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ICONOCLASTS AND COUNTER TERRORISM AGAINST STATE ORGANIZED TERROR: A STUDY OF PERSPECTIVES IN NIGERIAN HISTORY AND DRAMA

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Abstract

The paper assesses the issue of terrorism as a social reality present in the Nigerian state from its origination and the questions treated by the paper among others include: what dimensions did the occurrences of terrorism take on Nigerian socio-political sphere? What are the counter measures taken by individual and groups in dealing with state organized terrorism? What are the dimensions state organized terrorism take in the modern Nigerian state? Lekan Balogun's *Ogun Skugga* is used primarily while other literary works are used to supplement. The paper argues that the state organized terrorism was a surreptitious method of coercion adopted by the colonial authorities equally and eventually adopted by the political elites after independence. It also maintains that individual and groups engaged in subtle and overt terrorism as counter measure against state sponsored terrorism. Again, current acts of terrorism organized by state are multidimensional so also are variables presented by ethnic, tribal and political inclinations which in turn stimulate approaches by individual and groups in counter measures. The importance of this work is the perspectives it presents from history and drama to assess the issue of terrorism and its relevance to modern Nigerian society.

Keywords: counter-terrorism, drama, history, Iconoclast, state terrorism

Introduction

The United States Department of Defense defines terrorism as “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate government or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological(www.terrorism.com). In this wise, violence or a threat of it takes prominence, but violence on a victim does not portend terrorism. Although there may be a premeditated act of violence, it may not connote an act of terrorism. However, terrorism is a well-planned act. According to Eric Fromm (1964), there are two kinds of violence which include “incidental violence”, which may arise out of actions of protest or affirmations of certain views and “intended violence” which is aimed at the violation of others.

Therefore, one can say that violence does not constitute terrorism, but violence or the threat of it in an incongruous manner could constitute terrorism. That explains why “terrorist

act is frequently defined as violence used by, among, or against states or other authorities in order to inspire fear and to make a statement, usually political” (Gerbner 1988: 7). However, violence is not the same as terrorism as violence could be used to instill fear into the mind of target audience. In Erik Mannik’s words, terrorism is “the use of violence with the aim of creating fear in a wider audience in order to prevent various parties from doing something, or, on the contrary, to coerce them into a certain behavior”(2007: 152). Such use of violence has served states and various regimes over a long period of time. Thus, the colonial authorities in Nigeria in many of their various acts had perpetrated what could symbolize state terrorism against individuals and groups while many individuals or groups have also consciously and unconsciously engaged in counter-terrorism acts.

Although, terrorism is not a recent phenomenon and assessing the narrative of terrorism shows it as an act that could be traced to ancient civilization. “This implies that terrorism is not a child of modernity; it is as old as the existence of man. The history is as old as human’s willingness to use violence to effect politics” (Omede 2015: 120). According to Wikipedia and Freeman-Grenville(1978:111) More than two millennial ago, the zealots, a Jewish sect in Judea area were reputed to have resisted the Roman domination through assassination campaigns. They were reputed to have assassinated their enemies in broad daylight especially in crowded places or at feasts using primitive daggers. They chose their place and time of assassination to communicate to maximum audience.

According to Freeman-Grenville (1978:251), Assassins, (hashshashshun)an order of the Nizari Ismailis, an Islamic movement was founded at Alamut, Persia, by al-Hasan b al-Sabbah. It also used almost the same method against Christian Crusaders who came to the Middle East to retrieve the Holy Land from the hands of the Arab Muslims between 1090 and 1272. Suicidal martyrdom common among the modern Islamic terrorists today could be traced to bear their roots to these ancient groups. Bernard Lewis in his book, *Assassins*, (1967) actually linked this early movement with modern Islamic terrorism. In modern Europe, anti-monarchical tendencies and acts had strains of terrorism. The 1789 French Revolution and its aftermath were a conglomerate of undiluted individual and group terrorism and an artistic portrayal of it all by Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities* gives a saturated view of what a ‘reign of terror’ actually means. Wikipedia, Freeman Grenville(1978:566) and Dominic Hibberd(1990:27-28) recorded that what precipitated the First World War was a terrorist act that occurred in Sarajevo, Bosnia when a young Serb, Gavrilo Princip, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire on Sunday, June 28, 1914. Ever since then terrorism in one way or the other has been engaged in by individual, group and sects as an instrument to coerce, frighten or intimidate individuals, government or groups.

In essence, from the few cited examples above, individual or group engaged in terrorism deliberately to create fear or exploit fear in order to pass a message across or to make a statement to a target audience. By sowing the seed of fear or panic, the perpetrator designs a psychological effect that goes beyond the impact of his acts against the immediate victim or object of attack to the larger target audience. By creating an atmosphere of intimidation for the target audience, the perpetrator of terrorist acts can then manipulate the political set up through the fear created on the populace. The success of such act of terrorism is thus measured by the ability to attract attention to the perpetrator and the cause he represents. Although, threat of violence and actual violence might be resorted to just like in

an act of war and act of terrorism could include bombing, arson, murder, kidnapping etc., but it differs from warfare in many respects.

State sponsored acts of terror which is a form of secret warfare fall into different category. In Nigeria, as in many Western societies, political actors have exploited and used 'false flag' which in layman's language is an act of calling a dog a bad name in order to kill it. When pre and post-independence Nigerian political actors engaged in act of terrorism, it was actually to intimidate target individuals or group from opposing their political views or objectives. Violence and threats of violence were often utilized to deter recalcitrant elements (the iconoclasts) and those aspiring to follow the footsteps of such elements. By unleashing overt or covert acts of terror against the iconoclasts, acts which may include imprisonment or threat of imprisonment, physical assault, banishment, prevention of victims from functioning adequately in addition to such violent acts such as murder, arson, kidnapping of such iconoclasts or his family members, many iconoclasts and those looking up to them as role models have been frightened or intimidated by the state using instrument of terror to the extent of such iconoclasts going into voluntary exile. The message has always been made manifest to the iconoclasts, especially their followers and with subtle or overt terrorism, many regimes have been able to railroad iconoclasts seen as opposition to quietude or exile.

Terrorism in Nigeria

Scholars have assessed various types and dimensions of terrorism and a non-exhaustive list include: political terrorism, religious terrorism, state terrorism, nationalist terrorism, eco-terrorism etc. (Adeoye 2008: 151) and Nigeria, since it came into existence has experienced one form of these types of terrorism or the other. State actors, individuals and groups have found it expedient to hold Nigerian citizens to ransom using the instrument of terrorism. The narratives of terrorism which create a bifurcation between violence and terrorism make the appreciation of some acts perpetrated by state and individuals a medley difficult to put into proper perspective since the country's journey from pre-independence to post-independence.

Post-independence Nigeria has also seen many acts in the social, political and economic terrains that could rightfully be subsumed under one form of terrorism or the other either by state actors, individuals or groups. Individuals, through their various acts and tendencies have expedite counter-terrorist acts that have created a dynamism of heated socio-political situation in the 1960's, 1970's, 1980's and 1990's in the country. Individual iconoclasts which include Ogunde, Soyinka, Fawehimi, Tai Solarin, Fela Anikulapo, Saro Wiwa to mention a few have used their arts in counter-terrorism and this paper thus focuses on arts of a number of these iconoclasts which highlight their engagement with counter-terrorism especially against the background of state organized terrorism. In some instances where mass agitation and protests appear like counter-terrorism, scholars like Aderonke Majekodunmi have categorized Niger Delta Militants and the Boko Haram sect as terrorist groups. Aderonke explains that "the hemorrhagic acts of the Boko Haram and Niger Delta militants in Nigeria warrant an exhaustive discourse on terrorism and counter terrorism in Nigeria" (2015: 129). While Boko Haram uses violence and agitation to instill fear by creating Islamic state within an existing state (Nigeria), Niger Delta kind of violence underpins their moral justification for the way the youths, women and men vent their anger upon the state.

It is probably due to this that Karber (1971) assessed terrorism as not only a symbolic act but also as a means of communication while he also categorized it under four basic components which include (i) transmitter(the terrorist) (ii) intended recipient (the hapless victim) (iii) the message(bombing, ambush, kidnapping etc.) (iv) feedback (reaction of target audience). In the perspective of the terrorist, ideology or motivation influences the objectives of terrorist operations and the casualty rate. Due to the secretive nature and the small size of operation, terrorists seldom give victims any opportunity to defend against or to deter. The strategy, quite unlike ordinary violence is to draw the attention of the local populace and the government to their cause. The effectiveness of terrorism does not reside in the act but in the reaction of government or the public to the acts.

Violence, Terror in Drama and Theatre

Violence and terror have long been major themes of mythology, drama, literature, and popular culture (Gerbner 1988: 7). Drama and theatre, right from inception have always had scenes filled with violence and terror. A panoramic survey of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, *Electra*; Aeschylus' *The Suppliant*, *Oresteia*, *The Persians* and Euripides' *Medea*, *The Trojan Women*, to mention a few shows violence and terror in various forms and shades.

Sociologically, the content of drama and theatre are drawn from the society. Apart from what constitutes societal moral, there are negative attitudes such as violence and terror embedded in drama and theatre. This is because, as Ajikobi (2007: 170) reiterates, "The arts of a people is a true mirror of their mind". The Greek people obviously realized the existence of violence and terror as ineradicable societal problems, however, Greek drama in performance merely reported these acts rather than portray them before the audience. Greenwald et al. (2001:34)corroborate this as they stated: Greek tragedies, with very few exceptions (e.g. Sophocles' *Ajax*) do not show violent acts on stage, although they are about calamitous violence. Exhibiting violence violated the Greek sense of decorum and diminished the role of the audience imagination.

Apart from not working in consonance with audience imagination, the Greek society was also aware of the powerful effect theatre has on human mind and as Horace (65-8BC) states: "Whatever we learn merely through the ear makes less impression upon our minds than what is presented to the trustworthy eye" (qtd. in Ajikobi 2007: 229). This is because drama, according to Aristotle in his *Poetics* is mimetic and this, Ralph Metzner (2008:45) expatiates further when he states:

At the most basic level of individual development, most people would agree that violence, like other forms of behaviour, is learned by imitation. It is widely accepted from social psychological studies of violent criminals that violence is a learned behavior.

The Greek society even at that time was keenly aware that violence could be learnt and taught through illusion of performance inherent in the theatre.

Playwrights through the centuries have equally incorporated violence and terror in their plays since plays are reflection of happenings and events drawn from the society. It is noteworthy that many dramatic performances have not been careful of the contagious effect of theatre on the psychology of their audience. The Elizabethan, Restoration, Realistic theatre

and etc. including contemporary plays from Europe and America not excluding African theatrical performances not only incorporate violence and terror in their dramatic architectonics, but they have also been performed without shielding the audience from the contagious effects of learned violence.

More ubiquitous are the violence in contemporary screen media such as western movies, telenovellas and so on which are often saturated with violence and terror and the fact that the producers of these works are oblivious of the effects of violence and terror on the society is probably responsible for the level of violence and terrorism in contemporary world.

Iconoclasts and their counter terrorism posture against state terrorism

Due to widespread nature of terrorism in the contemporary society, this paper assesses the effect of terrorist action perpetrated on individual, referred to as iconoclast and the counter measures taken by such individual and the results of these as a chain of events creating an atmosphere of perpetual terror in the society at large.

Nigerian theatre history records the various subtle acts of terrorism by the colonial masters against the father of Nigerian travelling Theatre, Hubert Ogunde, because of the anti-establishment tones of his theatre. He was persecuted on several occasions, hounded, prevented from staging his plays under flimsy excuses and many of these actions could be taken as subtle acts of terrorism. His plays *Bread and Bullet*, *Tiger's Empire*, *Strike and Hunger*, *Worse than Crime* and so on were used to satirise the socio-political situation which culminated in the heavy handed acts of the colonial government in the early 1950's. Ogunde was an iconoclast that became a torn in the flesh of the colonial government. Oscar Brockett cited Ogunde's numerous ordeals in the hands of the colonialists which at times were subtle acts of terrorism because many of Ogunde's plays were anticolonial pieces and they "were censored or forbidden and at one time he was imprisoned" (2010: 572). The political elites in the post independent Nigeria also terrorised Ogunde for his anti-establishment plays. For instance his *Yoruba Ronu* (1964) was banned by the regional government for two years especially with the terrorist undertone inherent in "E Wetie ko ta robo" which calls on Yoruba indigenes to set ablaze those who sabotaged Yoruba political focus. This act of 'wetine' was also to deter other would-be saboteurs from engaging in action deleterious to the Yoruba nation and by so doing maintain Yoruba unity.

Wole Soyinka is another non-conformist that took the political elites head on both in his literary and physical activities. Many of his plays bear satirical darts meant for both civilian and military elites in the country. Many of his plays depict the act of terror by the state and these include: *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Swamp Dwellers*, *From Zia with Love*, *A Play of Giants*, "King Baabu" and so on. His physical action against state terrorism includes hijacking of radio station in the quest to promote peace on the eve of Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. He also visited the Biafran leader, Odumegwu Ojukwu to the chagrin of the Nigerian Federal government under General Gowon. A critical look at the play "Ogun Skugga" written by Lekan Balogun, an adaptation of Soyinka's *The Man Died* gives dramatic hints to the frame of mind of Nigerian iconoclasts such as Ogunde, Saro Wiwa, Fela Anikulapo while subjected to state engendered terrorism.

The play begins with Dapo Adelugba reading a letter written by Soyinka to him. Tunji Oyelana comes in with a piece of news that another iconoclast is not dead contrary to speculation. The terrorist activities of the various regimes are summarized by the duo. These

include: the notorious “Weti-e” which is a terrorist act organized by a group of politicians to deal with non-conformist opponent in the political and ideological terrains:

OYELANA: What did the other innocent citizens of the country do to suffer such terrible humiliation and violence that has been unleashed on them? I wonder what sort of a society one is part of. The Police who are supposed to protect, suddenly becoming a terror gang through which the populace is subjected to the madness of power unchecked! (4)

ADELUGBA: I said “Weti-e” is the new social order. Human beings suddenly transformed into beasts with uncanny willpower to wreck unimaginable havoc on their society. (5)

ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) is also another organization that is not spared the act of state terrorism

OYELANA: Kongi is always right. ASUU was also right to declare that the Federal Government was deliberately creating an atmosphere in which it could unleash violence and terror on the citizenry. This can only be compared to the civil war. We are all victims, Dapo. We all are victims of this reckless society seized by some powerful gangsters in government (6).

This brief summary forms the prologue to the main experience of the iconoclast referred to as Kongi, who is Wole Soyinka, the nonconformist whose experience of subtle terrorism which include stark humiliation at the hand of prison officials acting under order from above. It is to be noted that these experiences give insight to what other iconoclasts such as Saro Wiwa went through in incarceration before he was killed. It also gives insight into what the giant iconoclast, Gani Fawehinmi, must have gone through as he spent months in one prison or the other due to his nonconformist stance with Nigerian political actors. It also exemplifies what Fela Anikulapo must have gone through when he was imprisoned by various regimes in Nigeria, the cumulative effects which had repercussion on his health resulting in his untimely death. Fela’s abode was even brazenly destroyed by the military under Olusegun Obasanjo while Fela’s mother was mortally wounded in the attack which was all acts of overt terrorism by the state.

Fela, like Soyinka was thrown into jail severally by the state and “Ogun Skugga” gives a snippet view of the counter terrorism acts by these iconoclasts who remained unfrightened by state acts of terrorism. Between the state and the iconoclasts, it is noteworthy that the chain of terrorism by the state actors usually elicits counter terrorist acts by the iconoclasts which prompt further act of terrorism by the state actors. Thus, in the chain, the offenses of the iconoclasts were their counter terrorist acts which the state actors usually considered effrontery on their rights to unbridled use of power.

In “Ogun Skugga”, Balogun displays the poise of Soyinka against the various acts of terrorism by the government of the day. For instance, Soyinka considered the Nigerian civil war a belligerent act of terrorism and he decides to work against it. This counter terrorist act leads to his arrest and incarceration:

MALLAM D... When did you last see Ojukwu?

SOYINKA: some couple of days back...eight days ago really.

MALLAM D: why did you go to see him?

SOYINKA: (*Changes the topic*) Why was Lagos so anxious to liquidate me?

MALLAM D: what do you mean?

SOYINKA: soldiers were sent to Ibadan to kidnap and kill me. They were ordered to hunt me down at all costs. (6)

Mallam D eventually presents the opinion of the regimes on Nigerian iconoclasts. The regimes find it expedient to silence the iconoclasts in the society and the acts they usually take is symbolic not only to the iconoclasts themselves but to intimidate or frightened others who might follow the footsteps of the iconoclasts.

MALLAM D: ...By the way, what gives people like you and Tai Solarin the right to think that you know everything; that you have solutions to all the problems of the country?

The iconoclasts are frequently subjected to inhuman treatment in prison and these include putting them in chains even while in custody.

SOYINKA: (...*Doors open and 3 security men enter. One is heavily armed while one holds a chain.*) What do you want?

SECURITY 1: we have the orders to have your legs chained together.

SOYINKA: what did you say? This is insane! Don't you dare lay your hands on me!

SECURITY 1: we ask that you co-operate with us. We don't intend to be rough by any means unless... (*The security with the chains bends down and begins to clamp the leg chains on.*)

SOYINKA: Ogun, comrade, bear witness how your metal is travestied! (8)

The iconoclasts, Fawehimi, and others often embark on hunger strike the way Soyinka did it severally while in prison. They could also be transferred without warning from one prison to the other. There is also the terrorist act of extra judicial killings common in prisons.

STUDENT: None. The only interrogation we had was being taken out by the soldiers for what I called Dodan Roulette.

SOYINKA: what does that mean?

STUDENT: The soldiers would take you out and line you against the wall to be shot. It could be a live bullet or a blank. It all depends on your luck. (21)

Those who carry out the terrorist act on behalf of government are often shielded from punishment as the student recounts:

STUDENT:...Two weeks ago, an officer was brought in here for shooting thirteen detainees and some prisoners of war in Asaba. He was not tried or court martialed. He admitted killing them in cold blood out of panic because

they were talking in Ibo and he had asked them to speak only in English. He decided they were plotting to kill him when they refused to obey him, so he turned his machine gun on them and killed them all. He was released two days ago and re-assigned to a new division. (22)

The essence of the subtle and violent acts of terror by the regimes is not lost on the iconoclasts. Soyinka summarises the motivation for counter measures by other iconoclasts against state terrorism when he recounts in “Ogun Skugga”:

SOYINKA: alone, with leg chains in this solitary confinement, George Mangakis’ writing comes to my mind. When a dictator is imposed on your country, the very first thing you feel, the very first day is the feeling of humiliation. And then comes the attempt to impose on you by fear, acceptance of various barbarous actions of theirs that you hear about or that you actually see them commit against your fellow human beings...(9)

Conclusion

In contemporary times, the word terrorist or terrorism creates an invidious panic due to cognizant and non-cognizant experience of the hearer and this is fundamentally due to the signification from the modern mass media. However, terrorism is an act engaged in its subtle and virulent forms by individual, group, state and international entities primarily to make a statement. The primacy of the statement differentiates terrorism from any types of violence. Thus, terrorism has been an instrument used by individual, group of people from time immemorial to press home a cause and it has been integral in the architectonics of drama and theatre. However, its depiction on stage was controlled due to what the ancients perceived to be its contagious effects on the psyche of the members of the public. Contemporary drama and theatre especially the screen media have not been so circumspect in their portrayal of violence and terror on stage and this probably contributed to preponderance and widespread nature of terrorism in the modern world.

Terrorism in use by state is a common phenomenon especially its use to intimidate non-conformist individuals who usually took opposite stance against the establishment in their acts of state terrorism. The act is majorly intended to dissuade the followers of these iconoclasts from following them. Also, these non-conformist or iconoclasts are usually people who use themselves, their arts or skills to confront the establishment when the political elites engaged in any act that could be considered as terrorism. In this paper, an example of one of such iconoclasts is Wole Soyinka whose travails fully represent those of others such as Fela Anikulapo, Gani Fawehinmi, Tai Solarin, Hubert Ogunde, Saro Wiwa and so on”. The acts of terrorism perpetrated by the state often met with counter measure from these iconoclasts and this often set in motion a chain of terrorism from the state actors as exemplified in the play “Ogun Skugga”.

In this work, it is thus verifiable that subtle or violent terrorism by state in either its covert or overt forms are resorted to by Nigerian political elites symbolically to frighten non-conformists and their followers to silence. However, the iconoclasts on many occasions have resorted to counter measures using themselves as symbols and this has led to further act of terrorism by the state as the iconoclasts are often clamped in jail or hounded into exile.

Furthermore, the play, “Ogun Skugga” demonstrates the art and skills of counter measures usually exploited by these iconoclasts in response to state organized acts of terrorism.

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