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## COMBATING THE SCOURGE OF TERRORISM THROUGH DRAMA: A CASE STUDY OF MOROUNTODUN BY FEMI OSOFISAN

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### ABSTRACT

*The universal scourge known as terrorism has taken its toll on the corporate existence of Nigeria. The operations of the dread group have resulted in the manipulation of lives and destruction of properties. To curb the excesses of the terrorists, stake holders in the Nigerian project, dramatists inclusive, are putting heads together to fashion a way out of the conundrum. A sociological, contexture and critical juxtaposition of the thematic concern of the play, Morountodun by Femi Osofisan, with what separates in the larger society reveal that both the government and the terrorist have erred in one way or the other. The paper concludes that forging a lasting solution to the problem of terrorism requires understanding and bringing of communication gap between the government and the terrorist group.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Terrorism, Government, Communication Gap, Drama, Conflict Resolution.*

### INTRODUCTION

The development of any society depends on the level with which the society is able to handle the issue of conflict resolution when the need arises. The problem of terrorists raising their ugly heads in the Nigerian environment has been a global concern. The height at which terrorism is militating against the peaceful co-existence of human-being in Nigeria is now a serious problem that has generated different measures from different sectors. The global community had witnessed about 250 armed conflicts in the twentieth century with over 110,000,000 million people killed, wounded, crippled and mutilated (Cramer 2006). Statistics have suggested the existence of 233 groups in 93 countries between 1989 and 205

representing fully one-sixth of humanity engaged in political ethnic or military struggles from more than 20 million refugees who were in flight (Cramer 2006).

The problems also cropped up from political thuggery continued mass attacks by organizations such as Boko-Haram, Al-Shabaab and Al-Ogeda to achieve their aim. Findings have also shown that unemployment, corruption, insecurity, kidnapping, cultural barrier, low access to education in the North, class disparity and power dominance of one ethnic group over the other has been the reasons behind these insurgence on the Nigerian environment. The youths now become easy targets to recruit especially by politicians for criminal activities characterized by loss of lives and properties, economic decline,

displacement, distrust leading people to live in clusters. Nigeria seems to exhibit the symptoms of a collapsing state whose citizen are perpetually at war with one another (Jega 2000 in Obidah 2008).

With these on-going commotion on the Nigerian environment there is the need to employ the active role of drama as a frontier to counter terrorism in Nigeria, for drama has the potential to contribute to the quest for conflict resolution word-wide, that is why 'MOROUNTODUN' by Femi Osofisan will be critically analysed to juxtapose it with the current situation in Nigeria and proffer the way forward to a peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Delta group to Boko-Haram attacks, Hausa-fulani herdsmen on one side, the Jos violent conflict and killings on the other side. The claim for justice has been the cry of these groups but come to think of it, is it really justice that they want? Where comes justice? Or it is the dominance of power over the citizenry.

### **TERRORISM AND ITS EFFECTS**

Terrorism is the use of violent action in order to achieve political aims. The greatest peril to a society is terrorism because it infringes on the rights of the people, terrorism is seen as an act that is concerned to attract attention so as to put people under tension for some reasons. The terrorists utilize a strategy of creating an illusion of magnified strength to cause shock, fear, distress, phobic avoidance at public places. They inflict pain and anger on people and make it difficult for people to trust one another, neighbours who had lived together in harmony as brothers and sisters have turned against one another with murderous minds (Beatle 2010). The apparent relative calm that much of Northern Nigeria had enjoyed for several years was broken by the violent emergence of Boko Haram in 2004.

The little known Islamist group, Boko-Haram, founded in 2004 by Mohammed Yusuf; the group's name translates as "Western education is forbidden" in the Hausa language. Yusuf who was killed by the government forces in 2009, instilled the group with extremist ideology, extolling a version of Islam where interaction with western society is considered a sin. After nearly a decade of violence, Nigeria's government still does not have an effective strategy for dismantling the group and the political goal of Boko-Haram is to create an Islamic nation in the 12 Northern states of Nigeria, eventually spreading to the rest of the country. From its inception Boko-Haram viewed Nigeria as a state run by non-believers and made the government its main target-ever when the country had a Muslim president. Boko Haram capitalized on the widespread poverty, lack of economic opportunities, corruption which resulted in police abuse, human

rights violation and political violence to cause havoc on the Nation.

In fact a survey was also carried out by the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with the National Population Commission in 2010 attesting to the high rate of poverty and illiteracy in the North in comparison to the South. The survey showed that only 28 out of every 120 children in Borno State and in Zamfara are in school. In contrast 119 and 117 out of every 120 children are in school in Ondo and Anambra states respectively. On expenditure of households on education; while an average household in Lagos spend N25, 185 on education per school term, in the North household in Bauchi, Jigawa and Gombe spend on the average less than ₦2000 on each per school term. The army of poor and unemployed youths becomes easy tools that are susceptible to be exploited and recruited into any movement that promises improved living conditions provided it carries the banner of Islam.

The violent conflict in Jos, Plateau State, another appalling situation. The causes of the Jos violence are seen to be multi-dimensional and inseparable. Religion became an issue and the challenges are amplified. It is intensified because of the recurrent violence with massive killings and ethnic cleansing and terrorists attacks by the Hausa-Fulani herdsmen against the natives in 2001, 2002, 2010 and 2011. Ethno-religious violence in Jos is a factor preventing peace in the region. This increases the challenges of managing the Jos ethno-religious plurality. The use of bomb is a devastating weapon that brings loss of lives and properties. A suicide bomber will volunteer to kill himself just because he was sent to do so, killing so many people and getting many injured what a world? The spectacular trauma has left the country in a shamble and the country needs immediate intervention.

The increasing advent of terrorism is so sad; whereas in the past conventional warfare was fought along front-line by the military but in this instance modern warfare occurs in the very midst of civilian populations. This change has necessitated deconstruction of traditional concepts of warfare and composition of new-perception of the enemy and strategies for civilian defense. This is why drama is brought to the limelight as a frontier to look for a lasting resolution to the conflict caused by terrorism in the Nigerian environment. Though, the new enemy is not solely the terrorist group but its penetration and extension into the very fabric of the society and the individual homes.

The Niger Delta group is clamoring for even distribution of wealth, claiming that the government is marginalizing the region. This agitation can be done without killing or kidnapping people. This action has

also caused terror, shock, frustration on the habitants of the land. Justice can be demand in more sensible ways without destroying pipelines, destroying refineries and the likes. Past administrations found it difficult to solve the problem of Boko-Haram, Bakassi Boys, Niger Delta groups and the rest.

The key blow to terrorists' strategy may be delivered by the power of drama to mobilise public opinions and to fortify society's resistance as well as to provoke harsher and more efficient counter measures that would weaken terrorists' efforts. The objective of these efforts is to crush the people's will power by fear mongering and drama can project in an objective manner the cruelty of the terrorist's violence and killings of innocent soul.

Drama can contribute significantly to the destruction of the myth of fighters for 'justice' and 'freedom' as terrorists usually describe themselves. If it is justice, justice can be attained without the killing of people. The role of drama has been gravely underestimated or ignored whereas drama can be used as a very important weapon to defeat terrorism through well-constructed plot and performance because picture stick longer in the mind and it has emotional effect in the mind of the audience. Cepulkaiskaite, (2000) says;

*to inform revolutionists action is enough for the modern drama to become an important tool of propanganda and that the psychological war is a technique of fight based on direct or indirect usage of drama"*

### **SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY**

Morountodun is a play written by Femi Osofisan which reflects the 1965 Agbekoya uprising when peasant farmers revolted against the oppressive action of the government. The playwright adopted the style of play within a play in advancing the plot. The play started with the presentation of theatrical performances but in the course of the performance, there is an interruption by Titubi and her group representing the rich class.

There is an unhealthy class distinction and social stratification. Osofisan probes the socio-political and economic injustices in the society which are the major challenges confronting Nigeria after independence. In the play, Titubi, a member of the upper class like Moremi, tries to bring culprits to justice through disguise. These culprits are militant peasant farmers who resort to arms in order to express their grievances in response to the government's tyranny. This tyranny involves imposition of taxes and levies, bribery and corruption in administrative agencies like the sanitation commission.

Titubi, the daughter of Alhaja Kabirat, whose mother is the leader of the market women, collaborates with the police to bring to the fight an end. Remembering the story of a Yoruba legendary (Moremi) that brought an end to a war, she summons courage to do the same. As part of the plan to be locked up in the prison alongside the captured agitating farmers; at night, the leader of the farmers, Marshal, visits the prison to set the people free and in the process, Titubi went with them. After living among the farmers disguised as a mother in pain (based on her story to them), she returns to inform the superintendent of police (Mr. Musa) that the farmers are innocent and so should be given a listening ear. On this mission, Titubi discovers that the trials which the peasant (poor fanners) face and also finds love as she falls in love with the leader. She becomes the catalyst that brings about the end of the war. Morountodun is the new name given to her by her love.

The play is set in the western part of Nigeria. It is concerned with the imperative of revolt in Nigeria. It focuses on the uprising in history in which farmers who were taught to be docile rose to fight the military government over heavy taxes imposed on them. Morountodun reveals the suffering of the masses that work so hard but are denied full access to the fruits of their labour. Using the device of a play-within-the play, Osofisan through his characters dramatizes the revolt of poor farmers against oppression. The political leaders embezzle funds meant for community development thereby leaving the roads in a deplorable condition. This makes it impossible for the farmers to transport their goods to the market for sale. Despite the negligence by the government officials and the abject poverty of the farmers, they are asked to pay taxes for their farm products. The farmers resist this and protest to the local authorities for justice. All their efforts are ignored.

To complicate the issue, the new chairman who assumes office, Alhaji Buraimoh tries to bribe the farmers to pay their tax but instigate further conflict. The government orders that those who refuse to pay their taxes should have their farm taken from them. When this order is to be effective, the farmers revolt and this leads to violence. The farmers flee their homes for safety and one of their leaders is killed. They target the properties belonging to the rich community, setting them on fire. The play re-creates the ancient myth of Moremi, the queen of Ile -Ife.

### **CHARACTER ANALYSIS AND SYMBIOSIS INTERPRETATION WITH THE SOCIETY**

**Titubi:** Titubi the daughter of Alhaja Kabirat belongs to the Upper Class who gets richer at the expense of the poor. These upper class felt threatened when the

peasant farmers revolted, -against the government because they know that this will affect the economic activities negatively. For this, they sought for a way to stop the farmers, and their first attempt to stop any theatrical activity that reflects oppression. In the process of stopping the theatrical performance, Titubi discovers a more effective way of achieving her goal. Titubi felt bad when she finally made her way into the camp of the peasant farmers because she experienced their suffering herself and understands what it means to be peasant in a society, where the poor are reduced to the status of a mere chicken by the ruling class. Titubi is courageous (pg34). She walks into the mouth of python (the revolvers) just to accomplish a mission. She did not hesitate to make a u-turn after staying with the peasant farmers especially when the deputy superintendent was congratulating her thinking that she was going to hand over Marshal to him. Titubi encourages the peasant farmers not to lose hope in the play. The only difference is that Moremi allowed herself to be captured by the Igbo so as to betray them for the salvation of her people, whereas Titubi joined the peasants hoping to betray them but ended betraying her erstwhile social class and becoming a heroine of the peasants. Titubi thus becomes Morountodun, a symbolic healing bridge through which the wounded and the stricken peasants can hope. There is a representation of Moremi in Titubi's courage/wits, feminine ego and pride. The society needs courageous leaders like Titubi who will stand in the gap for the people but it is quite unfortunate that leaders today are after their bellies not minding the situation in the country. They acquire wealth travel abroad as if they are just going to the market. It is time to stand up and confront terrorism, to say no to oppression, to say no to killings and to say no to corruption for a better Nigeria.

**Alhaja Kabirat:** Alhaja Kabirat is a wealthy woman and the leader of the market women. Though she is afraid of the revolvers, she felt her daughter should not be the sacrificial lamb through whom peace will be atoned for the land. She pays more regard to her prestige than any other thing and that is why she wanted her daughter's courage to help in stopping the revolting farmers. As a rich person, she is proud and places emphasis on money than all things including freedom. But she is disappointed when she thought the war is won when Titubi leads Marshal to the deputy superintendent but Titubi turned the gun against the superintendent instead. She remains a loving mother who will do anything to protect the interest, of her children notwithstanding operating under the slogan of "Bamu bamu ni moyo, un o mope ebinpa omo enikan kan" (I am satisfied, I don't want to know if others are hungry). This has been the attitude of the rich class when the rich gets, richer and the poor gets, poorer,

even communist Khmer Rouge practiced this act of terrorism on his own people during his reign in the country of Cambodia from 1975 – 1979.

**Deputy Superintendent:** He represents the government and the law, this is seen in a verbal war between him and Titubi who rudely addresses the police officer and he on the other hand, orders the corporal to handcuff her. Titubi who represents the rich is used as a demystified of the other public image, Titubi shatters that myth about the inviolability of authority as represented by uniformed officers who may not always be right and the superintendent debunks the unwritten law about not arresting members of the rich and powerful class which means that members of these two classes are ordinary human beings like the rest of the society. It also makes a point about social inequality and about class division in the society, a society of might is right or the rich is always right which is an erroneous belief; it should be removed from the society's dictionary. Be it as it may, the superintendent sees Titubi's courage to stop the revolvers as an opportunity for him to achieve his aim, he recognizes the power of the wealthy but he maintains the dictate of his job. He is happy to see Titubi accomplish their plan but surprised to see Titubi supporting the poor farmers.

**Marshal:** Marshal is a very important figure, when he talks about the Agbekoya uprising, he believes more in action than words. For him he is saturated with results than dialoguing with the government. He teased the opportunity of one of such dialogue to strike the prison. Though he ended up in the struggle but his name still rings bell because his last operation contributed to the government's sincere agreement for resolution. Marshal though captured by Titubi, his well constructed plans led to the negotiation between him and Titubi and the government eventually. He is a brave and sensible fighter.

**Baba:** Baba is another important figure to be reckoned with. He is the leader of the camp, he believes in other people's opinion, he wants others to express themselves, he believes dialogue and peaceful co-existence, he does not believe in life for life syndrome and that is why he did not approve Marshal's idea on going to fight with the government when the later called for dialogue.

**Moremi:** More symbolizes patriotism, loyalty, determination, love for humanity, selflessness and courage. She is prepared to stake her life for her people, she is ready to take the risk of captivity in order to be able to penetrate into the enemy's camp to learn their magic despite the fact that she is the queen. She went to the camp of the Igbo who used to torment the Yoruba from time to time and was able to discover their secrets which she passed to her people and this

gave them victory. Moremi believes that human beings have a lot to do for themselves rather than relying on the gods. According to her "How many times already we've watched our festivals change into periods of mourning when the Igbo set on us: yet we have made sacrifices upon sacrifices till the earth is glutted with blood - tell me my friend, what more shall we do to learn that the gods will not help us? I have decided that Moremi shall be the clay which the race requires to remold itself". What the mythical Moremi did was revolutionary. It is true she married into the ruling class but she was not an embodiment or spirit of the class; this she did selflessly and peace takes its normal shape in the land again. Where are the MOREMs' of our time, let us stand up for the clarion call by our dear country. Moremi is a figure of women empowerment whose action influenced people like Titubi and by doing so validates womanhood in a world dominated by men.

**Lawyer Isaac:** He is the stooge used by the government for its ugly policy extension. He is moved by money and duty to the extent that he agreed to sneak into the peasant camp with the intention of exposing and crushing their revolution. When he is caught he pleaded guilty to show the extent at which he cherished his life. The lawyer is meant to use his profession in the service of truth and to protect his clients. But he engages in giving fake documents to a driver, thereby breaking the law that he is supposed to protect and uphold.

**Alhaji Bvraimoh:** Alhaji is a common title in contemporary Nigerian society bestowed on those who travel on holy pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia as part of Islamic religious injunction. The title has been cheapened by the bad eggs of Islamic religion who use it as a means of securing contracts and influence, rather than for the ideal intended by Islam. Such bad eggs have been known to go to Mecca as smugglers of prohibited items into and outside the country. Alhaji Buraimoh typifies bribery and corruption in government agencies. He betrays the cause of the comrades like Marshal, Mosun and Baba among others in return for bribes. Retributive law caught up with him when he was trying to escape from the camp of the peasants as he was killed by the government forces.

### THEMES IN THE PLAY

i. **Oppression:** The dominant theme as can be seen in the play is that of oppression of the poor by the rich (under the shield of the government) which prompted the revolution by the peasant farmers. Government made people to pay taxes through their noses and when it became unbearable then the peasant farmers took to arms. We can see this oppression extend to the theatrical situation where Titubi and her group

tried to stop the performance because the revolted will expose their secrets and gain the support of the masses. The people on the other hand stand up to say no to oppression.

ii. **Violence:** The use of violence by the government is another thematic element in the play. The government laid heavy taxes on the people and gave order that if any flouted the law, he/she should be arrested and thrown into the prison and this led to a serious violence between the government officials and the peasant farmers. They were ready to do anything harsh if the government pressed further.

iii. **Revolution:** Another significant theme in this play is revolution. The farmers feel the government is not giving them fair treatment, took to arms, since dialogue failed. The peasant farmers wrote so many letters to the government so as to look into their condition but instead of relieving them of their burden, the government resorted to making things worse for them which now gave the peasant farmers the courage to look back in their struggle not minding the fact that they die day by day. It was a good step for the revolution to take place though bloody but brought the desired change.

iv. **Courage:** Courage is also seen in the play. Titubi is portrayed as a courageous character that is ready to do anything to get what she wanted. Though she is of a rich background, she allows herself to be imprisoned so as to get into the camp of peasant farmers with the sole aim of capturing their leader which she did. The story of Moremi also portrayed as a fearless character who against all odds accepted to go into slavery just to accomplish the mission of exposing the secrets of the Igbo and consequently weakening them. On the side of Marshal, he is seen as a fearless and courageous fighter against terrorism. Even when the government agrees on dialogue Marshal sees it as an opportunity to take his turn them?

v. **Disguise:** Titubi is able to penetrate into the camp of the peasants as a result of her disguise as a prisoner. She pretends to be a mother in pain of the loss of her son to the enemy through which she is able to know and feel the sufferings of the farmers with them. Moremi also did not appear as the queen, instead she chose to disguise as an ordinary woman in order to be taken into slavery. On the other hand, the peasants also disguised as traders and they were able to invade the prison house.

vi. **Negotiation:** This is another vital theme in the play. Definitely in a conflict there will be two

parties: the antagonist and the protagonist. At a point a section should be able to shift grounds so as to allow peace to reign. The people should be considered first, the interest of the people should be protected because when there is war, there will be loss of lives and properties, the progress of the land will be jeopardized, and that is why strategy should be fashioned out for a round-table discussion in order to think of ways I A forward. This was what the government in "Morountodun " did and that brought an end to the war that for years through the intervention of Titubi who took it upon herself to risk her life for the masses.

- vii. **Language:** The language of the play is simple and straight forward. The playwright makes use of English language but infused Yoruba language into it to reflect the social background of the play. Through language he is able to differentiate characters and also reveal the inner minds of the characters. For instance, Moremi has this to say in order to show her determination to save her people:

*....this is a day of joy, my friends. The land is going to be reborn, by the daring of a woman.*

This portrays her as a determined character. Titubi also demonstrate a similar attitude when she told her mother: "I volunteered (more excited) you see, mama, they are coming to this prison this week.... the police will let them come, and free the prisoners, including me". So through suitable use of words, the playwright is able to pass his message across without confusing events and personalities.

- viii. **Style:** The use of flashbacks helps in the narration of the story. He uses the acts of give and take within a revolutionary group in a situation of siege.

## CONCLUSION

Since inequality and insufficient economic opportunities have been discovered as the major causes of terrorism, the government should take into cognizance the need to bridge the gap between the rich and the down-trodden, boost the economy through international business relationships to achieve peace and security within the Nigerian environment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

After much ado, with the explorations of events in coming situations in Nigeria on the problem of terrorists and their deeds, there is the need to coin

out modalities through which this monster that has bedeviled Nigeria with pathetic stories can be countered to give room for a nation that is cleansed of ethnic conflict, religious conflict, political conflict and the likes.

- i. First and foremost, it is the duty of the government to stop these rampant killings by declaring perpetrators as terrorists so that the law can take its course and bring them to book
- ii. Drama is one of the major channels of dissemination of information, Dramatists/Theatre artists should be granted freedom of speech without infringing on their rights as professionals.
- iii. If drama is to demonstrate necessary caution and responsibility, artists should try harder in creating measures of self-control which will be appropriate and sufficient to enhance positive change in the country.
- iv. Drama should be supported by government and non-government organization. It is only collective responsibility that could counter terrorist strategies over the nation.
- v. In order to make the struggle against terrorism successful, counter terrorist organizations need to adjust their actions, organizational strategies and technological know-how.
- vi. Contemporary democratic societies should respond to recent terrorism by new counter terrorist strategies which will take into account the role of drama to contribute significantly to a successful struggle against terrorism in Nigeria.
- vii. It is also the role of drama to remind authorities that the response to terrorism should comply with the rule of law, basic right and requirement for social justice.
- viii. There is also the need for international assistance, especially in the areas of intelligence sharing, counter insurgency operation detection of improvised explosive devices, forensic analysis, intelligence gathering and analysis and the mounting of a sensitization programs

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