and improving the practices to new contexts. There is an appreciation that community-based policing and trust-building in affected communities are some of our most vital counterterrorism tools. It is with nothing that on the face of gruesome extremist violence, most western societies appear to be largely resilient. In the wake of the October 2014 attacks, Canadians conducted themselves well returning to work and getting on with their lives after the carnage in St Jean-Sur-Richelieu and the other Ottawa. This determination denies terrorists the fear they wish to create.

### **Terrorism within the Nigerian Space**

The Boko Haram insurgency began in 2009 when the jihadist rebel group Boko Haram started an armed rebellion against the government of Nigeria. In 2012, tensions within Boko Haram resulted in gradual split of the group between Salafist conservative faction led by Abu Usmat al-Ansari, and the more dominant, violent faction led by Abubakar Shekau. By 2015, part of the group split into al-Quaeda affiliated Ansaru, and Shekau's faction became ISIL's West African branch (*Wikipedia*).

In 2015, a coalition offensive forced Boko Haram to retreat into the Sambisa forest. The insurgency took place within the context of long-standing issues of religious violence between Nigeria's Muslim and Christian communities. Boko Haram has been called the world largest terrorist group, in terms of the number of people it has killed. Boko Haram conducted its operations more or less peacefully during the first seven years of its existence. That changed in 2009 when the Nigerian government launched an investigation into the group's activities following reports that its members were arming themselves. Prior to that, the government reportedly repeatedly ignored warnings about the organisation, including that of a military officer. When the government came into action, several members of the group were arrested in Bauchi, sparking deadly clashes with Nigerian security forces which led to the death of an estimated 700 people. During the fighting with the security forces Boko Haram fighters reportedly used fuel-laden motorcycles and burst with poison arrows to attack a police station. The group's founder and then leader Mohammed Yusuf was also killed during this time while still in police

custody. After Yusuf's killing Abubakar Shekau became the leader and held this position in January 2015.

The May 2011 northern Nigeria bombings happened in several towns in northern Nigeria on 29 May, 2011. The blasts happened just a few hours after Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as Nigeria's President, Boko Haram was suspected in the attacks. The first explosion rocked the Zuba international market in Abuja killing the people (including a young girl) and injured 11 others. Three blasts also struck the Mammy market in Bauchi near the headquarters of Nigeria 33<sup>rd</sup> Artillery Brigade. Then, 13 persons died and 40 others were injured; no soldiers were injured. Two bombs also went off in Zaria, seriously injuring four. Another explosion targeted a military vehicle in Maiduguri.

Prior to 2009, the Boko Haram Islamic Sect was adjudged to be redundant as it focused on withdrawal from society because the group's erstwhile leader, Muhammad Yusuf criticised northern Muslims for participating in what he described as an illegitimate, non-Islamic state as well as establishing small camps and schools in the remote areas of Borno and Yobe states between 2002 and 2005. However, following the confrontation between the Sect and security forces in July 2009 that led to the killing of its former leader Muhammad Yusuf, Boko Haram re-emerged in the aftermath of this offensive against its members and became exceedingly violent, launching attacks at its targets. In an effort to deal with the menace, the Nigerian Government adopted multiple but varied security driven strategies and tactics which included the use of force and stationing of large numbers of military and police officers in the affected states as well as a clarion call on the sect to embrace dialogue. However, these conflict management mechanisms rather than ameliorate, exacerbated the situation thereby shattering the hope for a negotiated settlement and peace (Uchenna 130).

Considering the intransigence of the Boko Haram militants as exemplified in the escalating frequency, magnitude and geographical range of attacks launched by it, President Goodluck Jonathan in the exercise of power conferred on him by Section 305(1) of the 1999 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* as amended, declared a state of emergency in the three north-eastern States of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe on 14 May, 2013 with a view to curbing the activities of the Islamic sect. Following this declaration, the President ordered the Nigerian armed forces to move to the affected states with the aim of restoring peace and security.

In the wake of the emergency rule, Nigerian armed forces swung into action and commenced comprehensive military campaign against the sect; shelling and killing them as well as arresting a good number of fighters, seizing stockpiles of weapons including rocket-propelled grenades, guns and ammunition, deploying fighter jets and helicopters to launch airstrikes targeted at Boko Haram's strongholds and imposing blockades and curfew on the city of Maiduguri, the group's traditional base (131).

This little progress recorded by the military was however ephemeral as the sect regained momentum in August 2013 after a lull in its activity and as well as civilian targets, including banks, bars, restaurants, religious sites, schools and government buildings in the north with shootings and bombings in Maiduguri, Borno State and the neighbouring countryside occurring on a weekly basis and at times daily basis, resulting in hundreds of deaths ("Nigeria – 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division" para. 2). In response to the

renewed attacks by the Boko Haram militants, the Nigerian Army in August 2013, established the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division for easy supervision and proper coordination of the troops and their operations. On three different occasions, the General Officer Commanding (GOC), 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the Nigerian Army in Maiduguri has been replaced since its establishment amid two instances of mutiny by soldiers of the division is fuelled by allegations of sabotage, corruption and incompetence of the top military brass and the Federal Government (“Nigeria – 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division...”).

### **Synopsis of the Film, *Three Things***

The film opens in Gollum village, somewhere in north central Nigeria. Father Peter, a Padre in his 30’s straight from the seminary returns home to find his parents dead – killed in a herdsmen attack. In anger and a lust for vengeance he approaches a friend (a gang-lord) to take revenge for him. However, through his journey of self-actualisation aided by a vision about his parents who admonish him to dwell on the three things: faith, hope and love, rather than hate and anger, Father Peter has a change of heart. His attempt to do right and stop the vengeance he sets in motion ends with him paying the ultimate price, alas, he dies in the process.

### **Theoretical Concept**

This paper is situated within a theoretical context of the media (film) being extremely important in raising awareness about a given problem. At the same time, acknowledges that social learning and decision-making are not limited to considering media message but watching, listening and exchanging opinions with a number of different sources (Machunga 31). The discussion in this paper was developed based on Uses and Gratification theory that assumes that the media, film in this case largely shape public debate and consequently, political and social interventions and the essence of this is that people are more or less controlled by what they see and hear from the media and this in turn affects their environment. The theory assumes that the audiences are not passive but play an active role in interpreting and integrating film to their own lives. It can be said therefore, that audiences are responsible for choosing the particular media to meet their needs and suggests that people use media (film) to fulfil special gratifications (Machunga 34).

### **Background on Pastoralist Herdsmen and the Mutation towards Terrorism**

On the heels of the military’s tussle with Boko Haram came another conflict that would later launch the Nigerian space into a deeper phase of what many may refer to as a mutated form of terrorism – the herdsmen attacks. Attacks which would later see the Fulani herdsmen rank as the fourth deadliest terror group in the world on the Global Terrorism Index (Buchanan 1). Though the discussion on the unrest involving herdsmen did not begin in recent times, as there are records of earlier conflicts which began as clashes between pastoralist herdsmen and sedentary farmers in rural areas dating back many years, there has been an increased frequency in recent times. The migration of the herdsmen into Nigeria and other West African States happened for several reasons such

as economic viability, the availability of environmental and ecological factors, and the social integration that would later ensue according to Abbass (331).

Several scholars have made assertions as to the reasons for the clashes between the pastoralist herdsmen and the sedentary farmers. Abbass insists that the major cause of the clashes between the Fulani and the farmers is the issue of land (331-346). He argues that the clashes come as a result of a struggle for control over economically viable lands. Some other authors argue that there is a more political reason for the aggravation that causes clashes and conflicts between herdsmen and the communities they encounter. Okello et al. identify social, political and economic marginalisation as a reason for pastoralist's conflicts the world over (2). Furthermore, these authors posit that it is generally perceived amongst the herdsmen that global investment into pastoralist development is disproportionate to its potential roles in the national economies.

According to Eniola, the Fulani are the largest suppliers of livestock in Nigeria (3). Their cumulative contribution to the nation's GDP stands at 3.2%, which in Abbass' estimation, will mathematically translate to 1/3 of the nation's agricultural GDP (1). This line of thought infers that the Fulani believe more should be done for them in terms of national investment into pastoralist activities. The more recent clamour has been one for government provided ranches for their private businesses. This may present a major problem because the lands clamoured for belong to private individuals. If the reasons propounded by the later are reasons to go by, it would then suggest that farmers and agrarian communities may not be the primary targets of the herdsmen who have launched attacks in Nigeria in recent times. Recent patterns of the attacks will further support this point of view. The attacks then may actually be targeted at the government and by inference, the nation.

The government in response to earlier agitations by pastoralist herdsmen sought to find a mid-point at which both the sedentary farmers and the pastoralist herdsmen could co-exist and this was one of the factors that led to the creation of the *Nigerian Grazing Reserve Act* of 1964, which Ibrahim rightly identifies as a government effort to improve Fulani access to grazing land, address conflicts, and also improve access to amenities for pastoralist families (7). The promulgation of this *Act* led to the creation of grazing reserves such as the Kachia Grazing Reserve, amongst others. This will have been well and good except for one thing, localising grazing will turn pastoralist herdsmen into sedentary cattle breeders. This would fail in the long run and the herdsmen will continue moving, hence the continued clashes with the farmers that would later evolve into full scale attacks on communities.

One could ask: Have deaths from attacks remained on the farms and grazing fields? A clear answer would be No! Video and pictorial evidence have shown that attacks in recent times have left bodies right in the homes of victims. Furthermore, entire villages have been sacked and people displaced; thereby creating more internally displaced persons (IDPs) in need of government, individual, and NGO provided shelters and care. These attacks which seem to have increased in frequency and violence, have created fear and terror in the hearts of Nigerian citizens, thereby stunting productivity in the affected communities and environs. This has also made its contribution towards the steady decline in the nation's GDP especially between 2015 and 2018 from 568.5 billion

US Dollars (the highest ever, attained in 2014) to 405.1 billion US Dollars in 2018, according to the World Bank (*Trading Economics* 1).

The fear created, caused ransack of villages, and displacement of citizens, with the view to assume control over the land in dispute are classic hallmarks of formalised terrorism, the sort of which was depicted in the film, *Three Things*.

### **Assessment of Counterterrorism Methods through Film**

It is only natural that responses to certain forms of attack, the likes of which the herdsmen perpetrate, will be reactionary and often tend towards violence of similitude. However, there are many other avenues for responses which could be explored in the hopes of maintaining a society still responsive to law and order. Several of such responses exist in the realm of non-violent methods of combating a violent state recurrent in a system. A major proponent of such methods is film, and in this case, the film, *Three Things*.

Bryan Paul Nykon posits that modern findings through research from the fields of sociology, psychology, neurobiology, and neurophysiology show that humans, of a truth, learn beliefs and attitudes from observation (18). They observe personal role models, or modern society's more prevalent role models generated by the media. In general people learn behaviour through observing those who they respect and aspire to emulate. Nykon further insists that, "if a film's plot is sufficiently engaging, and its characters are believable, likable, and capable of inducing empathy in audiences, the 'modelled behaviour' in the film can cultivate similar beliefs, attitudes and behaviours in audiences through observational learning processes" (20).

Many theorists, critics, psychologists, analysts, and the likes have spoken about the power of film to interfere with, if not regulate the actions and reactions of people within a society. Film then, has taken up a place of importance in the running of societies' right up to some of the major power sectors, even the military. Curtis Morgan minces no words when he posits that there are interesting links between Hollywood and the "so-called military industrial complex" (53). His point of view is not far-fetched for Lacy notes "the history of twentieth-century warfare had an intimate connection with cinema" (611-636). At the time Lacy made this statement he was talking of how the United States Department of Defence (DOD) edits film scripts in order for the producers to make use of military supplies in producing the Hollywood films. This is done by the United States DOD in order to shape the way the American and global audiences perceive warfare and also to justify their point of view as well as launder their image so as to appear blameless for war; one may call that classic mind control. Mind control or not, it works.

The same power of influence and ability to shape not only perception, but opinion, action and reaction which is available to United States' DOD is also available to the Nigerian scholar and film maker to use as a measure in countering the activities within their society which are tantamount to terrorism. Yes, major gleanings from the films of choice will indeed function as viable tools for counterterrorism.

Film theorist, Douglas Kellner, asserts that film and dramatic cinema have massive effect in shaping our world more profoundly than we know: "There is an

aesthetic, philosophical, and anticipatory dimension to films, in which they provide artistic visions of the world that might transcend the social context of the moment and articulate future possibilities, positive and negative...” (10).

### **The Film, *Three Things***

*Three Things* attempts to create a fictional scenario based on true-life events within the Nigerian society. The writer carefully picks and crafts characters that express the views of diverse players in a heterogeneous Nigeria; broken down to the local government area level in the fictional village, Gollum. The nature of the film further expresses neutrality to religion as the attacks projected in the film are not solely targeted at Christians, Muslims, or traditional worshippers, which constitute the major faith-based systems in Nigeria; rather they are targeted at the society which functions as part of a larger system.

Seen from the view point of Father Peter, a young catholic priest, whose family is the victim of a horrendous herdsman attack, the film seeks to explore alternative means of conflict resolution, deviating from the idea that violence begets violence. The writer explores the idea of non-violence through themes of faith, hope and love, themes which share ideas with other films of renown; films like *Gandhi*, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, and *Selma*. The writer seems to favour Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Mial, as cited by Nykon, who when talking about conflict resolution as a field, opine that, “a core premise of the young field was that there are alternatives to ‘zero-sum’ conflict outcomes, where one party ‘wins’ and the other ‘loses’, or the even more prevalent outcome of violent conflict where both sides lose” (27).

### **Analysis of Themes in *Three Things* against George Orwell’s Reflections on *Gandhi***

One major theme which cuts across films that seek to promote non-violent conflict resolution is non-violence, obviously.

*Non-Violence*: The question of non-violence as a viable option for conflict resolution, some scholars argue, may be looked at through double lenses in the sense that there are situations where it is impossible to abstain from violence. Lynch in analysing George Orwell’s Reflections on *Gandhi*, sheds light on his scepticism in embracing Gandhi’s method of non-violence (2). However, she rightly points out the fact that George Orwell’s analysis was coming not too long after the Second World War (WW II), and in the early stages of the Cold War. For this reason, his point of view may have been coloured by the recent past and on-going events.

George Orwell’s scepticism presents a view point for scholars with an alternative view in non-violence and it is definitely worth considering. However, within the context of this study, it must be noted that George Orwell did keep an open mind towards Gandhi’s model of non-violence which also echoed in the film, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, and *Selma*, the film about the march from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery by Martin Luther King Jr., and other civil rights leaders. The film, *Three Things* imbibes this spirit as a viable option for conflict settlement and counterterrorism. One sees the protagonist go through a maturation process in his character arch to come to this belief and ultimately choose non-violence over his need for vengeance in order to gain closure.

*Saintliness vs. Humanness:* A person who is admired or venerated because of their virtue may be viewed in unofficial quarters as a saint. In *Three Things*, Father Peter pays the ultimate price for his belief when he dies saving the lives of his family's killers. This deepens the show of commitment to peace building through even greater sacrifice. The theme of saintliness is another theme which may cut across the films in study. For many, it may be easy to see Gandhi as a saint because of his ideals, follower-ship and ultimately sacrifice for his belief and the decolonisation of the Indian society. George Orwell, however, is very suspicious of saintliness as a political model. His argument rises from the notion that if Gandhi's models are left for saints alone then the majority of the societal population will be left out because most people are 'mere humans'.

The question then arises: Was Gandhi truly a saint? The same question can be asked about Father Peter of *Three things*. Through the film, *Gandhi*, it becomes clear that Gandhi was as flawed as anyone else. He battled with issues of infidelity and a hot temper which often portrayed him as human, and therefore a more relatable character. Father Peter also battled with issues of rage, a desire for penance in blood and unforgiveness, things which he had to fight and win in order to complete his character arch.

*The Ultimate Sacrifice:* Leaders who have been renowned for creating movements that live for centuries have many times been martyred in the process of their cause or at least because of it. There are many examples throughout history: Jesus and His apostles, Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, and many more. If they did not die for their beliefs, they at least paid dearly for them, see Nelson Mandela and his fight against the apartheid laws which lead to his lengthy imprisonment. The films, *Three Things* and *Gandhi*, suggest that paying the ultimate price for one's belief in non-violent responses and settlements may be the exact bullets needed to kill systems of terrorism and oppression. This may not be most favourably welcomed amongst most people as the idea of dying for any cause at all is outright unpalatable.

*Faith, Hope, and Love:* Right at the heart of the theme of non-violence in *Three Things* is the theme of faith, hope and love. Father Peter's dying words suggest that there are things which matter beyond tussle for land and control of power. Through this character the writer suggests that tribe, religion, wealth, hate, and rivalry are temporal. The Nigerian society is one which is highly religious and the two major religions in the country patronise the idea that there is life after death. It is from this point of view that the writer of *Three Things* suggests there are things – faith, hope, and love, which persist even after death and any other thing outside these three will end with life on earth. Therefore, all men should have faith, and hope for a better life here and in eternity. Above all the final word of the dying priest was love. The writer emphasises love because he seems to hold the opinion that when everyone loves everyone, no one will want to inflict harm on the other, therefore solutions other than war and bloodshed will be pursued with tenacity.



## Conclusion

Systems of terrorism and oppression thrive in societies where extremism and bigotry of any kind, religious and otherwise, go unchecked. This paper puts out a call for the identification of early markers of such traits in the Nigerian society. Terrorism, therefore, can be conquered by doing away with fanatical dispositions, extremism, religious bigotry, industrial and government nepotism which spins dissatisfaction amongst citizens, and creates a need to take matters into their hands, thereby mutating the law-abiding citizen into a terrorist-in-denial.

The Nigerian military has fought the war against the Boko Haram terrorists for many years and flashy tales of victory have been spun in the process. However, these tales of victory have soon been doused with the gasoline of recurrent attacks, and set on fire by the many deaths of soldiers, and citizens at the hands of these terrorists. Perhaps there were other methods of combat unexplored; methods that would have had casualties, but much fewer than the currently recorded number; methods of non-violence; or maybe there was never a better option, maybe it was always meant to be, maybe it was all politically influenced, and carefully orchestrated. But by whom? Whatever the true case may be, an ensuing war faces the Nigerian nation with the unrest arising from the recurrent herdsmen attacks. Perhaps it is time to explore the other options, perhaps it is time to look at, and invest in film and its powerful potential for counterterrorism.

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