

Cultural Negligence as Key Cause of Terrorism in Nigeria: A Study of Julie Okoh's *We Are Rivers*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to position cultural negligence as key factor that contributes to the prevalent terrorism in Nigeria. Culture, the sum total of the peculiarity and way of life of the people, is for long gradually being neglected and relinquished in the Nigerian space due to emergence and acceptance of Western culture that contradicts the primitive culture of the Nigerian people as portrayed in Julie Okoh's *We Are Rivers*. The emergence of Western culture to the Nigerian space poses factors ranging from Christianity, technology, civilization, science, discoveries etc., which have never been deciphered by the people, therefore creating discord amongst them. The effect of this is seen on the prevalent menace in the North-East, South-South, and other regions in Nigeria. This issue of terrorism is manifested in acts of kidnapping, incessant killings, politically motivated assassinations, suicide bombing, lethal car bombing, armed robbery etc. This has brought suffering, pain and death to the people, thus keeping the nation in a state of anarchy and lawlessness, and providing impetus for creative portraiture in argumentative and dramatic representations by critics and dramatist. Thus, with narrative methodology, this work investigates Julie Okoh's approach and attempt to establish the effect of cultural negligence on the Nigerian space using drama as an instrument. The effect of it will create positive change amongst Nigerians, thereby effectuating change around societies. The study therefore recommends that traditional culture of the primitive Nigerian people should be retraced and practiced as it defines their existence.

Keywords:

Cultural Negligence,
Causes, Terrorism,
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Background to the Study

From pre-history till present, cultural attributes such as ritual, dance, masquerade, folklores, and so forth, have positioned as being sum total of the peculiarity and way of life of primitive Africa, which defines her religion, norms, artifacts, nomenclatures, occupations, and propensities. It is therefore plausible to aver that culture unifies and creates sanity and sanctity amongst the African people. This is so because culture is associated with deity worship and ancestral veneration.

Lucidly, culture, as it is usually understood, entails a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other people or society (Anyanwu, 2006; Ajayi, 1930). On that same note, Fafunwa (1974) defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs or any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society”. This statement explains why Gabriel (2015) noted that “culture goes on to include a people's social norms, taboo and values”. Value here, according to Fafunwa, is to be understood as “beliefs that are held about what is rightly belonging to the discipline of philosophy”.

Apparently, culture can also be explained to have embraced a wide range of human phenomena, material achievements and norms, beliefs, feelings, manners, morals and so on. Culture can be understood as the totality of the way of life cultivated by a people in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norm, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours (Aziza, 2001; Soola, 1996; Bello, 1991). Invariably, culture fundamentally and essentially denotes the distinctive spirit, way of life, devices for living, attainments and values of a people, and as such guides behaviour and exerts social control within society (Zuofa, 2006; Odejide, 2003).

Most significantly, culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbol, distinctive achievements of human groups, as well as their embodiment in artifacts (Wallace, 1970). In the same remark, Wallace posited that culture consists of traditional and historical ideas on values, order, and systems. This substantiates the ideology that culture is all of those means therein whose forms are not under direct generic control or which serves to adjust individuals and groups within their ecological communities. Thus, cultures are seen as system of knowledge. To this, society culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members (Metgers & William, 1963). In the same vein, Spradley (1968) argues that “culture consists of the standards for deciding what is...for deciding what can be... for deciding what we can feel... and for deciding how to go about doing it.

Culture as related to education consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encasement and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporary, or formed by individuals themselves (Adler, 1997). It also means the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or

category of people from another (Hofstede, 1994; Tylor, 1871). Culture may as well mean a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by group of people, and their influence, but do not determine each members behaviour and his/her interpretations of the meaning of other people's behaviour. This explains the fact that culture is learned, not inherited. It is to this speculation that a peoples' culture may easily be adulterated or relinquished for imported or borrowed culture, such as it is prevalent in most Nigerian societies, which is the basic background for the study. Meanwhile, culture is supposed to be derived from one's social environment, not from one's genes. It should be relinquished from human nature, on the one hand; and from an individual's personality, on the other hand, which, of course, defines individual traits (Judith, 2006; Lustig & Koester, 1999).

It is important to note that culture is basically learned from the people you interact with and by explanations people receive from natural and human events around them. This notion that culture is acquired through the process of learning has several important implications for the conduct of people across cultural boundaries. This is fathomed when learned culture has appendices attracting attentions, intentions, interests, and fantasy. Good examples to this speculation include technology, civilization, science, discovery, magic, and wealth. Each of this singular acts would unequivocally make one culture relinquished for the other (Fafunwa, 1974).

On a general note, culture exists in two forms: material and non-material (Arinze, 1970). According to Arinze, material culture includes buildings, places, houses, dresses etc. Meanwhile, the non-material, according to above theorist, includes language and other symbols, knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and customs. To this, culture has certain durability as it changes constantly, its rate of change varying from society to another (Ruth, 1934). To this, there is an important historical dimension to culture that cannot be ignored, which is that it has a way of penetrating any society, even though it may contain factors in the form of degenerating contradictions. On this note, several factors may contribute to culture penetrating and changing other cultures. These include environmental as well as ecological factors (Arinze, 1970). Environmental and ecological factors such as cross cultural relation according to Arinze, can result to change in people's culture; specifically, it can lead to acculturation or the acquisition of a foreign culture by a society that plays a relatively subject role in the relation.

In a nutshell, Nigerian culture as microcosm of the macrocosm of African traditional culture is a victim as such. This is envisaged as Western culture has successfully penetrated and has domiciled in the Nigeria space, such that it has succeeded overthrowing the traditional culture of most Nigerian societies. This is plausible due to the notions introduced by the Western culture within the Nigerian space. These notions range from Christianization, technology, science, inventions, discovery, diffusion etc. They are equally believed to negate the traditional culture of the primitive Nigerian people, such as rituals, sacrifices, and communications with their ancestors, gods, and goddesses, thus seeming incomprehensible to practice. The incomprehensible nature of these notions has

created hatred, discord and conflict amongst the Nigerian natives. It has also resulted to terrorism, which is manifested through acts of kidnapping, incessant killings, suicide bombing, politically motivated assassinations, lethal car bombing, armed robbery etc. Also, it has brought anguish and death to the people, even as it did insert anarchy and lawlessness into the geographical terrain in which the people dwell.

Ironically, most critics argue that the root causes of youth restiveness in Nigeria are many, ranging from individual to societal factors such as marginalization, unemployment, exuberance and the role of politicians in employing youths against their perceived enemies, while others believe that issues of low productivity, intra-ethnic hostilities, unemployment, and environmental degradation are menaces over time generating chaos in the Nigerian space (Snapps & Hamilton, 2011; Chukuezi, 2009). On the same note, mostly on the Niger Delta issue, Sunny (2016) succinctly explained that “the oil-producing region, made up of nine states and over two-hundred communities, each with problems of health care delivery, portable water, education, accessible roads, unemployment, environmental degradation etc. have triggered the youths of the region to terrorism, targeted at the Federal Government and the multinational oil companies”.

In the North-eastern part of Nigeria, Right Activist and Senator representing Kaduna Central Senatorial District, Comrade Shehu Sani (2015), averred that terrorism in the aforementioned region is caused as a result of manipulation of the Northern region, disconnection between government and the governed, the prevalence of social and economic injustices, the collapse of public education, massive unemployment, the global terror epidemic-terror contagion, proliferation of arms and unguarded borders, the underdevelopment of the Northerners by previous administrations, human rights abuse, collapse of the North, disunity in the North, and, above all, the distortion in the practice of religious realities.

All of these speculations by these critics are plausible causes, thus are traceable to cultural negligence. It is to the fact of establishing this notion as established in Julie Okoh’s *We Are Rivers*, backed with cultural theory that defines the trust of this study.

Cultural Theory

Cultural theory propounded by Schwartz and Thompson (1990) as referred to by Ewulum (2015) as an ecosystem inhabited by a finite number of ways of life provides the mould with which this paper is shaped, which, when properly harnessed, would provide guides required towards grasping in a lucid way the importance and functions encapsulating culture and how it directs, and shapes society. When mastered and applied, the cultural theory becomes a way of life which consists of a preferred pattern of social relations and a cultural bias or set of shared values and beliefs about human society and the natural world. Ewulum avers that works of the two theorists, Raymond (1961) and Thompson (1963) have been particularly influential in the development of cultural theory. According to Ewulum, Raymond emphasized on culture as a “whole way of life. Whereas, Thompson emphasized on culture as the way in which groups handle the raw materials of social

system and material existence which opened up new ways of thinking about culture in particular, uncoupling the concept from a narrow literacy and aesthetic reference. He asserts that both Williams and Thompson studied the dimension of culture and the active and objective process of fashioning meaningful ways of life.

Conclusively, this study paves the route as stipulated by William, since it interrogates culture as a whole of life of the primitive Nigerian people and not culture as the way in which groups handle the raw materials of social system and material existence. The former defines that of the African tradition, while the later is for the Western tradition.

Praxis of Terrorism in Nigeria

Generally, Terrorism is the premeditated use or threat to use violence by individuals or sub-national groups in order to obtain a political or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of their immediate victim. In other words, terrorism is an anxiety inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main target (Abram, 2006). It may as well mean the calculated use of unlawful violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally economical, political, religious, or ideological.

Visual examples of terrorism abound in the country, Boko Haram insurgencies in the North-east and the Niger Delta militant and militia agitation in the South-South region being among the heaviest. On the same plain, the MASSOB and IPOB agitation for self-determination in the South-East is ironically considered in the year 2018 as terrorist groups.

Notwithstanding, the prevalence or reign of the Herdsmen/Farmers clashes that has left many dead and scores injured and some communities destroyed in several states, of which individual listing of them is inevitably inconsequential, but for the great number, are overwhelmingly for most persons yet considered none terrorist attacks but rather as inter-communal rivalry.

Emphatically, terrorism in the Niger Delta region became most visible in the early 1960s over tensions between foreign oil corporations and a number of Niger Delta minority ethnic groups who felt they were being exploited. This sort of exploitation ranges from an increase in marginalization, environmental degradation, and the failure of the state to ameliorate the suffering of the people. These notions have pushed or rather forced the inhabitants of the region specifically the youths to the edge. These amongst other issues consequently made the youths become very hostile and restless, which, on the other spectra, therefore initiated an atmosphere of fear, chaos and tension over the years. An example of such is the rebel group formed by Isaac Jaspas Boro (1966), which was for the declaration of the Niger Delta Republic from the country. Another group according to

Mark (2015) was the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) which was a non-violent group founded by the foremost human right activist, Ken Saro Wiwa in 1990 was also considered a terrorist group by Nigerian Federal Government. This declaration led to the death of Ken Saro Wiwa, Kiobel Barinem, Baribo Bera, John Kpuinem, Nordu Eawo, Paul Levura, Dadiel Gbokoo, Saturday Dabee and Felix Nuate, amongst others.

Also, Osalor (2014) also noted that “the movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which was the brainchild of the late environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, appeared to blaze the trail in the Niger Delta. The heartless execution of Saro-Wiwa precipitated a chain of reactions that has reverberated to the present day. The Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), and the Supreme Egbesu Boys of Africa, are some of the terrorist groups that have been formed to protect the communal interests of the Ijaw”.

On the same note, Barklay, (2016) in his article on the decadence in the Niger Delta, agree with Osalor that “this agitation has led to the formation of groups like Egbesu boys, Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality, Joint Revolutionary Council, Arogbo Freedom Fighters, Niger Delta Volunteer Force, and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta”. Other smaller groups which are not known to the Federal Government exist Mark, (2015). The complex nature of these groups has created so many issues that the Federal Government finds them difficult to address. Their agitations are targeted on the Federal Government agencies and the multinational oil companies in the area, pressing for a fair deal for the people of the region, most especially in the allocation of oil blocs. Incidentally, the entire militant groups according to (Kimiebi, 2010) seek for relevance at every point in time in order to solve some fundamental issues affecting them. Mark also stated that “These militant groups have taken up arms against the government and the oil companies as a result of some fundamental issues affecting the region, which include the problem of underdevelopment, environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration activities, and resource control”.

Additionally, Mark also stated that, these militant groups engage in criminal activities such as hostage taking, lethal car bombing, and sabotage of oil installations”. Apart from the above list, they equally engage in other malicious activities that affect their own people. These malicious activities range from rape, child abuse, kidnapping, armed robbery and other social vices.

Briefly, the issue of terrorism in the North Eastern region of Nigeria is another case affecting the peace and harmony of the region and the country at large. The Boko Haram terrorist group initially took up arms against the Christians. They were involved in the killing of mostly Christians, bombing of Churches and Christian buildings, and abduction – the most prominent being that 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 (Christopher, 2011). The same sect is also reported to have kidnapped the 110 Dapchi school girls. After series of deliberations and

negotiation with the Nigerian government, the Boko Haram sect releases 104 adopted Dapchi girls while five (5) were reported dead and one (1), is still held captive. They are also reported to have kidnapped some Red Cross Aid workers and two are already reported to have been killed by the Boko Haram sects. Despite the efforts carried out by the Nigerian military agents towards ameliorating the issue by confronting and chasing the Boko Haram sect out of the Sambisa Forest which was for long their captured territory to neighbouring countries such as Lake Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin Republic, the sect is of recent reported to have masterminded some terrorist attacks in states such as Kaduna, Plateau and Maiduguri.

Synopsis of Julie Okoh's *We are Rivers*

The play *We are Rivers* tells the historical development of Rivers State from the pre-colonial era to the present time.

The actions in the play revolve around the Narrator who tells the brief history of Rivers State from her humble, cultural and traditional way of life in the pre-colonial period, before the first white man stepped into its shore. The narrator also recounts the history of Rivers State during the pre-colonial era, creating an image of a timid Rivers State people and the efficacy of their culture, tradition, norms, artefacts and way of life. He tells the story of how the gods and goddesses of the Rivers people respond to plea of the people regarding their rituals, hunting, fishing, and farming occupations; how the gods and goddesses of the seas and land punish their offenders. The trade by barter system of the people is also narrated. The Narrator also highlights the maiden's purification ritual.

The narrator enumerates the intrusion of the first white man and his companions into the shores of Rivers State and their introduction of slave trade. He also tells the story of how the slave trade was abolished and the signing of a treaty which was not deciphered by the Chiefs with the Colonial Masters that made Rivers State a British protectorate; the rivalry and war that broke out among the ruling houses fuelled by the white people ruling them due to the outcome of the treaty already signed; and the Christianization process that occurred in the period that prevented the natives of their primitive worships, religion, culture and tradition. The narrator also narrates the events that occurred in the pre-independence period, which is the discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri in the year 1956, which later transcended to post independence period. The post-independence period, accordingly, focuses on oil exploration in the region and its effect on the lives of the people, leading to militancy.

He tells a story about Ibinabo who recounts to his neighbours the death of his entire family due to water pollution as a result of oil exploration and exploitation. The neighbours" also highlight how the British Government had established the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB), headed by Sir Henry Willink, to address the problem of underdevelopment in the area. They also narrate how Isaac Boro in 1966 formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) that proclaimed a Delta People Republic because they believed the Niger Delta people are not properly treated. The NDVF is said to have lasted for a short time because Aguiyi Ironsi, the then Head of State of Nigeria convicted Boro of treason and sentenced him to life in prison. He was later killed in the civil war.

The Narrator also explains the formation of other militant and militia groups which have existed after the death of Ken Saro Wiwa, the human rights activist and his fellow freedom fighters. He explained their declaration of war against the oil companies, their workers, economic saboteurs, oppressors, injustice, and exploiters. The scenario that paves way for their involvement in wanton activities such as kidnapping, vandalism of pipeline installations, lethal car bombing, kidnapping and other similar activities that rumbled Rivers State is also highlighted. The Narrator also explained how Governor Chibueke Amaechi, the former governor of Rivers State vowed to end the reign of battle in Rivers State, and his formation of The Joint Task Force. President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's formation of the amnesty program helped create a peaceful environment in Rivers State.

The Narrator ends the narration by advising the Rivers People to think back to the history of Rivers State and direct their steps back to the sacred system of the people which is already discarded by the acceptance of things unconnected to their culture.

Cultural Negligence in *We Are Rivers* and the Nigerian Experience

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to deduce that cultural negligence is the major cause of terrorism in *We Are Rivers* by Julie Okoh. This is plausible because the issue of cultural negligence resulted to the prevalent youth restiveness in the play. In the play, the issue of cultural negligence is seen on the aspect of the signing of the treaty between the chief and the white man without consulting the gods and goddess of the land as it had always been the culture of the Rivers State people to seek wisdom from their gods and goddess before engaging in any matter that affects the society in any fronts. Though the treaty assisted tremendously towards ending the issue of slave trade that was a major challenge to the people, yet, it enslaved the people in all ramifications. For instance, the signing of the treaty brought about the introduction of Christianization and other western cultures ranging from technology, discovery, science, and civilization. These notions established above are tentatively opposite to the traditional culture of the Rivers State people which entails rituals and sacrifices that are associated with deity worship and ancestral veneration. Due to the aesthetic and economic values of western culture to the Rivers State people, and the notion that the peaceful, loving, and forgiving nature of God of this new found culture, people of Rivers State abandoned their culture whose punishment for offences are heinous and unscrupulous. The lack of understanding of this western culture to the people brought about misunderstanding, chaos and war amongst the Rivers people. The lack of understanding and application of the proceeds and discovery (crude oil) of this culture created death, pain, and suffering to the people, as issues of betrayal, corruption, greed, nepotism, divide and rule, marginalization etc, started creeping in.

As enumerated, these are microcosm to the macrocosm of the Nigerian space in general. Today, issue of terrorism has risen to becoming a dicey issue plaguing the Nigerian space as a result of cultural negligence. Nigeria as a nation, having more than 300 tribes and divers of cultures, unified by deity worship and ancestral veneration is today witnessing a gradual relinquishing of her ancestral culture, norm, tradition, values, artefacts and way of life as a result of her acceptance of western culture that she is yet to decipher. According

to Okoh, this is the major cause of the prevalent terrorism in the Nigerian space. In the play, Julie avers that the western culture tampers justice with mercy, given room for long suffering for repentance that follows with forgiveness of sin. She sees this long suffering and forgiveness of sin as hallmark for callous behaviours, demonstrated by the greedy and sleazy political actors who are busy oppressing and repressing their people.

Julie sees the primitive culture of the people as that which upholds sanctity and sanity because of the laid down heinous punishments by the gods, goddesses, and ancestors of the people. Evidence of this is seen in the play when the narrator tells a brief story of a woman in Kalabari community who lost her wallet during their festival in the playground, and how she pleaded for the return of the wallet, all to no avail and the exposure of the thief by Owuaya the mother spirit. Julie averred that the punishment was immediately pronounced which was that the woman was to serve in Owuaya's shrine all through her life. After this incident, it is believed that such act was never reported.

Unequivocally, Julie also explains how the primitive culture gave room for the interaction between the deity (gods and goddesses) of the people which always reminded them that the gods and the goddesses are always with them. For instance, Owuaya appeared before them to reveal the thief that stole the wallet. In the western culture, it is believed that God of the Christians is metaphysical, therefore communicates only to the pure in heart but gives much time for the sinners to repent and return to Him. Armed with this knowledge, evil is perpetually committed. Besides, other heinous activities such as corruption, marginalization, nepotism, greed, and covetousness, other mundane atrocities are visible in the Nigeria space. The effect of these has resulted to suffering, pain, and death on the people, and underdevelopment to the Nigeria space. To avert these perilous acts, the youths ironically take to terrorism, manifested in acts of kidnapping, politically motivated assassination, lethal car bombing, suicide bombing, and incessant killings etc., and all the above keeping the Nigeria environs in a state of jeopardy.

In a nutshell, the immediate human victims of these terrorism attacks are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat and violence based communication processes between terrorists (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target, turning it into a target of terror, target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought (Thomas, 2007).

Effect of Cultural Negligence on the Nigerian Space

Putting the above speculation to consideration, it can be established that the effect of cultural negligence on the Nigerian space is pragmatically visible, so much the prevalent terrorism that has brought death, pain, and suffering to the people and underdevelopment to the country in general. It has resulted to other decadence such as inter-regional war, massive destruction of lives and properties, economic dislocation and sabotage, currency devaluation, state of emergency and total breakdown of law and order. Furthermore, it has also resulted to lack of national identity and lack of cultural integrity.

Conclusion

Conclusively, it is fathomed that cultural negligence has positioned as a major cause of the prevalent issue of terrorism in the Nigerian space. It is also established that cultural negligence is the root that paved way for other malicious issues which today seemed to have dominated the space. These malicious problems include likes of corruption, nepotism, marginalization, divide and rule, and the clandestine – fraud and bribery which are practiced in all fronts of the economy as portrayed in *We Are Rivers*. This has created negative emblem to the progress which we professed to have had. It has created disunity and hatred amongst the regions around us. Most importantly, therefore, the issue of terrorism in Nigeria can be curbed if traditional culture is retraced and practiced.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, it has been positioned that cultural negligence is the major cause of the prevalent terrorism attacks which has affected the Nigerian space in many fronts – economical, political, and social. As a way of correcting this menace, the following recommendations are established:

1. Considering the fact that sanity and sanctity are embedded in culture, it is therefore pertinent to deduce categorically that cultural heritage of the people which has ancestral veneration and deity worship of the traditional people of different tribes and regions in Nigeria should be retraced and practiced. This is true as it solidly defines the existence of every society, which, if properly employed and harnessed, would curb the issue of terrorism.
2. The traditional culture of the primitive Nigerian people should never be allowed to be relinquished or replaced with any cultural deposit, despite the economic and technological benefits, as it is sacred and most valued.
3. Culture, as macrocosm of history, should be paramount in the curriculums of study and should be taught in all levels of educational pursuits – primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. This will help create a background where generations yet to come would learn from and practice.

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