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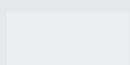


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Film and Terrorism in Nigeria: A Reflection on “Beast of No Nation” As Tool for Counter Terrorism in The Nigerian Space

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Abstract

Democracy in Nigeria has engendered fundamental human rights of the citizens, which was not possible under the military dispensation. However, the Boko-Haram, the Armed Fulani Herdsmen and the various ethnic militias – the nation has experienced in the past couple of years is the concern of this paper. The word “Terrorism” in whatever context it may be defined refers to the use of threats or violence to create fear and alarm. The terrorist murder and kidnap people, set up bombs, hijack planes, rape and commit all forms of unimaginable crimes, hence undermining the growth and economic development of the nation, subsequently putting the nation on a danger list. Though, government at all times have claimed victory over the wars against terrorism, the reverse is however the case as the activities of these dreaded sects seems unending every day. It is against this background that this paper reflects on images in the film “Beast of No Nation”, a film that takes viewers on a journey to a “Buffer Zone”, a village ravaged by war with the aftermath of pains, sorrows, tears and blood as a trademark. It is concluded in the paper that war and terrorism is an ill wind that blows no one any good but rather brings untold and avoidable hardship on innocent people chiefly due to corrupt practices of our political leaders and failure to give priority to education, welfare and security matters.

Keywords: *Terrorism, Film, Democracy, Violence, Government, Insurgence*

Introduction

Terrorism has been in existence since the French Revolution. The September 11, 2001 twin tower attacks in the United States of America, ushered in a new chapter in the public's understanding of terrorism, and in the process elevated terrorism to a level of public and academic interest not previously seen. Giving the power of mass media and entertainment platforms such as film to influence public opinion, it is imperative in at a time like this, to consider the place of film as a potent medium in complimenting the efforts of government to counter terrorism in Nigeria.

Terrorism has been described as "a tactic and a strategy, a crime, a holy duty, a justified reaction to oppression and inexcusable abomination" (203). Terrorism is politically and economically motivated. It is compounded and difficult to provide a specific definition. Terrorism, simply put is the systematic use of terror, especially as a means of coercion. It also refers to violent acts intended to instill fear with a religious, political or ideological goal. It is a means to carry out conflict without the adversary realizing the nature of the threat, these characteristics have expunged terrorism as increasingly common amongst many groups the world over. The United Nations defines it, as *actions that are intended or calculated to create or cause violence or destruction of life and property, criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the public.*

An Overview of Terrorism in Nigeria

Terrorism in Nigeria like other countries in the World is an age long phenomenon. In the early years of Nigeria's independence, issues of insecurity in the Western Region in 1962 upon political rivalry between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola led to loss of life and property. Akintola was hence removed from office as Western Region Premier on allegations of anti party activities. Francis Faramoti tries to give a detailed account of the crisis between Awolowo and Akintola:

...Akintola's removal in May 1962
sparked a bloody riot in the Western
Region and brought effective

Government to an end as rival legislators, following the example in the streets, introduced violence to the floor of the regional legislature. The Federal Government declared a state of emergency, dissolved the legislature, and appointed a medical practitioner, Dr. Adekoyejo Majekodunmi as an administrator for the Western Region (46).

Security issues further deteriorated, on the 15th of January 1966, Nigeria witnessed its first military coup, this coup was led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Ezeogwu, 22 people were reportedly killed including top political office holders particularly those from Northern extraction, these include the then Northern Region Premier, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, the Western Region Premier Chief Ladoke Akintola but the Eastern Region Premiere, Dr. Micheal Okpara was spared. The North viewed this coup as a tribal and ethnic coup and motivated strongly by ethnic interest. Six months after this first coup, June 29th 1966 a second coup was organized by military officers majority of whom come from the North of Nigeria, they tagged the coup a 'counter coup' a reaction to the killings of Northern politicians, this resulted in the death of Nigeria's first military Head of State General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi.

Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon was then appointed Head of State in July 1966. The Nigerian civil war was fought between 6th July 1967 a year after the second coup and 15th January 1970 between the government of Nigeria and the secessionist state of Biafra. This conflict resulted from political, economic, cultural, ethnic and religious tensions in the country.

Reflecting on incessant violence in Nigeria after 58 years of existences as a nation and the avoidable civil war that claimed thousands of lives and properties, Chinua Achebe, in his appraisal of the Nigerian nation says "...the only trouble with Nigeria is the failure of leadership, because with good leaders Nigeria can resolve any type of conflict and manage political and socio-economic maladies, such as tribalism, lack of patriotism, social injustice and

cult of mediocrity; indiscipline; and corruption". (244)

Unarguably, Nigeria is still battling with its security, economy, political and social structures, government at every phase or period of administrations have failed to nip the problems bedeviling the nation in the bud most especially on security matters.

For about nine years now the Nigerian state has been grappling with terrorist activities most notably the insurgency of the terror group Boko Haram and very recently attacks by armed groups tagged as armed Fulani herdsmen or armed Fulani militia whose activities are prevalent in the North Central States of Benue, and Plateau with other attacks in Taraba and parts of Adamawa and Zamfara states going down south to Delta State.

The addition of insurgency and armed groups to Nigeria's myriad of problems comes with a lot of implications for political stability, security, national integration and development. The devastation witnessed across the nation is colossal; citizens have given up hope of a government committed to protecting lives and property, providing basic infrastructure, tackling unemployment and ending both institutional and monetary corruption, a situation that has unfortunately defined the government over the years. There is also the disturbing event of ethnic and religious differences resulting to mass migration of Christians from the Northern part of the Country. These situations touch the very core of our unity as a nation; it however shines light on the cracks in the wall of Nigeria's "oneness" exposing its touchy and disintegrative potentials.

With the lessons from Nigeria's thirty month civil war one may expect that the Country will have little or no tolerance of terror groups or insurgents, the situation is however disturbing as these terror groups keep operating with impunity.

The Spate and Rise of Terrorism in Nigeria

The rate of terrorism in the world today has reached a significant stage that can be rightly described as unparalleled. Nigeria faces a serious terrorist situation among other nations like Syria, Somalia, Mali, and Egypt. Nigeria is ranked 7th position as the world's most terrorized nation on earth by the United Nations. This is as a result of the effects of terrorist activities by Boko Haram in the North East,

the Niger Delta Avengers insurgency in the South-South, and the IPOB movement in the South East with the disturbing rise of Fulani insurgency in the middle belt of the country.

In the list of terrorist organizations provided by the United Nations, Boko Haram, Ansaru and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (formerly known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq) are the ones listed to be operative in Nigeria. Those that are left unrecognized by the UN but are active in Nigeria include The Niger Delta Avengers and the Fulani insurgency. These terrorist groups have inflicted mayhem and other violent attacks on persons, groups and the nation causing untold havoc. Arising from this, the paper presents an account of terror groups in Nigeria from the 70's till date.

- **Maitatsine**

Maitatsine is an Islamic fundamentalist group that existed in Kano in the 1980's. The sect used hateful and provocative preaching against all it considered un-Islamic. Malam Muhammadu Marwa also known as Allah Ta-stine or Maitatsine an immigrant from Northern Cameroon who settled in Kano in 1945 founded the group. The sect began attacks on kano residents in the late 1980, they fought the police burning down police stations, government institutions, Danjibo describes the situation further:

When the situation was getting out of control, ex-President Shehu Shagari had to invite the Nigerian Army to intervene. It took the army two days to dislodge the sect while their leader was killed in the operation. More than 1,000 members of the sect were arrested and detained in prison where they received agonizing treatment from the police. The crisis lasted for 11 days, claimed the lives of more than 4,179 people and hundreds of houses and Shops were either torched or destroyed (48)

Maitatsine himself died in the army lockdown along side the about 5,000 others who lost their lives during the activities of the sect. However the sect members scattered all over Northern Nigeria, subsequent attacks in Maiduguri and Kaduna led to the death of 3,000 people, 1,000 were killed in Yola and its over 60,000 inhabitants were left homeless.

O' odua People's Congress

The O'odua People's Congress was a group that operated in the southwestern part of Nigeria. It claimed that its Objectives were mainly to unite the Yoruba community, further their common interest and to pursue social justice for all. The OPC was established in 1994 with the aim of overcoming what it alleged was the political marginalization of the Yoruba. It has since evolved in several different directions. Its activities have ranged from political agitation for Yoruba autonomy and promotion of Yoruba culture to violent confrontation with members of other ethnic groups, and, more recently, vigilantism and crime fighting. The objectives the group appeared to be harmless but the activities of the organization have been described as Terroristic in nature as they sometimes, in pursuit of their objectives, engaged security operatives.

Bakkassi Boys

Cases of Armed robbery in the 80s and 90s were rampant in the country. In the Eastern part of Nigeria; the Bakkassi Boys emerged as a result of loss of hope by Nigerians in the justice system and in security agents. Ayakoroma states that:

... the commercial town of Aba, which host the popular Ariaria Market, was gripped by insecurity and lawlessness as armed robbery and other forms of violent crime reached unprecedented levels. Robbery and extortion by armed gangs, the most prominent of which was known as the Mafia, became a daily routine and

began to affect more than just the population of Aba, as traders from all over the country who used to come to Aba to transact business in the Ariaria Market, began staying away from the town out of fear, frustration and anger at the insecurity an intimidation suffered at the hands of criminals in Aba. (50)

Movement For The Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND)

The Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta is a militant group that felt dissatisfied with the Federal Government as regards the socio economic development of the region. The Niger Delta militancy was driven by the demands for remediation of environment and distributive equity. The Niger Delta contains the crude oil, which since 1970 generated over US\$400 billion in revenue for Nigeria and more billions in profits for oil companies. Yet its host oil communities are mired in poverty and pollution. "This paradox stirred militancy in the region, which initially adopted legal instruments, party formation, and dialogue in the 1970s and armed rebellion in the early 2000s with hostage taking and attacks on oil facilities" (212). The region felt shortchanged as it deserves more in terms of development than it was actually getting. Though in 2009 amnesty was granted to members of the group by late president Umaru Musa Yar Adua, there has been considerable decline in their combative activities since the declaration of amnesty for repentant fighters.

The Herdsmen Insurgence

Herder-farmer Conflicts

Since the Fourth Nigeria Republic's founding in 1999, farmer-herder violence has killed thousands of people and displaced tens of thousands more. Insecurity and violence have led many populations to create self-defence forces and ethnic militias, which have engaged in further violence. The majority of farmer-herder clashes have occurred between Muslims Fulani herdsmen and

Christian peasants, exacerbating ethno-religious hostilities. *Global Observatory* (15).

Boko Haram

Boko haram is an Islamic fundamentalist group also called *Jama'atu Ahlus Sunnah Lidda'awatiwal- Jihad* (People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) Boko is a Hausa word, which literarily translates to "school (Western Education) and Haram an Arabic word which means forbidden. It is based on the ideologies, which the group constantly repeats as a form of advice to Muslims, mainly parents, university students and all linked to the educational system. Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, Borno State, founded the sect, which massively mobilized its membership from women and children, school drop outs, university graduates, lecturers, unemployed youths and those sympathetic to its cause who tore or burnt their certificates in response to Yusuf's call. The police killed Yusuf without trial in 2009. This led to the emergence of Abubakar Shekau as the leader of the sect. Olufemi Ajibola explains that the movement that began with an ideology against "western Education took a different turn after the death of its leader Mohammed Yusuf:

..."Boko Haram has been in subsistence since 2002 but became popular and notorious in July 2009 when its members had a brutal and prolonged clash with security agents who had wanted to dismantle the group, comparable to what it did to the Maitatsine group in 1981 and 1984. However, Boko Haram fought back obstinately and the death toll on both sides was estimated at about 500 in 2009 alone. There was a recurrence of the group in July 2010 at northeast Nigeria, starting with low-intensity violence and subsequent transformation into sophisticated

methods of operation that was not identical with the sect in the past”(11)

At this point, the spate of attacks by Boko Haram intensified, taking a new approach, a suicide bombing approach. The sect launched Nation wide attacks on schools, Police stations, churches. In 2011 the sect claimed responsibility of the bombing that occurred at the Nigeria police Headquarters, United Nations office in Abuja, conducting prison break operations and several bank robberies in Katsina, Bauchi and Adamawa states.

The rise of these terrorist groups and terrorism in Nigeria seem to have a meeting point and that is an acknowledgement of the inability of the political class to provide the basic necessities of life for Nigerians which are Education, Security, Infrastructure, and Employment for its teeming population. These all sum up to become the causes of terrorism and terrorist activities in the nation. Even though Government has engaged these groups in one form or the other, the war particularly in the North East is far from over. Government in several media reports have always claimed that they are winning the war over the terrorist groups providing millions of dollars to procure arms and ammunitions for the Military Joint Task Force (MJTF), and various local Vigilante Groups to combat the nefarious activities of the sect. But it seems that the war is seemingly not ending as the cases of terrorist attack are still manifesting in the Northern part and the middle belt. As the situation remains today, it is evident that guns and ammunitions may not be enough to counter terrorism in Nigeria but the need for an alternative to compliment the effort of government.

With the images that film presents to millions of viewers across the globe, government has the opportunity to tap in on the advantages film possesses to appeal to unrepentant terrorist groups to pave a way for peace. It is on this worrisome note that this paper examines the images of war, horror, killings, bloodsheds, fear, oppression, suppression, use and abuse of children, maiming, rape, destruction, bombing, revenge, among others in the film "*Beast of No Nation*" produced by Cary Joji Fukunaga in 2015.

Exploring The Film “*Beast of no Nation*” in Counter Terrorism in Nigeria

The film “*Beast of No Nation*” is an adaptation of the book *Beast of no Nation* written by Uzodinma Iweala (2005) who was influenced by the 1989 song of the same title by Late Fela Anikulapo Kuti. The film is centered in a town during an unnamed country's civil war.

The Plot of the Film

The film *Beast of no Nation* is about a boy named Agu with immense talent and childlike characteristics who is forced to become a child soldier. The film takes on a first person narrative; it begins with Agu telling us about the situation in the buffer zone where he and his family live, and his ingenuity as a child to create something with his “imaginary TV”. Agu's childhood and innocence was shattered by the war, he was conflicted by the horror of war. War eventually came to his family's small village, Agu's mother and sister are able to leave with the UN Peace keepers but Agu was denied by the taxi driver who said he cannot carry him, but equally charged a huge amount of 70,000 to carry the mother, his little brother and a sister. He is however forced to stay behind and fight with his father and other men in the village.

When soldiers attack the village, Agu's father and other men in the village were shot and killed, Agu and his brother attempt to escape, Agu's brother is shot in the back, leaving Agu who helplessly runs into a nearby forest.

Agu roams aimlessly in the forest but is soon found by soldiers who force him to join their rebel force. As part of his initiation, Agu is forced to kill a man with a machet, with the commandant consistently reminding him that men like the victim are responsible for his father's death, and Agu must avenge this ill by killing these men. Agu befriends a mute boy named strika; together they face the challenges of the war. The commandant rapes Agu and the other boys, but he says nothing for fear of being killed by the commandant, his childhood and innocence eroded by the flood of war ravaging his country.

The commandant receives a call from the supreme commander and the entire batallion travel to a certain city, while there, the

supreme commander orders the 2IC to take over as commandant of that battalion and orders the commandant to take over as his security chief, an argument breaks out between them, meanwhile Agu and the other boys ravage the breakfast set before them, a sign of inadequate feeding and constant hunger. The commandant takes them to a hotel where a prostitute shot the 2IC in a plan orchestrated by the commandant, the owner of the establishment and the prostitute were killed by the soldiers and the women taken as captives.

The battalion now fights as rebels and soon their ranks dissipate, with hunger and frustration Agu admits that he thinks the war is far from over. Agu realizes that his friend striker had been shot; he was forced to carry him and later watch him being covered with leaves, as he mourns his friend. The battalion resorts to digging for gold, hunger and disease ravages their camp, Rambo revolts against the commandant, and the boys follow him to surrender to the United Nations soldiers, there Agu once again sees the soldier that he (Agu) sold his imaginary TV to for some plates of food, at that point the childhood he had lost flashed before his eyes, and the realization of what the war had turned him into became his reality.

Agu and other children were rehabilitated in a camp, Rambo tries to persuade them to go back to war, but he refuses, Agu then finally opens up to his care giver, hence he began the process of healing, the process of becoming a boy again.

Interpretation and Discussion of the Film “*Beast of No Nation*” in Counter Terrorism in Nigeria

Deducing from the plot account of the film “*Beast of No Nation*” it glaringly shows that war or act of terrorism in any form it could manifest is an ill wind that does nobody any good no matter how any leader tends to profit from war. This is evident in Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941), a case of a mother who loses her children while attempting to profit from war. It can also be gathered from the film that no nation triumphs in the absence of peace, love and unity. Terrorism in Nigeria is avoidable if government from the onset has been doing the needful. Many Terrorists organisations most often group and re-group for vengeance having being pushed to the wall by government as a result of negligence, massive corruption,

lack of basic education and health care facilities, employment, among others. In the opening scene of the film *beast of no nation*, Agu and his friends try to recruit other children playing at a school football pitch into a drama group they called "imaginary TV". Agu narrates how the war has affected their education

...It is starting like this, our country is at war, and we are having no more school, so we are having to be finding ways to be keeping busy... (Excerpts from *Beast of no nation*)

Agu reveals to us the dire consequences of terrorism, a halt in education. In Nigeria, schools in the North East have closed down, teachers have relocated because of constant terrorist activities in the region, with UNICEF's estimation of over 13million out of school children in Nigeria, the North East alone has over 2.6million children out of school and in dire need of educational assistance, this has contributed in putting the region at a disadvantaged position compared to other regions in the Country. Education activist Malala Yousafzai is credited to have said, " with gun you can kill a terrorist, with Education you can kill terrorism". The first thing religious terrorist like Boko Haram and ISIS destroy is the school, they believe that western education is evil and corrupts an individual. When Boko Haram started in Maiduguri the Borno State capital, the founder Mohammed Yusuf, was preaching against all forms of western influence including western education. After the death of Yusuf, the group emerged more deadly and intensified its attacks on schools, international bodies like the United Nations bombing in Abuja, attacks on police and military barracks and stations, but the most worrisome of its activities that also attracted international condemnation was perhaps the kidnap of school girls in Chibok Borno State and Buni Yadi, Yobe State.

The film also points out a very important factor, that most of the terrorist groups recruits children, *Beast of no nation* in its images takes us through Agu's journey after his village had been attacked and his family killed, Agu was discovered in the forest by a rebel group which forcefully recruits him to join the ranks of its battalion comprising of majorly children under the age of 13. The film reflects

that children whose families have been ravaged by war become a prey and tool in the hands of the terrorist groups. In the film Agu seeks for revenge because government failed to provide security for his village, the commandant assures Agu that he will get revenge for his family that was killed, revenge against those who have killed his family. The once innocent child became a beast as he relishes killing innocents for a cause, a vengeance for the wrong done to him and his late family members.

In the film, the allegations against government according to the commandant reveals that politicians steal the countries resources and exchange it for dollars, that they have spit on peoples constitutions and rights and they have spat on the future of innocent people. Hence they regroup to fight an illegitimate war against government by extension killing fellow innocent citizens, damaging government property, raping, destroying houses, and vandalizing oil pipelines among others.

Thus consequently bringing untold hardship on the people they claim to be fighting for. To counter terrorism in Nigeria today, government should utilize the film as a tool to sensitize the terrorist groups to sheath their sword to pave way for meaningful dialogue. Hameed Olutoba Lawal talks about the power of film in countering terrorism, in his analysis of the Nollywood Films *Conscripted* and *Isakaba* Lawal posits that:

in addition to use of armed forces to counter terrorist, the film provides another medium of sensitization and documentation of terrorist activities in Nigeria...In 2017, a fictional thriller, titled *Conscripted* that depicts security agencies' patriotic fight against terrorism and other crimes in the society was premiered in Abuja...The production of capital pictures tell the story of insecurity as a global challenge why people should appreciate the unique sacrifices paid by security men, in the service to their

fatherland...the story plot was culled from the society, what the world and Nigeria in particular, is doing to surmount terrorism and all forms of insecurity...there are bombings, kidnappings, rape, armed robbery and other security challenges threatening the peace of Nigeria (82)

The importance of film in showcasing the society through images and dialogue cannot be overemphasized, as no other communication medium possesses the power of the film medium. Researchers have often argued that a nation's film industry is like a mirror showcasing its culture. Through the images of war, horror, terror pains, agony, the use and abuse of innocent children, maiming, oppression, bloodshed and tension that the film "*Beast of No Nation*" presents, it evidently shows that it is high time the government employs other means of counter terrorism. The film with the experience of Agu preaches to all Nigerian children that taking to war or joining any terrorist group is not the solution to avenge for the lost of our loved ones as victims of wars or terrorist groups. The paper opines that this will further bring more destruction and anguish to the nation.

Conclusion

It has been identified in the paper that film is a viable medium for telling and retelling the stories of war and its consequences. Film as a social medium covertly creeps into the mind of its viewer. It is often referred to as a propaganda medium, an agenda setter that generates opinions and influences reactions from the viewer and in essence propagates ideas and influences policies in the society. Be it a Documentary, a fiction film, or a drama, film is created and produced to have an impact on people and real life. To this end, film has been used to tell a people's story in order to preach the message of peace, love and unity in the midst of cultural differences and agitations. To counter terrorism in Nigeria it is emphasized in the paper that government should identify the relevance of film in nation and human development. With the ordeal of Agu in the hands of National

Defense Force (NDF), this should serve as a reminder to every Nigerian child, about the dangers of war and the implications of joining unauthorized groups or associations. Violence as a result of terrorism, retards development, scares away investors, stultifies creativity and contaminates social relations. At this crucial period that the country is confronted with various terrorist groups, and the crave to ensure stability in our democracy, film remains a strong force to reckon with to dissect the mind and opinion of leaders to do the needful in order to avert the dangers associated with terrorism.

Recommendations

Emanating from our discussion in this paper, it is recommended that the society and government should create an enabling environment for film to triumph by providing basic amenities and adequate financial support be given to the film industry to produce good and meaningful films that will change the mindset of the people. In the same vein, film producers should see it as a duty to write stories that will promote national unity rather than promoting violence in their works. Parents on the other hand, are implored to inculcate the habits of telling good stories to their children in order to mold their character from the tender age. Parents are encouraged under closed supervision to allow children to watch good films with moral values that can bring derisible change in the society. Religious bodies are also encouraged to partner with film producers to produced good films. Government at all levels – Federal, State and Local governments should exploit the full potential of film to embark on massive campaign against terrorism.

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Filmography

Title. Beast of no Nation. Story: Uzodinma Iweala. Director: Cary Joji Fukunaga. Producers: Amy Kaufman, Cary Joji Fukunanga, Daniela Taplin Lundberg, Riva Marker, Daniel Croen, Idris Elba. Cast: Idris Elba, Abraham Attah, Kurt Egyiaman, Jude Akuwudike, Kobina Amissah, Ama Abebrese, Zabon Gibson, Emmanuel Adam Quay, Francis Weddey.