African Culture and Performance Dynamics in the Dramaturgy of AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye

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Religious Intolerance and Disunity in AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye's *The Killers* (A Social Drama)

AbdulGafar Olawale Fahm

Introduction

Intolerance is defined as the unwillingness to accept views, beliefs, or behaviours that differ from one's own. By inference, therefore, religious intolerance would mean an unwillingness to accept different religious views, beliefs, or behaviors of a different social group. It can also be regarded as the incapacity or indisposition to bear or endure that which is not in congruence with one's own religious beliefs (Dowd, 2014, p. 1).

There are so many diverse religions practised in different parts of Africa and this has been a major influence on art, culture, and philosophy. Today, the continent's various populations and individuals are mostly adherents of Christianity, Islam, and to a lesser extent several Traditional African religions (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979, p. 3).

The role of religion in society is definitely a dynamic one. It has connected the races and societies of the world for hundreds of years and has given meaning to lives that may seem otherwise hopeless. Religion has provided for a universal language and culture among those who believe in a higher power (Ali, 2006, p. 5). The spirit or being receiving the worship and praise may not be the same, but the practices are usually similar and serve the same purpose - to give direction, insight, courage, and a divine connection. Yet there are people who think religion causes more harm than good in terms of news of terrorism caused in religious name, religious hospital denying care to miscarrying women, and wild and weird religious beliefs causing psychological harms invariably supporting injustice, inequality, and atrocities (Bagaji, Etila, Ogbadu, & Sule, 2012, p. 8; Marsha D. Fowler, Kirkham, Sawatzky, & Taylor, 2011, p. 11).

This diversity of opinions on the role of religion may have been the result of several factors such as scriptural ordinance and inter-relationship among followers of different faiths and religions. This is when individuals believe that their form of religious worship compels

them or drives them to interfere with others (Ugwoji, 2008, p. 23). It is interesting to see that some of the worst in human behavior has been done due to the love of religion. The misreading of religion and the awful things that result from it is where people have shown the potential for religious intolerance. This is where some level of change is needed in terms of how people advocate for and show zeal towards their religion (Hawting, 2009, p. 7; Schrag, 2006, p. 12).

It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the role of religious intolerance and disunity in breeding a culture of violence threatening the society and how this leads to the destruction of ethical fabrics of the society. It also explains the pragmatism of A.A. Adeoye on the issue of religious intolerance and disunity as well as its implication on the society.

Synopsis of *The Killers*

The Killers is a social drama written to promote peaceful co-existence and unity. The play is divided into two parts with nine movements. It also has prologue and epilogue to help readers harmonise the intended messages of the work. The play is a story of how different deadly characters perpetrate evil in the society. It is the story of how injustice and murders destroy the cohesiveness of the community. The physical setting is apparent from the use of names such as Emeka, Ahmed, and Lanwa, however, the country's name is Wazobia. The name of the country is also symbolic in the sense that it is a combination of "come" in the three major languages in Nigeria, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo.

The time setting is the military era, as there are references to military rule and dictatorship. In spite of being set in the military era, however, the characters, especially where themes of religious intolerance and disunity are noted, are placed in contemporary Nigeria setting with rampant use of various anti-religious tolerance anti-diversity slogans. Little wonder Adeoye (2009, n.p.)states that the play "dramatises the various antics and methods of violence, which have grown from the closet of our homes to wear local, national and international garments". *The Killers* is, therefore, a work that parades all kind of misfits that can be found in contemporary Nigeria such as corrupt diviners, religious leaders, managers, tribal politicians, cult leaders, contractors and so on.

Adeoye's use of language in the play is evocative of Wole Soyinka's A Play of Giants (1984), Femi Osofisan's Farewell to a Cannibal Rage (1986), Akanji Nasiru's *Come, Let us Reason Together* (1987), and Bode Sowande's *Farewell to Babylon and other plays (1979)*, in the use of scornful criticism of political violence, rage against violence and the waving of the olive branch against religious intolerance and disunity. In addition, attitude of people towards unity were discussed in the work. While some characters are calling for religious

tolerance and unity, others like Lanwa, Emeka, and Ahmed unequivocally express their religious and cultural intolerance. Ahmed, for instance, accuses Emeka and his group, and calls them violent dancers, stamping their feet like elephants. Therefore, they are not good dancers and should not win the dance competition(Adeoye, 2009, p. 2).

Furthermore, unity is also alluded to in the play when some of the characters sing and dance to the song of "We Match on":

With the fullness of joy

And the wonderful gift of nature,

We match on in unity

Not minding our tribulations

To build a giant nation...(Adeoye, 2009, p. 1)

Of more importance is the consideration of religious intolerance and disunity as practices that hinder growth and development of a society. This paper therefore progressively analyses the interplay of these two themes within the fictional world of Wazobia.

Religious Intolerance and Disunity in *The Killers*

Wazobia is portrayed in the work as a multi-ethnic nation dominated by Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. In recognition of the reality of the Nigerian situation, Adeoye carefully presents the constant threats to religious tolerance and unity through the actions and dialogues of the characters in his works. The theme of religious intolerance in *The Killers* is not as elabourate as disunity. Disunity in the work can be found in almost all sections of the work. Some references to disunity like disagreement, dissent, argument, quarrelling, feuding; conflict, and bigotry can also be related to the work. Relevant examples of these themes are hereby given.

Religious Intolerance

Religious intolerance is when a religious group or society specifically refuses to tolerate practices, persons or beliefs on religious grounds. This is also the unwillingness to accept different religious beliefs. In Nigeria, religious crises are prevalent, owing to a number of reasons among which is religious intolerance. Instances, where religious intolerance was expressed in *The Killers*, are provided thus:

(Charged atmosphere. The two groups mock each other, daggers are drawn. Special drum sound announces the majestic entrance of the Cult leader and his members who threaten the Christian and Muslim Worshippers. Fighting

resumes momentarily while the Orchestra sings "Don't Kill Them" to re-invent the chaotic situation):

Don't kill them my brothers

Don't kill them (2ce)

Let them live

My brothers

Let them live…

Don't kill them my brothers

Don't kill them (Adeoye, 2009, p. 12).

Disagreement, Argument, and Quarrelling

The theme of disagreement runs throughout *The Killers*. There is an incredible range of subjects that people often disagree about, however, there are relatively small numbers of reasons that people disagree. Among the reasons people disagree are facts, definitions, values, dislike, failures of logic, default beliefs, self-interest among others. Disagreement was shown in the following excerpts (in a brief dance competition between the Dancers of Emeka, Lanwa and Ahmed):

Ahmed: (Jubilating) Yes, we should win. *Walaitalahi*, we have the best spectacle and should win…

Emeka: You think that jumping up and down like hungry monkeys is all about dance? Besides, your dance is uncoordinated and untheatrical. The audience reacted spontaneously while we were dancing. We are the winner…the ultimate winner…

Ahmed: (Charging at Emeka) And you think that violent stamping of feet like elephants make you people good dancers? Why can't you accept that we have won?

Lanwa: Won what? No! I arranged my songs and dance movements better. Head or tail, we shall win. In the beginning (demonstrating) we were slow, moving majestically to the rhythm of breeze. Later, we were up, bending our buttocks in the process and finally, I say, finally, we moved down, deep to earth…(Adeoye, 2009, p. 2)

Argument is often caused by a number of reasons. Among the most commonly listed reasons are not listening, saying wrong things, and thoughtlessness. In *The Killers* an example of this is given in the following dialogue:

Edo Lead Dancer: Or if the child will not prostrate to his father. Enough of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa's cultural stereotype. (Shaking) No tribe under the sun is culturally richer than Edo. We are the heart of culture and...

All: No!

Edo Lead Dancer: Why?

All: (Agitating) We say no. Let all of us dance separately and allow the audience to judge.

Lanwa: What tune and what music are we going to dance to?

Emeka: *Ikolo*, the drum of the knowledgeable.

All: No!

Ahmed: *Goje*, a string of joy.

All: No!

Lanwa: Then, *Bata*, a fast rhythmic tempo of the fiery king.

All: No! ... –(Adeoye, 2009, pp. 34)

When people's wants and desires are not met or whenever they are in need of something and they fail to get it, it can lead to frustrations and the start of quarelling. Shortage of basic or essential needs such as food, electricity, water and so on can be a good reason to quarrel thereby creating disunity. The following examples demonstrate this in *The Killers*:

S.U.G. President: The time has come

The moment is today

We have to decide today

Change our destiny today and

Continue to live happily today

Everything must be done today

Reasonable time has been wasted on consultations with the university administrators. So, after the consideration of our positions...confrontation is the only way out. We will damage vehicles and create general pandemonium in the university community. "Aluta Continua, Victoria Ascerta". (Various Aluta songs violently rush out of the Students' mouths. While they are running out of the stage, the Orchestra sings):

Jaw-jaw-jaw

Wazobians not

War-war-war (2ce)

Talk-talk-talk

Wazobians Don't

Fight war.

Jaw-jaw-Jaw

Wazobians not

War-war-war(Adeoye, 2009, p. 7)

Dissent

Dissent is described as the expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions about social practices and policies. Since dissent involves disagreement it can lead to conflict, which if not resolved, can lead to violence and struggle. In other words, dissent is to have or express an opinion different from a prevailing or official position. An example of this can be seen in the following (As the Three Lead Dancers rush to pick the Golden Trophy, Efik, Nupe, and Edo Lead Dancers run to the stage and confusion sets in with echoes of yes and no):

> **Efik Lead Dancer:** (Mimicking) Yoruba...Igbo, Igbo...Yoruba. Hausa...Yoruba. Hausa...Igbo...Yoruba, this cultural conspiracy against the minority must stop (Dancing). Minority rights must be guaranteed (Adeoye, 2009, p. 3).

Feuding

Feuds begin because one party (correctly or incorrectly) perceives itself to have been attacked, insulted or wronged by another. Intense feelings of resentment trigger the initial retribution, which causes the other party to feel equally aggrieved and vengeful. The dispute is subsequently fueled by a long-running cycle of retaliatory violence. This continual cycle of provocation and retaliation makes it extremely difficult to end the feud peacefully. Also, feuds often involve the original members of the same family, associates, country or nation can thereafter last for generations and may result in extreme acts of violence. An instance of feud can be found in the following excerpt:

> **Alaibe:** (Shouting and screaming) They have turned our plights into political rhetoric. All rulers now and then usually promise heaven on earth and when they ascend the throne, we are easily forgotten like unripe paw-paw. In fact, there was a particular President who ruled the Wazobian nation like an estate

although with so many reform programmes that eventually reformed the masses to their early graves. He called us ungrateful wretch for daring to fight. He threatened to kill us and warned our leaders to learn from Saro-Wiwa's political suicide. Above all (Laughing) he said that he saw hope for a united Wazobia…

Ekpebide: Can there be hope for a united Wazobia without social justice? Is social justice not the basic tonic for an egalitarian society? Hope, whose hope?

Tarila: (Facing Ekpebide) Throw that question to the audience who have conspired to kill the truth!(Adeoye, 2009, p. 9)

Conflict

Many people try to avoid conflict at all costs. Others tend to blame someone or something else for causing it. These responses do not resolve conflict and may make the situation worse. Conflict is a normal part of life and there are many issues that could cause conflicts to arise within community or organisation. Some of such cases are recorded in *The Killers* as follows:

Ekpebide: After years of systemic elimination of our true leaders through divide and rule, a deliberate continuation of the Lugardian political manifesto!

Alaibe: We live in the creeks where we cannot afford the luxury of lives. But…

Azome: (Points to the audience) Most of you said that we must unite like a bunch of brooms so as to defend the Wazobian project…

Alaibe: That we must be hungry and angry with words and actions of unity…Wazobian project…

Azome: Whose project? Whose unity?

Ekpebide: (Slowly) Your actions and misdeeds have coloured you people in the toga of disunity. Call a white spade a white spade and avoid unnecessary diplomatic niceties, Niger-Delta stinks.

Azome: (Calling) Omare! Do your work before I build my anger and bring one of those awaiting death out for public execution!

Omare: (Loud sound of gun shot is heard backstage and Omare speaks from backstage) Dead already. He begged me but I went ballistic. (Dragging Mr. Wood to the stage) He is one of the termites that has built castlein our land while we rot away, hemmed down by poverty and rejected like rags (Adeoye, 2009, p. 10).

An Assessment of the Presentation of Religious Intolerance and Disunity in *The Killers*

A careful examination of *The Killers* demonstrates that religious intolerance and disunity are among the messages the play addresses. Moreover, the work can be said to emphasise the theme of disagreement, dissent, argument, quarrelling, feuding; conflict, and bigotry. These are issues that are also seen in our contemporary society. In view of this, it will not be out of place to state here that AbdulRasheed Adeoye has succeeded in portraying major albatross in Nigeria society through this work. In other words, he has been able to reflect the true character of modern day society in his work. Just as he stated in the "Prefatory Comments" of his work that:

> Meditatively, I have reflected and most often, been psychologically disturbed about the evils associated with violence. Perhaps as an interested dramatist, I have asked repeatedly that; what can the artist do in the seemingly impenetrable tragedy of violence? What with the conspiracy of the state which is constantly watered by the bourgeoisie and permanently nurtured by their deadly political wings (military or civilian regime)? Can we have a violence-free society in the face of glaring exploitation, oppression, unemployment, dehumanization and political injustice? (Adeoye, 2009, p. iv)

Continuing in the "Prefatory Comments" section, he declares the artist as "the living voice of the helpless; the town-crier whose gong often pierces across all age grades" showing the need to address societal ills and evils. He states thus:

> The artist can, therefore, *NOT* [emphasis not mine] afford to sleep or conspire with traders of violence. As a wise custodian, he must be alive with his sixteen eyes. As he watches unfolding events, he must also report his findings to the entire populace through various creative platforms. He must be ready and willing to say *NO* to injustice. To castigate dictators and demeaning voyagers in the vehicle of violence must be his attractions: he must not sleep (Adeoye, 2009, p. iv).

One should, however, add that the characters and the dialogues in the work show quite clearly that the author is trying to address his country, Nigeria. This is why many of the dialogues in the work show an in-depth understanding of the happenings in Nigeria. Given the author's religious, cultural and ethnic background, he did not allow these affiliations affect the portrayal of the characters. He is mindful and conscious of the cultural and religious bias various groups often face in the country. This is why he reveals that:

> My humble voice, *The Killers*, is a social play set in Wazobia land. It celebrates, in a melodramatic form, the various antics of murderers and the culture of violence threatening our society. *The Killers* establishes very clearly that violence is a deadly game, a waste and a relic of our unfortunate society.

> Consequently, this play unlocks the hidden secrets of Wazobians in their dangerous quest for money making, a destruction of our cultural ethics and ethos. Importantly also, *The Killers* is a manifesto for peace, fairness and social justice within the credo and dramaturgy of politics (Adeoye, 2009, p. v).

In view of this self-evaluation, Adeoye has shown and succeeded in achieving the objectives of his writing, which are violence, waste, dangerous quests, destructions all of whichbrings about disunity and religious intolerance. Closely linked with this observation is that the work did not deeply portray or elabourate on religious intolerance, unlike disunity, even though, religious intolerance appears to be the bane of disunity in Nigeria.

This minus notwithstanding, AbdulRasheed Adeoye has indeed demonstrated in *The Killers* that an impartial convergence of reasons for disunity could be seen in the work. Adeoye's achievement is made possible because of his deep-seated conviction that religious intolerances can be avoided as there are more pressing issues that threaten Nigeria's peaceful co-existence and World peace in general. This is expressed in the following excerpt:

> Unanswered questions coated and coloured in the vehicle of oppression have turned some Nigerians into kidnappers and as the Niger-Delta groans under the yoke of violence, threatening the very existence of the Nigerian project, violence is made the unfortunate king with a big crown of thorns. Also, it is now fashionable to be a suicide bomber in Asia, Europe, and America where those who do not want to die are fighting those who see death as a thing that can happen any time. Thus, we have at hand and all over the world, the great violence – the violence of the brain and of the psyche which hitherto set the pace for physical violence. Can we erase, from our minds, the evil of violence or is it possible to put a stop to violence? This is the core and the central motif of The Killers which is another theatrical adventure for play directors (Adeoye, 2009, p. v).

This response though is a call to end all religious intolerance and disunity in order for the world to progress, Adeoye also shows in this play that it is possible to talk about unity, fairness, social justice, and equality. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

> **Narrator One:** To be great is my aspiration for all. Call Wazobia a child of necessity, it must survive. Borrow new lexicon from your various languages, restructure your semantics or better still, give it a new paradigm, it must survive. If you call that amalgamation a political hara-kiri or condemn the creator of regionalism, parliamentarianismand federalism, this baby despised by her people must grow...We want to begin another dance, the dance of survival, of peace and progress without violence...(Adeoye, 2009, p. 15)

Furthermore, AbdulRasheed Adeoye has through his portrayal of the possibility of unity endeared and popularised his deep conviction and belief in peaceful co-existence among numerous readers across the globe. This achievement, it should be stated clearly, is not a coincidence, but well planned out by the author as he himself notes that:

> Scholars in search of peace, students of politics and literature will nonetheless see, in this play, the evils associated with violence through negative change and transformation. *The Killers*, a carefully written play has also shown the radical transformation of the writer from a theatrical author to a social writer; a seer in search of peace(Adeoye, 2009, n.p.)

Conclusion

This paper no doubt has been able to highlight the issues of religious intolerance and disunity in Adeoye's *The Killers*. It set out to present the pragmatism of the author on religious intolerance and disunity as well as its implication on the society. The paper showed that disunity can be found in almost all sections of the work as references were made to disagreement, dissent, argument, quarrelling, feuding; conflict, and bigotry. However, religious intolerance was not elabourated upon when compared with disunity as earlier illustrated.

While this may be seen as a significant omission due to the central position of religious intolerance in causing disunity, the author can be exonerated because of the comprehensive wayhe covered for the shortfall by addressing other salient and equally important societal ills. Therefore, it would be appropriate to observe that generally speaking, the work greatly succeeds in its approach at dramatising religious intolerance and disunity as a culture of violence threatening the society. The author through the characters and dialogues in *The Killers* has indeed given the reader and analysts from the religious discipline, the opportunity of understanding the complex and unwarranted degeneration of the society into unnecessary religious one-sidedness and disunity.

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