

PORTRAYAL OF TERRORISM IN SOJI COLE'S *EMBERS*

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Abstract

Terrorism was a foreign concept in Nigeria until 2002 when a radical Islamic zealot, Mohammed Yusuf, formed Boko Haram, a terror group, which went on to kill thousands of citizens and displace millions. Since Boko Haram and its splinter groups unleashed sorrow, tears and blood in northern Nigeria in the early 2000s, security agencies have been unable to check the bloodbath. The research studies *Embers*, a play by Soji Cole. It engages the use of Psychological Theory and Behavioral Psychology in analysing the text because Psychological Theory affirms the link between the mental state of characters and their traumas while Behavioural Psychology shows the relationship between behaviour and the human mind. *Embers* deals with the terrorism of Boko Haram. The nature of terrorism in *Embers* includes creativity and destruction. The causes of terrorism in the selected text are family, education, corruption, corrupt government and a perverted justice system. The research concludes that corruption, injustice, insensitivity, ignorance and poverty are the major causes of terrorism.

Keywords: *Boko Haram, Terrorism, Corruption, Soji Cole*

Introduction

Oftentimes, man perceives conflict as a means of self- reassertion, and self-preservation. Conflict is inherent in man's relationship. It reflects man's selfishness and dangerous pursuit of power and dominance. Perhaps, the highly competitive environment humans live in orchestrates the conflictual nature of man and the need to survive, adapt, protect and preserve himself in his environment. Burke corroborates by projecting humans as 'conflictual beings'. This innate characteristic of man also reflects in man's interpersonal relationships and further validates the existence of conflicts in man's community. In essence, conflict is a product of a clash of interests or mismatched goals and needs. Man perceives conflict as one of the means of seeking redress to systemic injustice prevalent in a relationship.

Thakore Digvijaysinh views that as long as man's community continues to interact and relate together, conflict is unavoidable. Conflict is an outcome of a clash of behaviour (7). It is an expression of hostility, negative attitude, antagonism, aggression, contention, and misunderstanding. Conflict helps other parties involved to realise the perception of injustice by the disadvantaged party, hence, the projection of conflict as a stimulus for social change. While a section of the human community views conflict as destructive, another section views it as a means of voicing their dissatisfaction. It is noteworthy, however, that conflict often impedes the development of a community until the aggrieved party's claims are addressed

and conflicts resolved. Furthermore, conflict is a metaphor for the survival of the fittest and it is part of the universal struggle which is motivated by human's innate aggressive tendencies.

Conflict can be projected through several violent means such as war, insurrection, mutiny, terrorism, and so on. Since the survival of a community is in jeopardy, it can be said to be conflict. For this study, attention will be on a form of conflict, which is, terrorism. To some people, terrorism is an act of destruction while some other people believe that it is a liberation movement. It can be the destruction of vulnerable and unarmed parts of the community to get attention or force the government into attending to a need. The terrorist, on the other hand, perceives himself as a freedom fighter who is out to achieve his rights. This makes terrorism quite an ambivalent and ambiguous concept. All the major actors in terrorism perceive it differently, ranging from the victims to the government, to the terrorists. The United Nations High-Level Panel of 2004 corroborates this stance by stating that terrorism lacks a clear and concise stance on its moral and normative stance. The definition of terrorism therefore is socially constructed and the truth of the definition is relative. Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur and Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler (2012) posit that the ambiguity of definition has turned terrorism into polemics of campaign.

Terrorism can also be an anxiety-inspiring means of repeated violent action, employed by clandestine personalities or groups or state actions for peculiar, criminal or political reasons whereby the direct victims of violence are not the main targets.

Statement of Problem

The persistence of terrorism and crisis in Nigeria is an important reason for a critical interrogation of the dual phenomena. This research will pay attention to the nature of Boko Haram terrorism as projected in Soji Cole's *Embers*. Many scholars have written extensively on Boko Haram terrorism. For instance; Helon Habila (2016) in, "The Chibok Girls," did a nonfictional analysis of Boko Haram kidnappings and the Islamic militancy in Nigeria. Associate Fellow, Conflict, Security and Development, Virginia Comolli, in the revised edition of her article, "Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency," published in 2017, describes the insurgency as a "hybrid security challenge" that demands "effective countermeasures tackling of both violence and the underlying narrative" (p.154). The study, which is based on the writer's broad field research and interviews in Nigeria between 2012 and 2014, deals with some of the challenges encountered in studying Boko Haram and also gives a historical background to Islam in Nigeria, coupled with the emergence of extremist groups in the country. In *The Chibok Girls: The Boko Haram Kidnappings and Islamist Militancy in Nigeria*, Helon Habila, considers the trauma of the kidnapping of some of the 276 female students who survived the April 2014 abduction in Chibok. Habila also interrogates the horrors of victims' displacement from their homes and condemns the insecurity at the country's borders. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that although there are many works of literature treating the impact of Boko Haram terrorism on Nigeria, however, none of them have been able to analyse Boko Haram terrorism along with its nature, causes, impact, and coping strategies by the victims and provide solutions. Ultimately, it contributes to knowledge about terrorism.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this research is to explore the impact of terrorism in northern Nigeria. The objective will, therefore, be achieved through these ways:

1. examine the nature of terrorism in Soji Cole's *Embers*,
2. assess the primary causes of terrorism in Soji Cole's *Embers*,

3. explore the impact of terrorism in Soji Cole's *Embers*.
4. appraise the coping strategies of the victims in Soji Cole's *Embers*,
5. to examine the possible resolutions that can be inferred in Soji Cole's *Embers*.

Research Questions

- i. What is the nature of terrorism in Soji Cole's *Embers*?
- ii. What are the causes of terrorism in Soji Cole's *Embers*?
- iii. In what way does terrorism impact the characters and the societies depicted in Soji Cole's *Embers*?
- iv. What are the coping strategies of the victims of the crisis in Soji Cole's *Embers*?
- v. What are the possible resolutions that can be inferred in Soji Cole's *Embers*?

Scope of the study

The research attempts a literary examination of terrorism and crises based on Soji Cole's *Embers*. This research adopts Boko Haram terrorism in the northern part of Nigeria has given the country negative attention in global security discourse, specifically with the abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014. The text is strategically selected because of its critical approach to exploring the origins of the conflicts, the nature of the conflict, the traumatic experiences of the victims of the crises, the underlying issues promoting the spread of the crises in the locations and the third party influence in the crises - all of which are key to the objectives of this research.

This study will also adopt psychoanalysis criticism because it pays critical attention to exploring the minds of characters in texts. This will help the research study the minds of the characters presented in *Embers*. Attention will also be given to critical works on terrorism, especially Boko Haram. Critical texts gathered from the library and on the internet will also be used. The study is limited to Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria, espoused in the play of Soji Cole. It is limited to the drama genre but it will look at articles and statistical data to buttress the points treated. The study is delimited to Soji Cole's *Embers*.

Significance of Study

Conflict is part of human relationships. Usually, this occurs when there is a clash of interests or ideas. The two crises this research adopts – the Boko Haram crisis is a significant crisis that has ravaged the country, Nigeria. The country has been besieged by different crises from its inception – military coups, Civil War, the Niger Delta crisis, the Boko Haram terror group, the farmer-herder crisis, and the most recent – banditry and kidnapping. This study intends to explore Boko Haram terrorism because of its significance to national wealth, unity, security, and image of the country because terrorism has become a volatile discourse in international politics. This research will engage *Embers* in exploring the cause of the crisis, its nature, the state of the victims of the crisis and their coping mechanisms. This study will also propose possible solutions to the crises. This study will contribute to knowledge.

Methodology

Materials and data for this research are sourced and collected through reading and analysis of the selected texts of Soji Cole. Soji Cole's *Embers* is selected because it dwells extensively on the existential problems of Boko Haram terrorism. Soji Cole is one of the leading lights in the new generation of African writers. Soji Cole treats drama therapy, trauma studies, and cross-cultural performance in his critical and creative writings. From his drama text, *Embers*, Soji Cole examines the state of freed Boko Haram captives and victims

in the makeshift refugee camp. Cole attempts to compare the state of the refugees in the camp and Boko Haram captivity. This play captures the contribution of the third party to the exacerbation of the crisis rocking the southern and northern regions of the country. This research will critically explore the nature of the crisis in the drama text. This research will use materials such as drama texts and critical texts.

Justification of Selected Text

This research engages Soji Cole's *Embers*. This text is selected because it dissects the socio-cultural and political issues concerning the Boko Haram terror group. *Embers* by Soji Cole views the Niger Delta uprising as a product of the insincerity of government after the Civil War. The government's inability to fulfil promises made to build peace after the Civil War, made the people of the region perceive the government as perpetrators of inequality, inequity and injustice.

Theoretical Framework

This research adopts the Psychological Theory because of the attention it gives to the study of the human mind. According to Ann Dobie (2012), the human mind is fascinating and can be understood better using psychological methods. The readers of literary works are, often, forced to question a character's mind if he behaves illogically, just like they will address a friend. People never run out of conjectures about other people's motives, relationships and conversations. Aristotle observed this in the 4th Century BC. Aristotle notes the influence tragedy has on the audience, saying tragedy evokes the feeling of pity, fear and catharsis of emotions on the audience. He explains the influence literature has on humans and questions the influence. Also, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung espouse this theory further, having observed their patients as psychiatrists. Jung investigates why people behave the way they do. Jung believes humans have the collective unconscious, myths and archetypes that help see literature as a universal experience of the human race.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Terrorism

Terrorism is a global phenomenon and it is not bound spatially. There are different terror groups spread across the world. For instance, there is Terik-E Taliban in Pakistan, Lord Resistance Army in Central African Republic, Jemaah Islamiya in Indonesia, Islamic State of the Iraq and Levant in Iraq, Hizballah in Lebanon, Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, the Daesh also known as the ISIS in Syria, the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Taliban is the first terrorist sect to be in total control of the government of their country. Most of these terrorist sects are domiciled in the Asian or African continent; their impact is however felt in most parts of the world. A critical example of this is the September 11, 2001, terror attack on the soil of the United States by the al-Qaeda terrorist group domiciled in Afghanistan. This implies that when a terrorist organisation thrives in a place, the region or the world's peace is being threatened. The case of the Boko Haram terrorist group's influence on the peace of West Africa corroborates this assertion. For this research, this study will focus on the Boko Haram sect.

Although the United Nations and its member-states have never hidden their condemnation of acts, practices and methods of terrorism, creating an Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism and drafting several conventions against all aspects of terrorism, this has not stopped or impeded terrorism in the world. For instance, the September 11, 2001, terrorist

attack on the United States, which caused a watershed in the history of terrorism in the world, is a notable one. This horrific attack started with the terrorist sect hijacking a passenger jetliner en route from Boston to Los Angeles, slamming it into the New York World Trade Center at 8:45a.m and eighteen minutes later, another plane, the United Airlines flight, also from Boston to Los Angeles crashed into the south tower. The United States recorded the death of nothing less than two thousand, nine hundred and seventy-four (2,974) people in the terror attack. The United States equally launched a retaliatory attack against the leader of the al-Qaeda terrorist sect responsible for the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States, Osama Bin Laden. The United States eventually killed Osama Bin Laden on May 2, 2011, in Pakistan.

Terrorism in Africa

Mroszczyk and Abrahms (2021) say the choice of targeted victims by terror groups depends on the ideological orientation of the groups. Terrorists refer to their religious motives to wreak havoc on civilians. The new wave of terrorism is characterised by increased civilians being targeted for violence in the name of religion. Several researchers have been able to link Islamic terrorist sects with the proclivity to conduct mass-casualty attacks against civilians. The new wave of terrorism in Africa is motivated by religion and it is unprecedented in scope, deliberate selection of targets, lethality and indiscriminate character. With religiously motivated terrorism, killing becomes an end in itself rather than a political tool used for negotiation. While Islam is not new in Africa, the interpretation of the religion has changed recently, especially among the Muslim populations. The traditional and more tolerant Sufi group of Islam has been displaced by the radical divisive Salafist interpretation of Islam which provides the theological backbone for Sunni jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State. Scholars observe this change in conflict-ridden countries like Niger, Nigeria, Mali and so on. The Salafist teachings sponsored by Saudi Arabia coupled with youth unemployment and lack of adequate education have incited increased violence in Africa. The failures of the government in those countries helped the Salafist organisation step in and provide social services, thereby winning the support of the disadvantaged groups in the terrorism-wracked countries. The Salafist interpretation of Islam is engaged by the jihadist movements to project their enemies, missions, objectives, and justification for the use of violence in advancing their cause. The jihadists were able to justify their anti-civilian violence as a legitimate weapon.

Terrorism in Nigeria

Sian Herbert and Sa'eed Husaini (2018) view the history of modern Nigeria as one filled with turbulence and violent politics. The Boko Haram terrorist sect in the northeast has continued to displace the northeast population, thereby draining government assets and increasing the rate of food scarcity as the region is known to be the food basket of the nation. The Nigerian system has been plagued with different crises ranging from the Civil War, Boko Haram terrorism, the Niger Delta crisis, clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the north and middle belt regions, and the secessionists groups causing displacement of several people in the affected region. These crises have put a question mark on the unity of the country and strained the security forces. Nigeria, with a heterogeneous population and overlapping ethnic, religious, regional and sub-ethnic identity marks, is often exploited by politicians to shore up electoral support. Herbert and Husaini (2018:18) say the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria has led to the displacement of over sixty-two thousand people. Out of all the insurgencies ravaging Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency seems to be the most dreadful

as Boko Haram was labelled a terrorist group in 2013 by the United States. Boko Haram launched over 1,639 large-scale attacks in Nigeria, killing over 14,436, with about 6,051 sustaining injuries and about 2,063 people taken hostage. The origin of this insurgency has been linked to the wide gap between the elite and the masses, unfulfilled political and economic promises, high unemployment rate, poverty, injustice, human rights abuse, and so on. Furthermore, illiteracy has made it possible for anti-societal, violent, extremist and divisive teachings to persist and gain ground in the country.

This research intends to explore the causes of terrorism and the impact of terrorism in Nigeria as captured by *Embers*.

Textual Analysis

Nature of Terrorism in Soji Cole's *Embers*

Captivity

In *Embers*, Soji Cole explores the different natures of terrorism in Nigeria – the real terrorists, the soldiers and the government. Soji Cole believes that the terrorist sect uses violence and force to destroy properties, displace people and eliminate lives while the soldiers burdened with the obligation of providing security for the displaced victims of Boko Haram in the Internally Displaced Persons camp (IDP), use force in having carnal knowledge of the females they were to protect. The government, which forms a remote part of the terrorism gang, is given the responsibility of providing for the welfare of the victims of the terror attacks. Rather than doing this, the government takes advantage of the victims' situation to enrich themselves while impoverishing the victims for their gains. For instance, Idayat states that:

“...How do we define a life of freedom when it bears all the signs of captivity? The real Boko Haram is here, not in the forest of Sambisa. They are here with us every day. They live with you and me! The Boko Harams are those Government people who brought ten bags of rice to the camp and announced in the news that they came with hundred. The Boko Harams are those Camp Officers which steal seven out of those ten bags of rice and leave us with three to share for food. The Boko Harams are those in uniforms whose job is to keep us safe here but drag out the girls every night to have a fill of their lust...”(19).

Destruction

One of the natures of Boko Haram terrorism is the desire to destroy. Boko Haram terrorist as captured in *Embers* seeks to destroy the system. The terrorist sect believes that the system is rotten and is responsible for the corruption prevalent in the country, hence the need to destroy the system. For instance, Idayat views that:

Goggo, I am sorry. I think the option is simple. The system has to destroy itself to regenerate (20)

The terrorists, as captured in Soji Cole's *Embers*, target their attacks against the system that permits unfairness and inequality in the country.

Causes of Terrorism in Soji Cole's *Embers*

Family

In *Embers*, Cole captures the origin of the Boko Haram crisis in the northern part of Nigeria. He explains the frustration that stems out of the disappointment from the institutions that are supposed to uphold justice, accountability and equality. Cole says the disappointment led to the creation and establishment of the Boko Haram terrorist sect. To start with, one of the key institutions in society, the family disappoints some of the characters. For instance, Talatu's family fails her and her siblings. The family simply gave birth to them without a plan for their welfare. Talatu views that:

I was not enrolled in school then. It was useless. Nana couldn't afford it. Although, even before she died I was the only child living with her. My two brothers had gone into the big cities to become almajiris. When Nana died, life became the school I had to pass through. (7). Talatu's mother could not afford the means to effectively take care of her children. She gave birth to them without a realistic plan for bringing the children up. Rather, she gave birth to them, hoping that by a stroke of luck, the children would be able to take care of themselves.

Education

Furthermore, education is supposed to be a tool of liberation from ignorance to civilisation, from illiteracy to knowledge. However, the educational system failed in the northern part of Nigeria as captured by Soji Cole in *Embers*. The educational system in the country fails to rid itself of what it intends to rid the society of. Idayat captures her experience with Mallam Bideen. Mallam Bideen, Idayat's Arithmetic teacher in primary school, encourages her to pursue her dream and make history by becoming the first female doctor in the city. Mallam Bideen helps as a good teacher to guide her in acquiring the basic knowledge needed for her ambition. It is ironic, however, that the same Mallam Bideen made Idayat lose interest in her education by raping her. By his action, Mallam Bideen shows that the acquisition of Western education does not guarantee freedom from ignorance.

Corruption

Furthermore, society believes that it is impossible to achieve success without being corrupt and cheating others. Society is so entrenched in the notion that being an upright citizen is a crime. It is difficult to achieve success without cheating or engaging in corrupt acts. Talatu views that:

...My mother's death taught me a lesson: we are all inside a grave, to come out of it you must tread on corpses. (7)

Talatu, one of the few experienced and old women in the Internally Displaced Persons camps in the play, believes everyone is in a disadvantaged position, which makes it difficult for anyone to achieve success. Talatu views that for one to become successful, society expects that such a person must be corrupt. Conversely, being honest and upright is a major disadvantage in attaining success.

Corrupt Government

Also, government actions and inactions against terrorism have not helped in disabusing the minds of the citizenry from the widespread notion that Nigeria has become a failed state. Idayat views that:

...How do we define a life of freedom when it bears all the signs of captivity? The real Boko Haram is here, not in the forest of Sambisa. They are here with us every day. They live with you and me! The Boko

Harams are those Government people who brought ten bags of rice to the camp and announced in the news that they came with hundred. The Boko Harams are those Camp Officers which steal seven out of those ten bags of rice and leave us with three to share for food. The Boko Harams are those in uniforms whose job is to keep us safe here but drag out the girls every night to have a fill of their lust... (19).

Impact of Terrorism in Soji Cole's *Embers* Displacement

Terrorism as captured in *Embers* altered the pattern and way of life of the people living in the northern part of Nigeria. They were displaced from their homes after the terrorists had turned their homes into ruins. The people no longer have a home over their heads. Furthermore, the terrorist attacks revealed to the people the real image of the country's soldiers who are saddled with the responsibility of securing the lives and properties of the citizens. They are, however, the ones responsible for the deaths of a lot of the civilians whom they ought to take care of. Atai notes that:

The soldiers brought me. They were stationed watching over the ruins of my village. They were angry too. They said the Boko Haram Boys killed many of their fellow soldiers. They made me stay with them for five days...the horrors I saw in five days were more frightful than the fiercest things I saw in Sambisa forest. The soldiers slaughtered any man that passed by the village. They didn't even wait to ask questions. Some men who escaped the destruction of the Boko Haram boys were returning to Gali to see what can be salvaged. They were all killed by the soldiers. Even when I told them that I knew a man they captured, they threatened to kill me too (58)

Societal Decadence

The crisis makes the people realise the decadence in their society. The corruption which has eaten deep into society makes it difficult for them to achieve their dreams and desires. The impact of corruption is so severe that the people not only give up on their dreams but also give up on the ability of their country to become a better place. They realise that the country and all the potential of greatness it has have been lost to corruption. The people equally are indifferent to the state of the country. Rather than salvage the country with the hope of creating and having a better society, the current generation believes that if the country is going to be any different, then the country will have to rely on a new generation to grow and rebuild it.

Ah, nemesis! This day chanced upon me too quickly! I came for a gathering of hope but all I met was a potlatch of curse! I thought the fancy I created would be their dreams; to shed light and warmth over the souls (94) of women – and men too! You who sit there should see what has become of the dreamland of our lives! The land is covered with filth! The first sound a newborn baby hears is the shriek of pain! The old tree is dead and the sprouting sapling has begun to wither! It is finished! Let a new generation nurse itself! (95)

The Coping Strategies by the Victims of the Boko Haram Sect in Soji Cole's *Embers* Impacting the Younger Generations

Talatu's coping strategy to remain sane amid calamities is for her to lower her expectations and aspirations. In essence, she refuses to be optimistic for a better, brighter future. Talatu views that;
Maybe you're right. Life taught me. I should teach others. I don't expect much from life

anymore. (37)

Storytelling

Another coping strategy by the victims of terrorist attacks is storytelling. Through this, they express repressed experiences, thereby giving vent to their neurosis and managing their mental health, having gone through such traumatic and horrible experiences. Memunah enthuses Talatu:

You were going to tell us about your Kano (37)

Possible Resolutions to Terrorism in Soji Cole's *Embers* Revolution and Destruction of the Old and Corrupt System

The impact of terrorism on the people living in the northern part of Nigeria is devastating with some losing their jobs, families, and lives to the chaos. The crisis caused some people in the northern part of Nigeria to be displaced from their homes. Some of the characters in Soji Cole's *Embers* suggest possible solutions to the crisis and, most importantly, the corruption embedded in the Nigerian system. Since the corruption, which Soji Cole's *Embers* views as a major cause of the crisis in the north is facilitated by politicians, the play suggests that a revolution will be the best solution to the crisis. The people need to voice out their dissatisfaction and need for a better government. Memunah remarks: "The politicians will keep destroying us, Goggo. What we need now is a revolution. A sweeping revolution". (20)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has been able to explore Soji Cole's perception of the Boko Haram crisis in northern Nigeria as captured in *Embers*. It can be deduced that Boko Haram is a product of the systemic failure of family, society, education and government to create a country where justice, equity, and equality reign. This research has been able to explore the corruption, greed, wickedness and devilry that altogether violate the institutions which are supposed to protect the people. *Embers* is the trajectory of the lifeless lives of the average northern children born into a family/culture that reeks of abject lack of care but sides with the violators of its children who are the future. To uphold society's belief in marriage, the family prefers the children to suffer than to punish their children's exploiters. The educational sector responsible for nurturing and enlightening the leaders of tomorrow is also guilty of truncating their growth and development. The sector oversees the rape and impediment of children's promising futures without any retribution. The government saddled with the responsibility of upholding justice and protecting citizens also cheats and takes advantage of the helpless situation. Almost everyone with the power to protect the rights of the citizens uses the power to cheat and frustrate the citizens. Conclusively, this study has been able to affirm that the crises ravaging Nigeria have brought a huge setback to the country and negatively affected its image.

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