

Impacts of Security Challenges on Women and Children in Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops and Pari*

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Abstract

It is no longer news that insecurity has been one of the major challenges confronting the Nigerian nation over the years. For instance, the activities of violent gangs such as Niger Delta militant, Boko Haram terrorists, kidnapers, Fulani Herdsmen and the unknown gunmen have threatened the peace and stability of the nation in a number of ways. The aforementioned challenges with no doubt have serious and direct negative impacts on the nation's women, children, and by implication, the socio-economic and political development of the country. The study examines the impact of insecurity on women and children in the Nigerian society through dramatic texts. Thus, the work uses content analysis of quantitative methodology to examine the efforts of a Nigerian literary artist like Ahmed Yerima in capturing the aforementioned social realities through literary work. The result reveals that insecurity in Nigeria and its impacts on the nation's women and children have been on the alarming in Nigeria as portrayed in Yerima's *Little Drops and Pari* amongst others. Therefore, the study concludes amongst other things that Nigerian literary works that captured theme of insecurity should be encouraged and promoted for national peace and progress. The paper recommends that we must come together and champion the same towards nipping the menace of insecurity in the bud.

Key words: Socio-economic; Political; Development; Crises; Literature

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INTRODUCTION

The interaction among human beings at all levels; socio-cultural, religious, economic and political normally generates issues. Thus, throughout ages the world has been confronted by political and socio-economic realities which have not only served as obstacles to human development but great threat to human peace and safety. However, like other parts of the world, the Nigerian nation has been faced with several challenges; political corruption, religious bigotry, nepotism, tribalism and other social realities. These problems have over years fuelled security challenges across the country. According to Dado Olorunyomi, "Nigeria is truly at the crossroads, bedeviled with grievances and tensions of all descriptions and there is little in sight to suggest a sense of emergency in handling the issues on a national level" (79). This enumerates avalanche of challenges faced by the Nigerian nation and how they have impeded the development and advancement of the nation. In the same vein, Oluwole Ojewale and Omolara Balogun affirm that:

Insecurity in Nigeria has gone full circle in recent years, due to the countrywide emergence and domination of various non-state armed groups. With differing rationales, objectives and modus operandi, these actors includes criminal gangs, separatist groups, Islamic fundamentalists and amorphous kidnapers, dubbed unknown gunmen in Nigerian media. Now the country's most pressing security challenge is described as banditry by state officials a composite crime including armed robbery, kidnapping, murder, rape and illegal possession of firearms. (Par.1)

Like it has been observed and affirmed above, Nigeria is indeed at the crossroads, faced with numerous

security challenges that seem to have become endemic that is above the nation's control. In recent times, many people have been attacked almost on daily basis on the nation's high ways, rail lines, religious houses, schools, government institutions, on the farms and even at police stations and army barracks. In the face of these challenges, Nigerian women and children have suffered untold hardship and faced several forms of abuses.

However, an artist, they say, is a watchdog of the society. Because a writer according to Breytenbach in Atanda, "must be ready to act not only as an interventionist, but as a conscience of his people. He further submits that a writer has two tasks to perform in his society, first, that a writer should persistently question and criticize the mores and attitudes, actions and inaction, myths and realities of his society. Secondly, a writer by and large is expected to be an exponent of the aspirations, expectations, and dreams of his people" (45). As such, world over, the source materials which artists use to create their works are found within their immediate environment. These source materials are burning social issues bordering a particular people. In this realm, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o asserts that: "A writer has no choice, whether he is aware of it his work reflects one of or more aspect of the intense economic, political and ideological struggle in a society, every writer is a writer of politics but the only thing is who's politics"(2). They carefully create their artistic works with these sources with the intention to draw the attentions of the people towards the social realities confronting their society. Niyi Osundare argues that, "the ideal writer writes to right the wrong in the society. A writer may choose to write to right the wrongs in society or write to worsen the wrongs in society, if he (or she) is not careful and mindful of what he (she) writes (As cited in Augustine G. Onoyona, 474). Soyinka in Atanda, submits that:

no matter under any disguise of suppression, oppression, censorship or by the imposition of a secular and theocratic ideologies, a writer's voice must not be silent. Therefore a creative writer or a playwright in particular to Soyinka is expected to bear witness from within his own society, from within his own milieu and in defence of his assailed humanity. (45)

Many Nigerian literary artists have written a number of works to right the wrong in Nigeria over the years and Ahmed Yerima is one of them. As, "a playwright, writes for or against any subject matter he sets to discuss in his play depending on his stand point, and perception of the issues under-discuss" (Mohammed-Kabir and Yunusa 79). Play writing is an art which like other arts, requires good input of creative ingenuity, artistic creativity and intelligent skills. Nigeria has had and still having a good number of dramatist/playwrights who draw from their socio-political, religious and cultural backgrounds to write dramas which in one way or another are their social responsibilities about the country or plays which point at

enormous solutions to the numerous problems bedeviling the Nigerian society. Corroborating this, Daniel-Inim opines that, "Play writing is an art which like other arts, requires good input of creativity and artistic skills. Nigeria has had a good number of playwrights who draw from her cultural, socio-political and religious background to write plays which in one way or another are commentaries about the country or plays which proffer solutions to the ebbing problems in the society" (5). Hence, no playwright writes in a vacuum, dramatists write their works with utmost seriousness and treating topical issues. In the light of this, Ifeanyi Ugwu avers that:

Nigerian playwrights have engaged in the writing of serious literary theatre of standard quality which deals with the multifaceted portrayal of the Nigerian state. The foremost precursors of literary theatre and their later counterparts had good intentions because they wrote to provide the reader with artistically admirable plays which deal with the historical, political and socio-economic problems of the country. Despite all this, many of the written plays were dismissed by some critics as being substandard, due to what they describe as their numerous short comings. (23)

The concern of this work therefore, is to evaluate the impacts of security challenges on women and children as presented in Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops* and *Pari*. Because, according to Peter Emeka, "drama provides an existing forum for dissecting societal ills and problems with the ultimate aim of finding solutions" (285). He further submits thus: "Hence playwrights use drama as a medium of re-enacting some prevailing realities in the society in a bid to instigate public debates which are aimed at creating the fore for mind-rubbing, which in turn will generate robust awareness amongst the populace in order to trigger positive communal quests for solutions to varied societal maladies and anomalies" (285). It is against this backdrop that the current researchers beam their searchlight on the area of women and children experiences in the time of crises as captured by this prolific dramatist.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory that underpins this work is a social change opinion known as conflict theory. This theory was first developed by Karl Marx. The theory states that naturally, society is unequal and competitive. According to Karl Marx, "more often than not, the rich and powerful control the rest of society by exploiting vulnerable groups. This sows conflict, provoking people to action. Social change occurs as a result" (in Human Rights Careers, Par,3).

This theory seems to have serious implications on the thrust of this research work. The ideas of the theory are true realities of the Nigerian situations. Over the years, the political class in Nigeria have been exploiting the poor masses, thus, in line with the theory, the violent activities across the country are clear indications that the vulnerable

groups in the country have decided to take actions for social change to occur, although, their actions have serious implications on the nation's citizens including women and children as it is reflected in Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops* and *Pari*.

IMPACTS OF INSECURITY ON NIGERIAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN: DRAMATIST ANGLE

Insecurity is one of the major challenges facing Nigeria over the years. Arguably, the roots of Nigerian problems of insecurity can be attributed to, among other factors, the nation's ethnic and political structures. From the angle of the nation's ethnic structure, Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation whose citizens have failed to manage their differences at many levels. For instance, Oronto Douglas and Doifie Ola note that, ". . . those who assumed the leadership of independent Nigeria have continued to treat the diverse nationalities, especially the ethnic minorities unjustly, unequally and undemocratically" (42). As a result, the nation has witnessed several ethnic motivated crises over the ages.

In the same vein, the country has equally been bedevilled by problem of poor leadership which has over years fuelled issues of unemployment, lack of infrastructural development and general economic hardship. According to Julius-Adeoye and Rantimi Jays:

Despite Nigeria's obvious wealth (from oil and other natural resources), it has undergone dramatic economic deterioration, especially under military rule, which has, for the most part, governed the country since its independence. Even before the military incursion into Nigerian politics in 1966, the country had been experiencing severe and devastating socio-economic, political and developmental crises, reasoning used by the military to force its way into power. Nigeria's developmental framework is laden with components such as consumerism, corruption, incessant military coups, failed socio-economic and political policies, and so on. (5)

Indeed, the Nigeria has been faced with a lot of challenges that continue to threaten its peace and economic stability, despite its huge mineral resources and place as giant of Africa. . .Some Nigerians, in reaction to the burning economic issues facing the country, have resorted to the use of arms and other terrorist activities to draw government attention to their plights, for instance, the Niger Delta militancy/insurgency, the Boko Haram insurgence, and the most recent, the Herdsmen and Farmers conflict, among others, found in virtually every geo-political zone of the country.

Indeed, in recent times, because of the aforementioned economic issues and other factors, it seems there is no part of the Nigerian nation that has been saved from issues of insecurity. This situation has not only caused damages to the socio-economic development of the nation, but

it has equally exposed the citizenry to untold dangers and hardship. In particular, women and children have been faced with serious challenges amidst the security issues across the country. Oluwole Ojewale and Omolara Balogun note that:

Insecurity in Nigeria has gone full circle in recent years, due to the countrywide emergence and domination of various non-state armed groups. . . Amid these attacks, women and girls bear the most significant burden of banditry in the region. Sexual violence has skyrocketed with women frequently raped, kidnapped or commodified by families who are forced to exchange their daughters for protection. (Par.2)

In addition to the above submission, within the recent times, the rate of insecurity in Nigeria has reached an alarming state, with blood chilling incidents of daylight killings. The activities of these insurgents have various implications on women and children, as this vulnerable group of persons tend to suffer most from crisis of any kind. Women and children under the ages of eighteen (18) ,especially girls have been negatively affected by the crisis in the form of lack of access to basic needs, sexual and gender based violence, sexual exploitation, abuse and abduction. Their level of vulnerability is on the increase as most of them are widowed or single due to the high rate of men-killing in the course of the conflict and the detention of some men by the military for investigation purposes. Women now bear the responsibility of feeding their families. With no doubt, Nigerian women and children have been faced with serious challenges as a result of insecurity that has been facing the country over the years. These challenges like it has been mentioned ranges from sexual abuses, psychological problems, hunger and lack of access to basic needs, health related problems and even death. Hence, the need for the playwright as a philosopher, prophet and others to beam his searchlight on all the aforementioned areas with the aim of ameliorating the society. In this vein, Daniel-Inim capturing the playwright's place asserts that:

Being a creator, the playwright from conceptualisation of the characters, dialogue, theme and setting, to the actual printed script, uses his experiences or that of others to create a work of art which is of educative or entertaining relevance. To achieve this, he uses his imagination to create plausible stories especially fictional ones. The playwright uses his pen to speak his mind about prevalent issues in his society. The issues might be economic, political, social or even religious. (5)

In the same direction, Daniel-Inim submits that, "The writing of a play is an art and science which brings to fore the embodiment of a researched process. Being an art, playwriting requires a deliberate use of aesthetics. As science, playwriting involves a careful study of a particular topic, culture or a people. By making a systematic observation of the issue or people in a particular environment, the playwright then adds aesthetics to bring out a play that has societal relevance" (15). Christiana Oboshi affirms this opinion when

she reiterates that: “the playwrights are involved in making dramatic statements about burning issues such as ineffective leadership, bribery.... This places the playwright in the role of a watchdog of the society (213). The opinions above ascertained the place of the playwright in the society.

IMPACTS OF INSECURITY ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN AHMED YERIMA'S *LITTLE DROPS AND PARI*.

Obviously, the plays reflect the negative impacts of violence on women and children among other themes. Instance, according to Ahmed Yerima, “*Little Drops*. . . is another look at Niger Delta, this time from the perspective of women- the neglected innocent victims of the war. . . they bear the burdens and live with the collateral damages of the war caused and fought by men” (n.p).

Like the author has acknowledged above, the play is set in Niger Delta, a land troubled by crisis as a result of bloody conflict between militants and JTF soldiers. As a result of these crises many women and children in the play are exposed to dangers ranging from homelessness, sexual abuses, psychological traumas and even death. For example, Mukume, one of the characters in the play, is a newly married woman. The crisis separates her from her husband and she becomes homeless and exposed to sexual abuses as she laments thus:

Yes, please! I have been raped three times today already. Kill me instead. Shoot me and let me die! (Crying). No! I will not let another man to touch me. Kill me first. (Slowly, she raises her hand). I shall die first, not one more finger on me. . . He always said that my body was his temple. Tell me, will I ever be the same again? I. . . We just got married four days ago. Ovievie, my husband, he has only just given this wedding ring and vowed to treasure and please me. . . And I was his goddess. But see what they have done to his temple. They have trampled upon my virtue, turned my passage to marshy swampy ground. . . (71)

As one pauses to pity the situation of Mukume, the play presents one with another woman with more serious predicaments. The name of this second character in Azue. Azue is a queen. She is the youngest wife of a powerful king in the play. Her husband is corrupt. He collaborates with the government to rob his people of their rights. This portends another dimension to the Niger Delta predicaments. Wholly, it becomes apparent here through this king that it is not all the government fault, but their representatives and traditional rulers are not representing the people rather they go to meet with the government to represent themselves and their families. Hence, the militants killed him. So, Azue escapes from the palace with their little son with the intentions and hope to save the life of the boy. But her effort to save her son is challenged by the crisis as it is captured below:

A straight small bullet like a pistol straight into his small back not breaking a bone. . . lodged in his stomach. It is swelling. The stench you smelt, woman, is from his breath. His small stomach is beginning to rot. That was why he did not ask for food. . . His life continues to sip away with every little drop of blood. (85)

However, the little prince is just one among the many children that are exposed to dangers in the play. Like him, many other innocent children are equally killed as a result of the crisis just as another character in the play reports thus:

I am a teacher. I teach at the Urban Day School. Monday like any other day in school. Then we heard a few gunshots and some shells exploding. It all sounded very normal, so we continued with our school work. We were prepared as we had heard of the attack on Camp Iroko a day before. At the staff meeting, the Head Teacher had made us go through our crisis handling procedure. How to close the school and take the children to a safety spot. I had taught all morning when I had this headache and wanted to use the toilet. I asked my primary two students, all children between the ages of seven and eight to sleep. Then I left them. I barely there when I heard this loud explosion. I ran out when I heard screams and shouts. First it was a bad dream. The roof of my classroom was blown open. Huge smoke and heavy smell of charred skin and burnt flesh. Not one soul. . . Not one child was spared. All we saw were cut off limbs, little trunks, cut off heads, with their hair still burning. . . forty-one of them. . . all dead. (93)

More horrible hardship, torture and abuses women and children face as a result of insecurity and crisis are abound in the play. However, as Osundare rightly said, “ideal writer writes to right the wrong in the society” (474). Based on this, Yerima did not only reveal the aforementioned situations, but he equally suggests solutions to the problems. The writer’s opinions about the crisis seem to be clearly shown in the dialogue below:

KURU: People must be part of the division of wealth. The oil companies are playing a game of divide and rule with us. They think they are smart. There are some people in government and in high places who believe that the Niger Delta people must be taught a lesson, so each of law is against us. Even our big men are covered with too much tea drinking that they forget the true cause of their people. But they will see. We shall destroy everything. . . everything. . . everything. Total break up! (112)

MEME: Ha, Ayiba! That is not the answer. . . It will never stop. The stupid women and the innocent children will always lose their lives. Faith and commitment, that is what you need. You must also have trust among yourselves. Then decide what you want for your future. . . have faith in your decision, and when you are committed to it, it will be easy to achieve everlasting peace. This way you will not kill all of us before the break of dawn. Ayigba will not allow you. (113)

Obviously, the opinion of Kuru truly agrees with the principle of conflict theory. For any time the rich robs the poor of all his economic rights, violence will occur. Nigeria as a nation has been in a conflict situation as a result of this fact. But the writer’s second opinion captured above seems to be correct. Like in the play, the innocent women and children across all the troubled areas

of the country are the major victims of the crisis. Hence, all the violent groups like Boko Haram set, Niger Delta militants, Fulani Herdmens, and the unknown gunmen have to realize the fact that weapon is not a solution to any problem, but strong faith and commitments can unseat bad leadership and pave way for peace and sustainable development.

Similarly, the Chibok Girls' experience is still very fresh in the mind of every well-meaning Nigerian who saw or heard about the Chibok Girls experiences. The example is apt because all the girls were still in their teens as at when they were all kidnapped. The researchers classified them under women and children. The trauma experienced by these girls is not a good one. When one reads through the pages of *Pari* by Yerima you will come to term with the fact that the experience of women and children during crises is a tremendous one.

In *Pari*, Yerima presents the story of the Chibok girls who he gives the major names of Shekau and any of the girls as Ibrahim and Hyelapari. Pari along with some other girls are kidnapped and forcibly married to the Boko Haram Islamic extremists during the Boko Haram kidnap. After two years of fruitless search and no hope of Pari's return from the den of Boko Haram, her mother converts to Islam with the hope that her acceptance of the Islamist's God would make her daughter to be released. When Pari eventually returns from Boko Haram's den, she returns with her son. Ibrahim's search for his family brings him to Pari's family house where he is eventually arrested by the security agents. But before being taken away to Darak (barrack), Pari, who has been dumb, requests to be allowed to follow him. She says:

Pari: I want him to take me and my son along. I don't want him to go alone. Who will take care of him? ... I believe him ... Two years. For two years, I lived my life with him ... dodging bullets and bombs. He taught me how to clean his AK 47 gun, how to cry and how to muffle tears and pains with honour... (*Pari* 68).

From these words, Yerima comments that what begins as a socio-political problem has got solution in individual choices. Also, one could imagine the experience of Pari in the hands of the so-called Islamists who never meant well for the citizens-both Muslims and Christians as no one could ascertain the reasons for their attack on the citizenry and the abduction of innocent school girls in their teens. Ama's verdict of Ibrahim is:

Ama: I say no! He is a human thief. He stole my only child ... took my daughter's virtue ... and killed Vero's husband. He must die by the knife he has brandished so well (*Pari* 57).

This exchange explains the experience of these young girls in the hands of Boko Haram and other heinous group with terrorist intent. They kidnap young girls, rape them, impregnate them or rather put them in family way. This is purely an experience that can never be deleted from the minds of these victims. In the first instance, getting Pari re-integrated becomes impossibility. Ama says:

Ama: You see what they brought back to us? The living carcass of our once dear sweet innocent daughter. Several times, she screamed in her sleep today. Even the sleeping drugs do not have any effect on her anymore.... We may need to add traditional medicine to her treatment (*Pari* 42).

The psychological trauma of war was expressed in this last line. By investigating the story of the Chibok girl. This is in term with Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis has been criticised for its non-consideration of peoples' cultures and environments, yet, it is a known fact that people react "differently to similar situations" (*Wikipedia*). In analysing or watching a play, Freud's theory helps to clarify the meaning of the writing as well as the actions of the characters within the text or performance.

Yerima has in these plays selected for this study presented himself as one of the most committed Nigerian playwrights who have saddled themselves with the responsibility of presenting the society as it were or proffering solutions to the numerous challenges ebbing the Nigerian society. Thus, "Man is a social being; and it is a fact that cannot be debated. Man exists, lives and operates in a society. Because human relation is an integral aspect of human existence, a playwright's impact is greatly felt when his works reflect the socio-political realities of his society" (Daniel-Inim 12). In reaction, the nation is supposed to encourage and appreciate the works of the playwright by taking heed to the issues in the play. To confirm this, Frederic Lorca asserts that: "... a nation which does not help and does not encourage its theatre is if not dead, dying, just as the theatre which does not feel the social pulse, the historical pulse, the drama of its people, and catch the genuine colour of its landscape and its spirit, with laughter or with amusement hall, or a place for doing that dreadful thing known as "killing time" (cited in Asigbo 7-8).

CONCLUSION

As a result of political and economic disputes amongst other factors, insecurity is one of the major burning social realities facing the world today. The discourse of the plays selected for this study it shows that in the face of conflicts, women and children are often the major victims. Across the globe, many women and children have faced several forms of abuses during crises. Example can be drawn from the current wars going on in Syria, Russia, Ukraine, and other places in Africa like Sudan, Xenophobic attack in South Africa, reports on CNN, Aljezeera, AIT, Channels TV and NTAi show that the most vulnerable of these crises are women and children. Thus, the literary artists around the globe are saddled with the responsibility to gather and reflect avalanches of social issues confronting their nations for positive sustainable transportation.

Hence, to win the fight against insecurity and save Nigerian women and children from untold hardship and abuses, Nigerian writers like Ahmed Yerima and many

others have written literary works and beamed their searchlights on these menace that suggested peaceful resolutions to various conflicts across the country. Therefore, through the analysis of Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops* and *Pari*, the researchers have to some extent revealed the impacts of insecurity on Nigerian women and children and pointed at the means through which the playwright selected for the study presented in the dramas selected for the study as a means towards the amelioration of crises in the society. Because it is observed that violence is not a better option of settling disputes, once there is no violence women and children will continue live and enjoy peaceful life of their own.

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