

# COUNTER-TERRORISM AND NIGERIA'S SECURITY: AN INVESTIGATION OF UMUKO'S *THE SCENT OF CRUDE OIL*

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## **Abstract**

Terrorism is one of the emerging realities in Nigeria that has become a near permanent feature of the nation's contemporary history. Its emergence in different shades has made the security challenges posed by it a big issue globally. Thus, the emerging discourse on counter-terrorism is a phenomenon of incredible importance to the research on possible and probable ways of conflict resolution in Nigeria. Contemporary trends associated with conflicts and terrorism point to the fact that they are bent on going nuclear if adequate measures to counter them are not put in place, hence the urgent need to address its increasing menace in Nigeria. The study adopts the literary research methodology while leaning on the Theatre for Development (TfD) to advance the research. The paper examines the ideal of counter-terrorism, and how theatre can be used as an agent of re-organisation, change and re-orientation with a view to exposing the ill effects of crime and terrorism and proffer possible ways of conflict resolution. In tackling this scholarly concern, the paper will investigate Eni Jones Umuko's *The Scent of Crude Oil*. The paper identifies the fact that terrorism poses a threat to domestic and regional security which is compact and multidimensional in nature. The study therefore recommends the mode of sensitisation via the theatre as a potent and viable channel for conflict resolution and to counter terrorism in Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Shuddering over the increasing incidences of crime in Nigeria, Kelechi Ogbonna and Lucy Onaivi are of the opinion that, "the spate of violence and insecurity witnessed in Nigeria in recent times have woken up conscious efforts by every Nigerian to seek for safety and proffer solutions to the nation's dilemma" (200-219). The spectre and challenges of perceived terrorism and insecurity in Nigeria is indeed a topical issue and it has been with us for a long time but has gained ascendancy with the activities of the militants in the Niger Delta region which started in the 70s, the Maitatsine religious upheavals in the North in the 80s to the ideological issues of Boko Haram insurgency and increased herdsmen attack in various parts of Nigeria. Terrorism is one of the emerging realities that is forcing itself into the national history of many contemporary states like Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroun among others. The emergence and internationalisation of this menace has made the security challenges posed by it a big diplomatic issue globally. Thus, the emerging discourse on counter-terrorism in the country has become a

phenomenon of incredible importance to the research on theatre in contemporary Nigerian drama. It is drawing an increasing attention as a topical challenge in relation to human and material security, due largely to the effect of gradual collapse of basic security of lives and property within the Nigerian space and legal boundaries. Insecurity in Nigeria has taken various forms and dimensions, in the major zones in Nigeria adopting their own manifestations which are peculiar to them. As Cindy Anene Ezeugwu avers,

in the northern part of the country, cattle rustlers' frequent invasion of villages and undue encroaching into people's farm lands for grazing and the hostile attacks on communities, ethno-religious conflict, and extremist invasion and attacks are quite prevalent. In the South Western region, ritual, thuggery, and armed banditry hold sway, in the South East, cyber fraud, armed robbery and kidnapping, are prevalent while in the South-South zone, drug and child trafficking, militancy, pipe line vandalism and oil theft, prostitution, witchcraft cleansing and kidnapping are on the increase. In the middle belt, herdsmen attack and cross border bandits operate with ease (82).

The antecedent consequences of all these forms of violence and terrorism include the generation and spread of violent conflicts as well as proliferation of poverty, diseases, bloodshed and loss of lives and property, human dislocation and displacement. It also has numerous numbers of intra state conflicts and ethno-religious conflicts. This is more so in Africa where religious intolerance and ethnic divide fuelling these violent crisis through terrorism has become one of the most urgent security and developmental challenges in Nigeria today with no definite means of resolution in sight. The uncontrollable widespread proliferation of illegal firearms globally and in Nigeria in particular is a worrisome trend with its antecedent outcome of injury, death, maiming and displacement of people (men, women and children).

Violence and conflict have continued to ravage many parts of Nigeria in varying degrees and the Boko Haram menace which is biting hard across the length and breadth of the Northern region with its antecedent upsurge of bomb blast and suicide bombing seem not to be reducing while the casualties are daily increasing. The implicit assumption is that not much have been done by the past and present government in tackling the problem of terrorism besides calling for investigations that never get to see the light of the day, making promises to fish out the perpetrators and moving soldiers to the terror prone area without equipping them with state of the art weapons that will help them combat crime and terrorism and bring them to an end.

Despite all these incidents of bombing, there is also a deepening socio-economic insecurity and concern that poses a threat to the individual wellbeing of Nigeria citizens thereby making lives unbearable to many people. The youths both graduates and non-graduates, are not being gainfully employed and this scourge is making many of them restive thus, they resort to all manner of vices like thuggery, cultism, drug addiction, rape, kidnapping among others. This scholarly work therefore sets out to examine the place of theatre as a panacea to counter terrorism in contemporary Nigerian dramatic

literature using Eni Jones Umuko's *The Scent of Crude Oil*. The research identifies the fact that terrorism poses a threat to domestic and regional security which is compact and multi-dimensional in nature. They often come with other broad security and societal issues such as violence, criminal activities, proliferation of arms, governance issues among others. In the words of D. O. Ogabi, "such acts have serious implications on human rights and humanitarian activities" (9-10).

A 2017 World Health Organisation (WHO) Report avers that about 320,000 Nigerians have died as a result of conflicts in various forms. While a shocking finding as reported by Small Arms survey year book of 2014, stipulates that about 2% of the firearms in Africa (600,000) are thought to be in the hands of armed groups and insurgents. It is indeed quite shocking that it is just a relatively few number of weapons that is bringing such devastating destruction in various parts of Nigeria and this phenomenon goes to highlight the lethal capabilities of violence if not well checkmated.

The issue of porous borders between neighbouring countries has made it difficult to squarely address the spread of crime. In Nigeria, besides being one of the direct causes of deaths, the effects of conflict and terrorism are far reaching when considering its economic cost and upheaval. After the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States of America in 2011, it became crystal clear that contemporary terrorism is no longer just a theatre of the absurd, as it seems that they are out to kill, maim and destroy as many people as possible and kill even themselves as in suicide terrorism. In the same vein, we are wont to investigate and interrogate its threats to global security in contemporary times. The technological shift and change occasioned by security resistance and its relationship with suicide bombing in Nigeria constitutes one of the most pressing challenges to national peace and stability, hence the urgent need to address it.

In Nigeria, the issue of counter-terrorism is an emerging trend and it became prominent with the emergence of Boko Haram sect in 2009 and its intrusion brought about mega terrorism and as at 2018, simultaneous bombings in Borno, Taraba, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Kano, Plateau, targeted at unsuspecting Abuja, among others, have been recorded with a daunting casualty rate. The act of suicide bombing often targeted at group of persons, churches, mosques, market places, motor parks and public places have over the years steadily and gradually broken local boundaries to form new links with other dreaded terrorist organisations across the globe, with the acts breaking new grounds and barriers in intelligence monitoring and gathering as well as perfecting expertise in the usage of hyper- sophisticated weapons of mass destruction. In Nigeria, as in many other developing countries, political elites, religious fundamentalists, illegal immigrants among others, remain some of the sources of social insecurity to the nation.

Some school of thoughts have at different times hinged the reason for the emergence of terror activities in Nigeria on political, ethnic, religious and socio cultural considerations. Many politicians use powers allocated to them to brutalise and intimidate the people who they are meant to protect at any slightest provocation. They also use state power as a means of primitive accumulation of wealth at the expense of societal development. Some other group hinges it on socio-economic line, while others see it as a by-product of leadership failure. The researcher is of the view that there is an urgent need

to reassess and address the rising threats to lives and property and work out ways to help cushion the poor living conditions of many Nigerians.

This study, therefore, will investigate the role of the theatre as a viable mode to counter terrorism in Nigeria. Given the fundamental traits of terrorism which seeks to maim and annihilate people, this paper proposes the avenue of Theatre for Development (TfD) as an alternative plan and measure to sensitise people on the dangers of insecurity and the need to embrace peace. Jonathan Mbachaga views drama as a “participatory art that allows deep exploration through an informal context of communal get together and interaction” (45). The investigation will also enable us to explore possible ways of using the theatre as a positive and functional channel that can be used in stemming the rising tide of terrorism in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

The study leans on Theatre for Development theory to advance its cause. The theory essentially enjoins dramatists and theatre practitioners on the need to use the theatre for the development and transformation of man and the communities. It also seeks to use theatre in mobilising the people towards engendering positive change in the society. As Ugwu and Ashver aver, “Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire are credited with this theory and it emphasises the conscientisation of the people, creation of a conducive atmosphere for sharing experiences, educating the people and inducing a desire for change” (80-81).

The theory aims at empowering people both at the grass root level and in the urban areas through the avenue of the theatre on how best to live together with a view to impact on their well-being positively. It also seeks to create awareness and to get the government to listen to the oppressed and the downtrodden masses and their plights in order to proffer solutions to them. Theatre for development enjoins the community leaders and stakeholders of the communities to act as mediators between the theatre for development participants, the people and the government. This entails that theatre for development practitioners will carry out researches bothering on the needs of the communities, and work hand in hand with the leaders towards finding a lasting solution to their problems by sensitising the communities through the use of the theatre.

### **Counter-Terrorism and the Nigerian Theatre**

Chandan observes that, “certain training programs or rehabilitating programmes have changed human attitudes and behaviour; hence, reorientation is capable of rebuilding the cracked walls of peace and stability in the nation” (234). Counter-terrorism has become the yardstick and measures adopted by many institutions, groups and persons for addressing and responding to the security challenges of the developing countries. It also seeks to find adequate and acceptable measures necessary to overhaul the threats of insecurity, crime and conflicts in all forms in Nigeria using the theatre. This is borne out of the fact that the rate at which terrorism is spreading if not countered will spell doom for the nation. Kelechi Ogbonna views the theatre as:

an art by which the people recreate their environment and live in it. The very many ills and malaise of the society, the violence and denials, nepotism and

anarchy, the class structure and social injustice are the rich-stone of which dramatists coin and develop their art to sustain and solve the problem of man and his immediate space (39).

Dramatists like Ola Rotimi, Wole Soyinka, Ahmed Yerima, and Femi Osofisan, among others, have emphasised the historical significance of violence in the period following several global upheavals, during which playwrights and dramatists expressed strong concern and anxiety over a world that seemed incapable of long-term peace.

Until recently, the need to reform and redefine our security measures has been perceived narrowly in the context of institutions and establishments like the Nigeria Police Force and the military alone, thus terrorism in different forms in Nigeria has become expansive and more encompassing. Therefore, a growing recognition and acceptance that theatre can be employed as an effective tool to expose the ills of terrorism, especially when it is viewed from the human-centred perspective through proper sensitisation have arisen. In analysing the efficacy of theatre in conflict resolution, it is of essence to understand the broader context of its function, ability and mode of implementation with a view to fostering lasting peace, unity and restore confidence among people from different ethnic divide. Countering of terrorism in Nigeria tends to adopt a common fix for all approach which is easily discernible by the terrorists. Such measures often lack the dynamics and proper contexts of effective terrorism policing.

Dramatists throughout the ages have used the theatre to draw the attention of their audience on the need to fight injustice, rise against war and to educate them on moral and social and societal issues. The Greeks used the theatre to educate the masses on the consequences of disobeying the gods; and the Romans used theatre to promote their empire. The medieval era used the theatre to propagate the virtues of Christianity, while the Elizabethans used theatre to entertain and celebrate the royalty. Modern theatre arose as a response to industrialisation and social issues and till date, theatre has been consistent in mirroring the society.

It is obvious that a society riddled with violence and conflict is a danger to that society; ethnic conflicts, diverse interests and religious sentiment pose a serious threat to the unity of our heterogeneous nation. Nigeria is fraught with maladies of different dimension. The theatre has over the years have tried to mediate between man and society (conflict resolution) through education, entertainment and sensitisation. It has functioned as a mouthpiece for the oppressed and it has awakened the spirit of ensemble and unity in man and his society. Theatre and the Nollywood film industry can help to restore peace by gainfully creating a source of employment for the Nigerian youths who as a result of unemployment get into all manner of vices including all manner of crimes in order to sustain themselves. This situation is captured by Ifeyinwa Ozondu thus:

Every production process of a given movie, engage at least 85% of Nigerian youths, from the technical crew to actors, marketers, producers and other crew members. The industry has reduced the unemployment in the country by engaging the youths usefully in the process of film production... most stories in the Nigeria movies link to either our culture or the situation of the country (576).

The inception of theatre in Nigeria through the elite clubs in Lagos in 1866 and the professional theatre organisation, a revival of the theatre by Hubert Ogunde, was an essential tool used to fight the shortcomings of the government. Theatre through the channel of stage drama exposes and satirises the faults and vices of the society. Ray Emeana posits that, “the theatre is a tool for change, it sensitises individuals on their conditions, in the society and strives to better their condition and enhance mass transformation and orientation” (49).

### **Textual Analysis of *The Scent of Crude Oil***

*The Scent of Crude Oil* centres on a fictional Nigerian community, Esidi in the Niger-Delta region, blessed with natural resources but is filled with selfish leaders, greedy and lazy youths. The play opens with the youth election. Tafa, a jobless University graduate vies for the position of the youth chairman against Maku-Maku, a notorious kidnapper and illegal oil bunkerer. Maku-Maku and his friends, Jugunu, Pelele and Aluta are lazy and greedy youths known to have been terrorising and bullying the community through illegal oil bunkering and kidnappings. When it becomes apparent that Tafa who has genuine plans to positively transform his community is the preferred choice of the people in the election, Jugunu instigates a revolt against the community and their leader. They fire gunshots into the air, scaring people away and are able to declare Maku-Maku as the elected Youth Chairman. Tafa canopies the election experience this way:

**Tafa:** It was outright daylight robbery! You need to be there to see the charade when almost everybody had lined up behind me, the hoodlums brought out guns, yes, real guns, AK47 and chased everybody away! They carried Maku-Maku shoulder-high and danced round the community, claiming victory (19).

After the election, Maku-Maku and his friends kidnap Obobo, a ‘mulatto’, thinking he is a white man not knowing that he is one of them. Tafa is contacted since none of them could read nor write to help them draft a letter to the oil company demanding for ransom. Tafa agrees, but instead writes a letter expressing gratitude for all the company has done for the Esidi people. In a community interactive session with a development organisation, Obobo comes in time to expose the deeds of Maku-Maku, Jugunu, Pelele and Aluta and how he escaped from their captivity and he explains it this way:

**Obobo:** ...I am a mulatto, half caste. But these youths (*pointing at them*) kidnapped me one week ago from where I dey hustle for my daily bread...thought I was a proper white man who they could hold for ransom. They wanted the company to come and pay 50 million naira to free me... It was cigarettes I went to buy ... when they kidnapped me... (80).

Tafa corroborates his story and reveals how he with assistance from Amparo created an escape route for Obobo. In shame and humiliation, Maku-Maku and his gang leave the interactive session with the plan to return to oil bunkering. Tafa finds out their plan and alerts the community chief, the community members and the security agents. The school pupils are evacuated to Warri as they all prepare to stop the gang. Unfortunately, Tafa and his followers did not succeed in their attempt to stop Maku-Maku and his men. The bunkering leads to fire outbreak that engulfs Maku-Maku and his men except Pelele who left the crime scene after hearing the sound of a gunshot before the fire outbreak. The inferno razes down the entire Esidi community, leaving just few survivors. After the incident, the survivors including those living on the outskirts of Esidi such as Keni, his wife, Tahisha and Mama Jugunu return to the land of Esidi to rebuild it and start a new life, and they gave all the dead people from the inferno a mass burial. As Nnamele avers, “the contention in the play is focused on communal responsibilities and the need for peaceful existence, the devastating effect of oil exploration by companies in the region and government negligence” (23). Maku-Maku, Jugunu and their followers display gross disrespect for the tradition of the land and its constituted authority. The playwright reveals the first instance of such disregard for tradition through Jugunu in the election scene:

**Chief Huri-Huri:** From what my eyes witness, I announce Tafa as Youth Chairman of Esidi community.

**Jugunu:** Stop am! (*Brandishing an Ak-47 riffle*). Stop the nonsense at once! Na we dey on ground. Pelele! (18).

Being an accepted traditional ruler, Chief Huri-Huri embodies the customs and traditions of the people as ordained by the ancestors. It is through Western influences that many of these sacred African beliefs lost their relevance, especially among the youths as portrayed in the characters of Jugunu and his cohorts. In terms of combat, the bandits also proved to be the stronger team as they are all armed with guns to withstand any form of opposition. Tafa who suffers the loss in the election attests to this thus:

**Tafa:** It would have been madness to stay back, unarmed, to engage a band of drug addicts, cultists and rapists who are armed to the teeth and ready to kill (19).

The Esidi community through the activities of these few youths becomes a community where only the strong survives at the detriment of the weak majority. Chief Huri-Huri also affirms this state of helplessness in the hands of Jugunu and his gang when he says:

**Chief Huri-Huri:** No be lie even the youths get power pass me wey be them chief. Imagine the other time wey NDDC carry big generator come dash us Kamala, the youths drive the contractor wey e bring am. Dem say contractor must give dem ₦250,000.00 as “deve” before dem go allow

am install the generator for our community. We beg dem tire say the generator go improve our lives but dem no gree! (61).

The proliferation of arms in contemporary Nigeria has led to an increase in armed minority groups terrorising the majority of the people as witnessed in the play. The play, *The Scent of Crude Oil* explores a storyline cast in vivid images of the insurgency that ravaged the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. The template for these conclusions could be found in the youths' brazen disrespect for tradition and recourse to use of terror and violence. The play also mirrors the façade of young people fighting with a tradition that is impeding their chances of being gainfully employed or having a source of livelihood.

### **Conclusion**

In the words of Chijioke Agbasiere, "the contradictions, absurdities and cruelty witnessed on the global scene today have necessitated the need for a rethink and reconciliation" (143). As socially committed artists, many playwrights have equally attempted to highlight many of the social problems bedevilling the nation in their works without suggesting the possible and probable ways of solving them. Many post-colonial societies across the globe are embarking on various measures with a view to counter terrorism. The researcher is of the view that it is time we look at the ultimate threat in the Pandora box (terrorism and conflicts) and recommend that an indispensable evaluation should be done by scrutinising and strengthening the regulatory mechanism with a view to contain terrorism through various modes which the researcher has enumerated here to create awareness about the effects of arm proliferation, suicide bombing, insurgency among others.

As Nigeria grapples with the worrisome issue of inadequate security and its antecedent consequences in a nuclear age under globalisation, it must be however pointed out that Africa's relative security in the global security system remains precarious to say the least. Currently, Nigeria is fast becoming one of the havens for global jihadist terrorists who are leveraging on the nation's security lapses to bring untold hardship to the nation. Thus, this study attempts to constitute an indispensable clarion call to engender security consciousness through the employment of the theatre. The imperative of fighting terrorism hinges on exposing the intricacies of violence and the impediments to global and national peace and stability, as can be discerned from *The Scent of Crude Oil*.

Many people erroneously still view terrorism and counter terrorism as a western or middle East challenges and policies, but this is no longer the case as this notion has been set aside by the activities of religious fundamentalists of apocalyptic bent and nihilistic disposition. We should not therefore be under any illusion that this scourge will cease or abate too soon. The study recommends that the Nigerian government should tap into the expertise, neutrality and professionalism of the theatre for peace and conflict resolution initiative, such intervention and sensitisation must have a comprehensive road map and realistic timelines and agenda.

For theatre to succeed, it must be insulated as much as possible from the vagaries of politics and fortified with both official courage and sincerity of purpose. The resultant



effect of terrorism if not countered and checkmated will lead to wanton destruction of more innocent lives and property. The theatre can be an effective tool that can be used to blow out the embers of terrorism and violence in contemporary Nigerian drama. The play x-rays the problems and challenges fuelling ethno-religious crisis, and recommends the use of the theatre for effective, balanced and more socially responsible intervention in issues bordering on religion, politics, ethnicity and cattle rustlers' incursion beyond their boundaries and scope among others. The use of the theatre will lead to the recognition of local peculiarities in the application of political and economic ideals fashioned in our society. The study also identifies the need to harness the rich vein of traditional folklore, stage performance, films among others in tackling some of the intractable social and political problems that confront our nation.

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