

WHEN THEATRE MEETS VICTIMS: THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT, COUNTER-TERRORISM AND SOCIAL STABILITY IN NORTH-EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The vain extermination of lives and the loss of property worth billions of Naira in North-East, Nigeria calls to question, the actual motive of the Terrorist group domicile in the area. Apart from the civil war and subsequent submission to peace and unity, Nigeria has not got to grapple with such high profile security challenge like that perpetrated by Boko Haram. This paper examines insecurity and its daunting effects on peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Among other forms of security threats, militancy, Fulani militia attacks and inter/intra-communal crises, it focuses on terrorism and its threat to social stability in Nigeria. The paper uses qualitative research methodology and in line with the popular axiom, “knowledge is power, he who possesses knowledge, possesses power”, designs drama instances which can be performed in troubled communities and beyond. The essence is to empower and equip citizens with the knowledge on how to cope with life in such monstrous situation and also assist government agencies with useful information which they can use to decimate the terror group. The paper concludes that the dislodgment of Boko Haram is factorial to the existence of peace and development of the affected areas and Nigeria as a whole. The paper encourages all hands to be on deck in other to terminate this savagery in Nigeria.

Introduction

The fight against insurgency across the globe is prioritised today following the emergence of different terrorist groups and their insensitive activities leading to the destruction of lives and property. Nigeria like other affected nations of the world is currently grappling with the cruelty of terrorists on innocent lives and property of citizens and the development of the nation in general. Since the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria, countless of lives and property have been destroyed, economic activities

crumbled, many Nigerians displaced and forced to live between the jig-saw of death and survival. Urim and Imhonopi give a vivid description of the horrendous situation when they decry that:

What started as an insurgency against the state and its institutions, gradually assume political, religious and socio-economic permutations as not only police stations, army barracks, government establishments were targeted but also banks, business, churches, Christians, Christian leaders and later mosques and some Muslim clerics fell to the raging inferno of Boko Haram violence. The alarming dimensions of the Boko Haram's terror acts were particularly their forceful attempt to impose a religious ideology on a constitutionally recognised secular state and their introduction of suicide terrorism on Nigerian soil, a tradition alien to Nigeria and Nigerians (in Doki and Odeh 330).

However, this security breach has not gone unchecked as Nigerian and international governments, other non-governmental organisations as well as concerned individuals have continued to collaborate and share tactical intelligence as part of counter measures. The academia is not left out of these counter-terrorism crusade; as the crucible of society, scholars in different fields of endeavour support keenly by finding out its factorial precursors, its effects on the nation's stability and suggestion of different combative measures. Isabelle in Majekodunmi corroborates that,

although terrorist tactics have been in use for a very long time, terrorists' increasing use of sophisticated weaponry and the consequences in terms of increased potential for mass casualties have led scholars in the Social and Political Sciences to place high priority on understanding the "causes" of terrorism and the means by which it might be prevented (128-129).

The field of arts, with particular reference to the performing arts has also made concerted contributions to the war against insurgency in Nigeria. The artist explores avalanches of theatre genres at his grasp to define and address this dreaded and hideous situation in North-East Nigeria. As an edutainment medium, the performing arts subject human actions to thorough scrutiny while also offering pleasure to its recipients. This paper is specific on the contributions of Theatre for Development (TfD) to counter-terrorism efforts in Nigeria. TfD falls within the landscape of Applied Theatre. According to Taylor, applied theatre is "a useful umbrella term... for finding links and connections for all of us committed to the power of theatre in making a difference in the human life span" (in Prendergast and Saxton 6). Thompson and Jackson corroborate that these forms of performance narratives fall outside mainstream theatre performance and take place "in non-traditional settings and/or with marginalised communities" (Prendergast and Saxton 6).

The pedagogical, dialogical and participatory nature of this theatre genre gives vent to teaching and learning through the instrument of dance, songs/music, painting, game, and drama. It exhibits high proximity to communities because it relies on or

fetches from the potpourri of the artistic reservoir of the people to articulate their challenges. The creation of a continuum between the performance and the performer who in this context also constitutes the audience is essential to the comprehension, assimilation and subsequent practicalisation of knowledge acquired from such theatrical experiences. Most enriching is the decentralised nature of Tfd; theatre is removed from the ivory tower to the people in their communities to service their challenges and spur them to generate solutions to their problems. It is, therefore, evident that Tfd intervention can be made in both troubled and non-troubled communities and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps where victims of this inhuman group would be engaged at different levels, exposed and equip themselves with ideas on how to cope with the situation and also assist government agencies with useful information which they can use to decimate the terror group.

Theatre for Development (Tfd) and Terrorism in Perspectives

The history of extant participatory performative traditions reveals a proclivity or tilt towards the people's sensational, aesthetics and socio-spatial consciousness. That is, theatre evolved and thrived within the people in their communities. However, the conventionalisation of theatrical performances with its movement from the people to the ivory tower and other formal theatre structures and new performance space configuration distanced the performance tradition from the actual owners. With various societal contradictions in rural communities especially in the third world nations of the world, the need aroused for the definition of a theatrical idiom that will engage these groups of people; a form of theatre that will speak the language and challenges of the people in more lucid and comprehensive manner.

An upshot of this search is the applied theatre tradition through which theatrical performances

are played in spaces that are not usually defined as theatre buildings, with participants who may or may not be skilled in theatre arts and to audiences who have a vested interest in the issue taken up by the performance or are members of the community addressed by the performance (Prendergast and Saxton 6).

Prendergast and Saxton further inform that theatre practices that engage people outside mainstream theatre are brandished by diverse nomenclatures such as grassroots theatre, social theatre, political theatre, radical theatre and many other variations. However, over the course of the last decade, "Applied Theatre" is the term that has emerged as the umbrella under which all of these prior terms and practices are embraced (7).

According to Iyorwuese Hagher, Tfd is a "theatrical style which stresses participation, dialogue, critical consciousness, and etcetera. The practitioners of this theatre are committed to social transformation through cultural action using theatre" (Inyanda and Egwu 75). Croyden refers to this two-pronged relationship between the people and the theatre as, "the only theatre reality" (Prendergast and Saxton 9). Similarly, Kershaw conceptualises Tfd as a

theatre of social engagement, a theatre primarily committed to bringing about actual change in specific communities. The companies making this theatre aimed to combine art and action, aesthetics and pragmatics. Often they were dealing with material-stories, documentary, information, images, and so on-inscribed with questions of fundamental importance to their audience. Always their starting point was the nature of their audience and its community (5).

A peculiar aesthetic component of this theatre is that it is designed and targeted at a particular community and societal problem(s). Through the deployment of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) research tool, major issues and contradictions around the focused society are uncovered and appropriately put in perspectives leading to solutions which usually emanates from the people. Tfd engages the people in the process; from community research, through drama formation to rehearsals, performance and post-performance discussions. Through these processes, community members become abreast with the knowledge and skills to tackle their challenges without relying on the government, NGOs or individuals. Oga Steve Abah affirms that Tfd “intervenes to motivate, animate or catalyse the people so that they can dialogically question their existing reality, critically determine the roots of their problems and work out strategies for solving them” (121). He expatiates that:

all over the world, where theatre for development (Tfd) is practiced, it defines itself as an alternative practice; and the agenda it peruses always is that of change. The notion of ‘amateur’ (other) is quite strong in Tfd’s definition of itself and its role. It is also significant that in its practice ‘otherness’ is central to Tfd’s discursive strategy, first in its artistic form and secondly, in the issues and participants involved in it. However, the end point of exploration and subjugation is to seek a point of equilibrium or change. It is the conduct of the journey from the point of disjunction to where a resolution, no matter how tenuous, may be achieved that is at the centre of Tfd practice (99).

Prentki reacts that the theatre can be the most democratic of art form depending on who controls the means of production:

Not only can anybody do, everybody does it, whether wittingly or not, in their daily lives, as roles are played out in ways that are necessary for the survival of the individual and of the group. The creation of an actual performance space, a theatre, allows the participants the chance to try out roles to which they would normally be denied access. Peasants can be chiefs (and more rarely chiefs can be peasants). Women can be men. All forms of transgression can be explored and all norms of reality subverted. If development is understood as a process in which people’s conditions – material, social, political or cultural – are changed, then theatre with its immense transformative potential seems to be an ideal form through which to explore a community’s development aspirations and possibilities (cited in Umar-Buratai 97).

While the potential of Tfd in community transformation comes highly commendable, it has also been observed to be double-edged in the performance of its function. That is, Theatre for Development can be used benevolently and malevolently. According to Thomas Kidd, Tfd can be

‘Liberation-oriented’, deepening confidence, building group or organisational unity and inspiring collective efforts. But it can also be used to ‘domesticate’ that is to coerce people into accepting their situation or adopting practices contrary to their interests. It can also be a form of ‘sponge Theatre’ providing a means of participation through which people can ‘let off steam’ but failing to channel their grievances into organised action (280).

The intension here is the benevolent deployment of Tfd. Theatre for Development deploys various theatrical elements to articulate its form. These include dance, songs/music and drama. James Alachi, writing on the efficacy of drama in teaching, informs that:

Drama as a tool ... is eclectic because it is not only a two way medium of interaction, but demonstrative and it also has the capacity to embrace dialogue during and at the end of presentation. Drama method as it is being suggested here calls for creativity which is defined by psychologists as a combination of flexibility, originality and sensitivity to ideas which enable the thinker break away from usual sequence of thoughts into different, but satisfying production sequence (in Boh 43).

However, within the web of performance, the trio of dance, songs/music and drama are inevitable. They all assist in propelling the performance; the messages there are replete with are also critical to the empowerment of the people. Mda views Tfd as,

a theatre that contributes to the process of healing, for it confronts the pain rather than deny its existence. Its audience is active participants in the performance and therefore in creating, and distributing their own messages... the audiences are transformed into dramatic actors and the dramatic actors are transformed into social actors (in Boh 108).

Abah amplifies the above thus:

The participatory method has several features which are quite significant for integrated community development. The method removes emphasis from the ‘expert’ and invests it in the collective.... This horizontal approach was based on the realisation that a collective approach which involves both the villagers and the outside amateurs enriches the process. It also means that the process is being true to the people since the problem belong to them (in Boh 111).

Scholars have also validated the potential of TfD in solving human problems. The current terrorists' activities in the country require the exploration of various methods and or ways to combat the security challenge. It is on this premise that TfD is here proposed in the fight against terrorism in Nigeria.

The rising wave of terrorist attacks in North-East Nigeria reveals the risk at which the country is prone to. The resilience of both parties: the Nigerian security force and the insurgent group, to end or continue the dreaded activities leave citizens at the threshold of this crisis. According to the United Nations Security Council, terrorism is a

criminal act, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act (<http://hir.harvard.edu>).

The fundamental principle of terrorism in Nigeria as stipulated by The United Nations Security Council is to destroy, kill and intimidate civilians, government and other organisations. This explains why upon abducting citizens, no ransom is demanded as in the case of the abducted Chibok and Dapchi schools girls. Often times, such hostages are used as insurances and or leverage for government to release Boko Haram prisoners among other things. Similarly, the United States Department of Defence defines terrorism as, "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological" (<http://usaid.gov>). Furthermore, the African Union (AU) sees terrorism as,

any act which is a violation of the criminal laws of a state party and which may endanger the life, physical integrity or freedom of, or cause serious injury or death to, any person, any member or group of persons or causes or may cause damage to public or private property, natural resources, environmental or cultural heritage" (in Omotola 43).

Drawing from these definitions, terrorism is a lawless act that requires urgent decimation for peace and tranquillity to rain. While these attacks and counter attacks go on in the North-East, many residents in the affected areas live in perpetual fear and might therefore, lack basic knowledge to deal with these challenges. Therefore, anchoring on the Chinese axiom: "Tell me, I will forget. Show me, I may remember. But involve me, and I will remember" (in Boh 177), this paper designs TfD drama-model aimed at educating and informing victims of these attacks on how to contribute to counter-terrorism efforts and how to cope in such situation.

Terrorism and Social Stability in Nigeria

Nigeria is ranked one of the most peaceful nations of the world, until the emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region, Boko Haram in the North East and Fulani crisis with its strong hold in the Middle belt. With an unprecedented high ratio of death and loss of property recorded on daily basis, it is ocular that the once cherished peace the nation once enjoyed is no more. Several implications of this state or situation on the individual and nation at large are deducible: (1) psychological; (2) physical; (3) economical; and (4) political implications. The psychological implication of terrorism on victims is enormous. Frustration, disillusionment, depression and traumatisation are easily discernible. The absurdity of life as members of affected communities watch their love ones being killed and abducted for no justifiable reason is a pointer to this fact.

The uncertainty of what tomorrow would be and the lack of guaranteed security of lives and property as well as poor living condition also lead to this state of mind. Physical implications range from the destruction of the physical landscape including buildings and roads, all of which render the affected areas un-inhabitable. Also, commercial activities such as trading and farming are affected. Investors are deterred from investing in the Nigerian economy, tourists and other economic developers are scared of coming into the country. The political climate is dented because some politicians take advantage of the situation to fight their opponents using innocent citizens as bait. The implication of this is that the country is unstable and lacks the capacity to develop. The development of the nation is therefore, premised on its stability and one way of ensuring peace and tranquillity of the nation is to appropriately combat security challenges the nation is faced with. It is on this premise that, the contributory role of Theatre for Development (TfD) is proposed. Below are drama instances which can be performed for victims in troubled areas, IDPs camps and beyond. It is expected that the dramatic performance will avail victims with the knowledge of how to survive, secure and or defend their land and also provide useful information to relevant authorities in order to be able to decimate the terror group.

TfD Drama Instance One

Skit One

A scene of bomb blast: People shout and scream as they run to and fro the scene of bomb blast. Some call for help; others lay helplessly. The dead and injured are seen lying on the ground; survivors are seen in shock. A reporter, who doubles as the narrator, is seen covering the aftermath of the blast. She asks why they were all running up and down. While some say they were running away from the scene, others say they were running to catch a glimpse of what had happened. She then educates them on the danger of the act because there may be another bomb planted around that may be detonated. She further tells the people to always call on relevant authorities to do the job of taking care of victims of terrorist attacks and that they must in such circumstance stay a few metres away from the scene.

Skit Two

A farmer runs home with information that terrorists were planning to attack their community, kill and abduct some members. On hearing this information, the entire community is alerted and they horridly take a few belongings and run away before the terrorists would attack. The narrator intercepts them on the way and asks why they were deserting their ancestral land. They say they were living their community for fear of terrorists attack. She further asks if they had reported the alleged attack plan to the relevant authorities. They say there was no use for that. She, therefore, advises them to always report suspicious behaviours and movements around their community to security agencies in order for them to prevent such attacks from occurring.

Skit Three

A female suicide bomber walks into a market looking uneasy and shaky. One of the traders spots her; the trader wonders why the lady wears an oversized cloth, looking scared and crying profusely. The trader rushes to the market chairman and notifies him. The chairman informs the security operatives in the market and the lady is apprehended. She is subjected to intensive interrogation and she confesses that she was coerced to further the course of the terrorist group. The narrator steps in and advises community people on the danger of letting their children wander about in the face of security challenges for they can be abducted by terrorists.

Skit Four

At a military base: All military officers go about their normal duties. One of the officers goes to ease himself. Knowing that he is alone, he makes a call informing the terrorist group to strike at that time because they will have minimal resistance from the military base. A few minutes after the call, a terrorist group attack the base, killing many soldiers. The narrator engages the audience on how to handle issues of traitors and prevent such situation from occurring.

Skit Five

The people organise themselves and take to the streets to protest bearing placards, appealing government to arrest both immediate and remote sponsors of the terrorist group. As they march through the streets, the narrator comes in, emphasising that power resides with the people; and once they are able to organise themselves, the battle against insurgency in the land is already won.

TfD Drama Instance Two

Skit One

IDPs camp: Two women engage in an intense quarrel over a bucket of water, due to scarcity of water in the camp. At the height of their quarrel, a soldier intervenes. He asked why they are quarrelling and after series of explanations amidst attempts to fight each other. The soldier tells them to cooperate and share everything they have with each other rather than fight over little things.

Skit Two

As soon as the case with these women is settled, another woman brings up yet another incident that occurred between her and another woman. She alleges that the woman's child stole her child's food. On hearing the accusation, a quarrel ensues again – theirs progressed into a huge fight. They fight from one end of the stage to another as the soldier and other members of the camp try to separate them. They are finally separated and once again put to questioning. After explanations are made, everyone boos them. The soldier again advises them on the need to be accommodating each other rather than being a source of trouble within the camp.

Skit Three

An elderly man cries out in a horrified voice accusing the camp chairman of embezzling food and other donations meant for the camp. He maintains that people like him should not talk of peace and collectiveness in the camp because he does not have any good intention towards the people. The chairman asks him to provide proof that he had diverted donations made to the camp. The elderly man lists diversion of money meant for the supply of water to the camp; and food stuffs worth millions of naira for personal use. He also lists constant power outages due to his diversion of money meant for purchase of diesel for the stand-by generating set in the camp. This angers the chairman and he insists on beating the old man. Everybody begins to call him a thief. Then, the soldier intervenes again. He asks the chairman if the allegations levelled against him were true. But he drops his head down in silence. Everybody begins to call him, thief, again. The soldier asks them to stop and they all adhere. He advises government and other donor agencies to always monitor how these donations are utilised.

Skit Four

A young boy raises alarm on the harsh treatment they get from the security operatives in the camp. He is immediately supported by everybody in the camp. The soldier tries to explain that it was for their own good and safety but no one would listen. An elderly woman then says it seems all of them were guilty of the lack of peace and togetherness in this camp and they all agree. He then asks what they could collectively do to bring peace and tranquillity to the camp. They all respond one after the other suggesting possible ways like being your brother's keeper, helping each other, sharing, and consoling each other, among others.

Combating Terrorism through Theatre for Development

To perform these drama skits in troubled communities, the catalyst must be aware that they are not rigid dramatic skits that must be strictly adhered to. The drama pieces presented hereof should only serve as a template and/or guide because as the catalyst engages the people about their own challenges, they may not totally agree with all the situations crafted. This is because they have first-hand experience and are therefore in a better position to shape and reshape the skits to suit their experiences. When this is the case, the flexibility of the catalyst must come to play in order to reflect what the people think and say of their problems. The point being made here is that these short dramas

may be accepted, recreated or improved upon by community members. Fundamentally, community members must be allowed to contribute enormously to the production process, which is in three phases: pre-production, production and post-production.

Pre-production Stage: The pre-production stage include pre-visitation notice and subsequent visitation, engaging the people for familiarisation sake, unveiling the stories or story as the case may be, subjecting the story(ies) to scrutiny by the people, responding to all questions and modifications raised, making the cast, casting roles and begin rehearsals (which must be discursive and interactive to create more clarity and understanding).

Production Stage: Conversely, the production stage involves gathering the people to watch the performance carried out by them; turning the performance arena to a classroom where interjections, questions and answers will be given on the causes, effects and solutions to the problem raised in each drama skit and general aesthetic pleasure derived from the performance.

Post-production Stage: The post-production stage involves subjecting all issues raised in the performance to thorough discussion between the community people and the facilitator and or the catalyst. Through this discussion, community members become much more clarified on issues raised in the performance and thus become empowered with the knowledge of how to deal with the situation in their domain.

Conclusion

This paper examined the contribution of Theatre for Development (TfD) to sustainable peace in North-East, Nigeria. Currently, the nation is under serious attack by different groups whose motive is unknown and activities have led to the loss of many lives and property. The relative peace the country enjoys before is no more as citizens no longer go about their lawful duties without fear and intimidation. In the face of these crises, TfD can be deployed in affected communities to educate members on diverse ways of combating this security challenge. It is a mode of performance that utilises existing artistic elements such as songs, dances, language of the people. It does not restrict itself to the cultural milieu of the people, rather it appreciates, accommodates and utilises the cultural practices of the people which may be purely indigenous or modern and or the combination of the two. In this context therefore, it is more appropriate to state that TfD uses all the familiar artistic elements of the people in addressing their challenges. The drama scenarios created are very essential to the fight against terrorism because they provide cogent information on how to live and cope with the murderous situation in the North-East. Through such dramatic performances members of the affected communities will be stimulated and encouraged to device counter measures to safe-guard their communities and be able to provide useful information to relevant authorities usable to combat this menace.

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