

A Critical Analysis of Youth Restiveness in Uzo Nwamara's *Dance of the Delta*

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Abstract

Until now, the Nigerian space has been severely challenged on many fronts - politically and economically. Mainly among these challenges is the issue of youth restiveness triggered by socio-political cum economic factors as portrayed in Uzo Nwamara's *Dance of the Delta*. This issue has pragmatically threatened the existence of the Nigerian nation. For instance, some states such as Benue, Kogi, Edo, Enugu, Delta and Adamawa, are enmeshed in violence due to the activities of Herdsmen/Farmers clashes for cattle colonies. The North East is equally besieged with terrorism due to the Boko Haram insurgency; the South East is also engulfed with groups like MASSOB and IPOB agitation for self-determination; while the oil rich Niger Delta is overplagued with crises for resource control. The resultant effect of these is manifested in acts of terrorism including bombing, kidnappings, illegal oil bunkering, incessant killings etc. Among the major findings is that these situations have provided impetus for creative punches in dramatic and theatrical representations by notable playwrights. The aim of this study is to critically examine ways in which Uzo Nwamara attempt to engage the issue of youth restiveness using the instrument of drama. This thematic treatment will hopefully create positive attitude amongst Nigerians and create change in their society. Using the content analytical approach, the study interrogates Uzo Nwamara's *Dance of the Delta*. The study recommends drama and theatre as a viable medium of propagating change among the masses.

Keyword: Uzo Nwamara, Youth Restiveness, Dance of the Delta, IPOB, MASSOB

Introduction

Youth restiveness is one of the major threats of terrorism in Nigeria and the world in general. In the 21st century, it has been a prominent issue in the Nigerian society as there is increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness which creates serious challenges from many fronts in the economy. These challenges have surfaced varied situations of agitation by sects demanding urgent socio-political cum economical solutions and identifications. These acts of violence, championed by youths, include incessant killings, politically motivated assassinations, lethal car bombing, suicide bombing, kidnapping and the likes. Nevertheless, youth restiveness is not a recent phenomenon in the Nigerian society as various forms of youth restiveness that are economically, politically, and religiously motivated have existed for a long time (Elegbeleye, 2005; Sani, 2015).

The palpable reason why Nigerian youths take to restiveness and the mode of demonstrating their anger may seem different but the effect is synonymous. The result of it creates death, fear, pain, suffering and lack of development, as it affects the area and the country at large. The most significant discord demonstrated mostly by youths was the Biafra-Nigeria civil war that started from 1967 and ended in 1970, led by Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu. The aftermath of the civil war created so many policies of ethnic identity which have had negative effects on the Nigeria nation. Presently, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) are also agitating because the issues of marginalization, favoritism, nepotism, tribalism and divide and rule system which their fathers died for in course of the civil war is still ongoing. The IPOB group is today declared a terrorist group by the Federal Government for their activism of self-determination.

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Another dicey issue is the oil-rich but exploited Niger Delta region. Militants in different splinter-groups in the area are waging war with the Federal Government and the multinational oil companies to control their resources and better their impoverished lives. The region is said to be badly treated despite the fact that oil produced in the region is the major source of Nigerian foreign exchange (Stella, 2010). The oil companies exacerbate the agony of the host communities by not giving them due attention even when their exploration results in spilling crude on their farmlands and waters, flaring gas and setting economic terrains on fire by bunkering which their compradors covertly arranged. The agitation for regional identification in the area led to the death of some activists like Ken Saro Wiwa, Kiobel Barinem, Baribo Bera, John Kpuinem, Nordu Eawo, Paul Levura, Dadiel Gbokoo, Saturday Dobe and Felix Nuate, amongst others (Mark, 2015). The militant groups in the Niger Delta decided to agitate using violence means that also affects their people. Ironically, while the actions of recognized militant groups in the Niger Delta regions such as Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), among others had abated in the Niger Delta (Mark, 2015); other smaller groups have of recent surfaced which makes the problem more complicated to address (Ifeanyi, 2008).

Most importantly, the North Eastern region of the country is seriously besieged with issues that affect the peace and harmony of the region and the country at large. The Boko Haram Militants initially took up arms against the Christians. They were involved in the killing of mostly Christians, bombing of Churches and Christian buildings, and abduction of the Chibok school girls and the suicide bombing attack of the U.N headquarters in Abuja on the 26th of August, 2011, killing more than twenty six United Nation officials, and injuring scores, as noted by Christopher Bartolotta (2011). Their most recent attack is the kidnapping of the one hundred and ten (110) Dapchi school girls in Benue state, of which one hundred and four (104) were rescued by the federal government agents, five (5) were killed, while one is still in their custody.

Another painful issue of youth restiveness in Nigeria is the communal clashes between the Fulani Herdsmen and farmers in states like Yobe, Benue, Adamawa, Edo, Enugu, Delta, and Kogi. Conflict between crop farmers and herdsmen has become a common feature of economic livelihood in Nigeria (Anthony, 2017). This conflict is as a result of land usage for grazing. Resource ownership and its utilization have resulted to conflict involving man since time immemorial. Land has remained an overwhelming source of conflict among various users, groups as well as individuals. That is, conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers for the use of agricultural space is becoming fierce and increasingly wide- spread in Nigeria. This is as a result of intensification of production activities that are necessitated by increasing human population. Understanding this fact, the Federal Government of Nigeria decided in the year 2018, to sign a bill for cattle colony. This they hope would provide more grazing environments for herds in all the thirty six (36) states of the federation. Some states, welcomed the idea, thus, providing ranche for herdsmen, while some refused. The refusal of farmers in these states creates conflict between the herdsmen and farmers for the use of lands rightly belonging to the farmers. The resultant effect of these clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the states have caused the death of so many men including women and children (Anthony, 2017).

The issue of restiveness in Nigeria in this 21st century has metamorphosed or diffused, overtime, exerting a pervasive, albeit, negative influence on all facets of the Nigerian society. This issue has generated series of discourse within the Nigerian social strata and has provided impetus for creative portraiture in dramatic and theatrical representations by notable playwrights. Thus, the cause and effects of the menace as explained in Uzo Nwamara's *Dance of the Delta* becomes the main thrust of the study.

Theoretical Framework

The issue of youth restiveness in Nigeria can be addressed using many theories. Theories are embedded in some truth, law or assumption which portrays some essential qualities or elements that determine some intrinsic nature or characteristic proposition from which others are derived, in studying ways in which the issue of youth restiveness can be curbed, thus, changing the behavior of affected youths in the Nigerian society such as portrayed in *Dance of the Delta* by Uzo Nwamara. Certain theories are subsumed as guides to action. These theories include: Theatre of the oppressed theory, Social and Behavioral Change Communication Theory (SBCC), and formalism theory.

Social and Behavioral Change Communication Theory (SBCC)

SBCC by Crosby Richard can help understand why people act the way they do and why behaviors change. The theory foregrounds why people change from good to bad, considering the fact that so many phenomena may trigger a good person into doing things that affects his immediate society and his people.

SBCC is an interactive process of any intervention with individuals, communities and or societies to develop communication strategies and to promote positive environment which will enable people to initiate, sustain and maintain positive and desirable behavioral outcomes. This theory can also help to direct attention on what or who to address for social change. SBCC helps in explaining behavioral change and area of focus - the individuals, their intention to change their behavior or their surrounding environment (Crosby & Noar, 2010). Therefore, the goal of every behavior change campaign is to induce long-lasting behavior change.

Formalism Theory

In identifying a critical approach to play analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and identifying inherent features in dramatic representation, Formalism theory is an exemplar to note. Formalism reduces the importance of a text's historical and cultural context. The features of Formalism approach include not only grammar, meter, tropes and syntax but also literary devices such as plot, character, characterization, thematic thrust, subject matters, language, style, genre, and setting in a literary work (Eagleton, 1996). Formalism theory has at once grounded and challenged our understanding of literature. Formalism forces us into a dramatic awareness of language; while literature refreshes these habitual responses and readers objects more perceptible (Eagleton, 1996).

Causes of Youth Restiveness in Nigeria

Youth Restiveness in Nigeria is caused due to some fundamental issues that affect its regions. Some splinter groups such as the Boko Haram sect in the North East, the farmers/herdsmen clash in some parts of the country, the militants and militia groups in the Niger Delta, and the MASSOB group in the South East are agitating for change on issues that affect them. Scholars and researchers have advanced several causes of youth restiveness in Nigeria, of which poverty, unemployment, bad governance, inadequate educational opportunities and resources, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate communication and information flow stand out as the causes. (Stella, 2008; Peter, 2014).

Another study also identifies marginalization, unemployment, environmental degradation, exuberance and the role of politicians in employing youths against their perceived enemies (Chikuenzi, 2009). These contribute the main causes of restiveness among youths in Nigeria. These causes as highlighted by Chikuenzi are plausible because the issue of marginalization is one of the major reasons for the civil war that lasted for years and still, the MASSOB and the IPOB members agitation for self-determination: the issue of environmental degradation also resulted to the agitation by the militants and militia groups in the Niger Delta; while the issue of unemployment is the reason why both the educated and the non-educated go into agitation that affects their regions and the Nigerian space. On the same note, mostly on the Niger Delta issue, Snapps and Hamilton (2011) identified economic, political, socio-cultural, environmental degradation as the causes of youth restiveness.

Effects of Youth Restiveness in Nigeria

Youth restiveness in Nigeria has risen to become a major threat against the development of the Nigerian society. Youths are known for using violence in expressing their pain in order to create change among themselves and the society to which they belong. This violence through agitation for change has resulted to loss of lives and properties in the regions where it is prevalent. On a general note, the issue of youth restiveness carried out through violence creates fear, pain, suffering, hunger, death and lack of development in regions such as the North East, South South, South West and the South East. It is also affecting the other regions of Nigeria. Painfully, from the sporadic exploits of the blood thirsty Sharia zealots of the North West and North Central Region, to the incessant display of violence by the angry mafia of the armed bandits that paint the political landscapes in the South South, with blood, and from the hot headed ethnic militia known as the O.P.C. in the South West, and MASSOB in the South East, to the murderous secret cultists in nearly all our universities and polytechnics, it has been an orgy of violence and a season of blood and tears in which the very foundation of the nation is threatened. Precious human lives have been destroyed in their thousands and properties worth hundred and millions of naira have been set ablaze (Yusuf, 2014).

Nigerian Government on Youth Restiveness

The issue of youth restiveness in Nigeria is paramount as youths are seen agitating and demonstrating in different forms. Their agitations and demonstrations are accompanied with violence – those done physically or done in secret. Their means of agitation and demonstration seem different but the effect is synonymous. The result of their agitation creates fear, pain, suffering and lack of development, as it affects the area and the country at large. The Federal Government envisaging the effects of this issue on its space decided to proffer workable solutions which would alleviate and calm the menace for proper development of the regions.

The Federal Government in the year 2006, under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua created an amnesty program which helped to calm the prevalent tension in the Niger Delta region. This singular act by the late President helped tremendously in changing the mind-sets of the Niger Delta people, who initially believed that they were totally forgotten. President Yar 'Adua restored hope, peace and development in the region, as all of the militants who identified with the Nigerian security agency, were adequately established, most were flown abroad for studies. President Yar' Adua was highly regarded for keeping to his promises. He was a reliable President of the Republic of Nigeria, who stood to fulfill his promises on Niger Delta issues.

On the MASSOB issue, the Federal Government has also provided some mediums of calming the issue in the south eastern part of Nigeria. Yusuf Omotayo, (2017), avers that "the Federal government has promised to find a solution to the problems in the South East". This statement indicates that the Federal Government has expressed worry over the protests which sometimes have resulted in violence. The issue becomes complicated because the Federal government has decided not to yield to their demand for self-determination.

The agitation by the Boko Haram sect seems complicated due to its intricate nature. There is no profound ideology for their agitation as so many attempts by the Federal government towards proffering a workable solution have proved abortive. Presently, the Nigerian government has almost succeeded in defeating the Boko Haram sect. But due to its complex nature of establishment and sponsorship, the sect seems strong, as new issues relating to their attacks are still prevalent in the region.

On the Herdsmen/Farmers clashes, the Federal and some states governments have taken some steps towards solving the problem. The affected states have set up mechanisms to counter the menace of the herdsmen while the Federal government has ordered the security chiefs to hunt down those who perpetrate the attack on the farmers. The Federal government also plans to import grass from Brazil to increase pasture available for the livestock.

In a nutshell, the Nigeria Government has tried in proffering workable solutions regarding the prevalent and precarious issues in the Niger Delta, the North Eastern and the South Eastern regions. Peace reformation programs like the amnesty program and dialogue are on-going in most of these regions. Those, whose issues are well defined, attract most attention, while those whose obligations are not yet identified are also given the opportunity for dialogue. These moves by the Federal government are made for peace, unity and adequate development both for the regions and for the nation at large.

Synopsis of *Dance of the Delta* by Uzo Nwamara

The play *Dance of the Delta* revolves around Ikem, a young, honest, determined, and head strong boy who decides to take to arms to continue the fight against grabbers, greedy and sleazy vultures, whose sole aim is to perpetually oppress and repress the people. These oppressors impose ignorance, poverty, hunger, disease and pain on the people. In order to alleviate the community from these problems, Ikem decides to form a revolutionary group which he thinks will assist him in killing the corrupt chiefs and sanitize the community. Before now, the management of Swampland Energy Exploitation Company Limited, led by Mr. Brown (a white man) had called a meeting of chiefs and rulers of the community for a discussion regarding the development of the community, where Chief Eziokwu, Ikem's father, who was the Oji-Offor (bearer of truth), was present. During the meeting, the chiefs led by Chief Apkan, rejected the development agenda presented to them by Okwu, the company's community development manager. The chiefs suggested that the development project be monetized, so that as community leaders they would provide the kind of development that their people would like. The meeting was rescheduled by Mr. Brown (Swampland company area manager) as a result of the fight that came up between the chiefs and Chief Eziokwu, who was representing the council of elders. Chief Eziokwu who spoke against the chiefs, suggested that the people would prefer the direct development of the community and not monetization of the representative chiefs.

Earlier on, Chief Eziokwu had dreamt of Chief Apkan's plot to eliminate him. His dream comes to manifestation, as Chief Apkan's assassins attacked and burnt Chief Eziokwu in his house, as his wife Ego and two children escaped. Ikem (his first child), who lives with a close uncle, arrives to receive the news of his father's death. As the new Oji-Offor (the mouth piece of the gods), he decides to fight against the corrupt chiefs and their thugs in order to restore peace to the community. He forms a revolutionary group, whose aim is to exterminate the oppressors of the community and restore the glory of the land. This aim becomes a reality when Ikem and his revolutionary group succeeded in killing Chief Apkan and his allies.

***Dance of the Delta* and the Theme of Youth Restiveness in Nigeria**

The play, *Dance of the Delta* reflects the situation in the Niger Delta region and is a macrocosm of the Nigerian reality. It interrogates the causes, effects and plausible solutions regarding the menace called youth restiveness that has unequivocally crippled the regions where it is prevalent in the Nigerian space. The play presents the real causes of youth restiveness in Nigeria, identifying corruption as one of the key hallmarks of the causes of youth restiveness in the Nigeria. It attributes this cankerworm to the sleazy, greedy, corrupt, and ambitious politicians, chiefs and leaders who daily oppress and repress the people who find favor and confidence in them in intricate matters for their benefit and development of their society. These leaders, instead of protecting the good image of their people, see that as a lucrative opportunity of looting, grabbing at the detriment of those they represent.

In the play, characters such as Chief Akpan, Chief Kalada, Chief Wariso, and Chief Tanure, represent the corrupt politicians, leaders, chiefs in the Nigerian society that are busy raping the country of its blessings in broad day light at the detriment of the people they are supposed to protect. The same corrupt politicians, leaders, and chiefs, also mislead the youths into terrorizing the society, thus, creating pain, suffering, and death to the people and underdevelopment to the society. Evidence of this is seen in the play as Chief Akpan decided to employ the services of some unemployed youths who were willing to be engaged in any services to ease their jobless nature. This tendency is seen in the Nigerian space where some youths are used by some corrupt politicians to commit assassinations, armed robbery and for their political obligations. In the play, Chief Akpan and his allies employed these youths to assassinate Chief Esiokwu whom they saw as threat to their malicious activities. These same youths were also involved in the kidnapping of the Whiteman working for Swampland Energy Exploitation company.

It is evident that the issue of youth restiveness in the Nigeria, inferring from the playwright is masterminded by some corrupt politicians who benefit in the wake of conflicts in their respective jurisdictions. Some youths in the play were employed by Chief Akpan and his allies to create havoc in the community. They indulge in the act of kidnapping, assassination, looting, rape, armed robbery, incessant killings, and other malicious activities that create pain and agony to the people. This was the reason why Chief Esiokwu decided as the Orji-Ofor, that is, the bearer of truth and tranquility to steadfastly speak against the evil activities of the corrupt chiefs that eventually resulted to his death.

On this note, there still exists some politicians, leaders and chiefs in the Nigerian space who strive for the well-being of the people and the betterment of the country in general. Chief Esiokwu represents the politicians, leaders, and chiefs who may not really be tagged righteous but who seek to do right for the benefit of those to whom they have pledged allegiance. On the same note, there also exists some youths who despite material enticements, still stand for the truth. Evidence of this is seen in the play when characters like Ikem and some profound youths in the community and nearby communities decided to form the revolutionary forum with the aim at rehabilitating their people, excommunicating the corrupt chiefs from the profaned society, for a holistic and emulating space. Ikem, an emblem and exemplar of youths such as Ateke Tom, Asari Dokubo, Tompolo, and their likes in the Nigerian space decided after being perturbed by the level of corruption, suffering and pain in their immediate society, to form the revolutionary groups such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South East; Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), among others. Their aim was to emancipate the people against the oppressors who daily oppress and repress them. Most of these youths in the Nigerian clime such as Ikem have succeeded in eliminating the corrupt politicians out from their regions for the emancipation of their people and the development of their society.

Most importantly, Chief Esiokwu in the play represents politicians such as Senator Dino Melaye and his likes in the Nigerian National and State Assemblies and other human rights activists who are presently speaking for the people of Nigeria regarding the gory killings by the herdsmen and other mundane killings in some Nigerian states.

Finally, Uzo Nwamara in the play redirects the ideology that the main cause of the issue of youth restiveness in the Nigerian space is the corrupt politicians, perceived leaders and chiefs who are busy oppressing and repressing the people. The playwright's dramatic view is that this menace can only be curbed if the corrupt politicians, leaders and chiefs are gotten rid of. He implores the Nigerian youths to sit up, organize themselves, thus, create change by purging the society off of corruption, nepotism, tribalism and suffering, since the society belongs to them.

Conclusion

The issue of youth restiveness in Nigeria is a complex one in that it has affected the nation on all fronts. It has also affected the people as they contribute to the escalation of the menace one way or the other. In the Nigerian space, everyone is deemed responsible for the precarious dilemma that has resulted in the retardation of the development of the nation either by association, by relation, or by negligence in reporting the escapades of illegal activities and associations in their societies. Thus, change for an expansive and egalitarian development, that would proffer peace, love, happiness for all is a collaborative effort. A patriotic service to humanity is the hallmark for a healthy society. Those in public and private offices should be patriotic in delivering service and representing the people without fear and favor.

Recommendations

From the analysis, youth restiveness in Nigeria is a dicey one, thus, can be curbed if the following steps are taken:

1. Resources in some states which are neglected for one reason or the other should be recognized and harnessed. It would create more employment opportunities for youths.
2. Peace reformation programs should be used in settling the issue of youth restiveness in the Nigerian space.
3. States should be given the right to manage their resources and a good fraction of proceed from the resources should be given to the Federal Government as tax.
4. Government should provide functional and free education to all citizens.
5. Poverty eradication programs like N-power, Gowin, and similar programs should be continuing at local, state and federal levels.
6. Multinational oil companies should re-channel some of their profits to improve the lives of the communities and rebuild the environment of those who suffers from the direct consequence of their operation.

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