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Mediating Peace in a Conflict-ridden Society in AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye's *The Killers* (A Social Drama)

By

Tayo S. Arinde (Ph.D.)*

Abstract

This paper asserts drama as a tool for identifying, exerting and mediating peace in a conflict and crisis ridden society as exploited in Adeoye's *The Killers* (A Social Drama). The study employs the analytical and descriptive methods of research to unearthing some of the societal ills in the play under examination and how the theatre-style has given direction to them. It became clear that drama has justified that drama is a didactic and a fearless instrument, pungent in pinpointing societal vices, cautions and provides directions. It also finds that in the theatre resides power to entertain, educate and chastise perpetrators of evils in the society as Adeoye artistically weaved it in *The Killers*. The paper recommends that when the society is confronted with knotty and cantankerous societal problems, the option of Drama should be explored for solution.

Keywords: Peace, Conflict Mediation, Dramaturgy, Neo-alienation Theatre. Theory.

Introduction

Every society, irrespective of its geographical entity, ethnic or cultural affinity is ridden in one form of conflict or the other, thereby making our societies conflict prone and a potential battle grounds. Reasons for this are not limited to Personal interests but social interests, communal interest, religious, political and economic interests. It is an obvious fact that man disagrees with one another not only because of hatred for one another but largely because we differ in our areas of bias and opinion. In our desperate efforts therefore to protect our interests, we hurt one another. However, when any society observes that conflicts rears up its head, peace loving individuals make concerted efforts towards resolving them. Many of those efforts have proved abortive because of man's unwillingness to surrender his right.

Whether the society knows or not about the lassitude of our state, the theatre is not oblivious of the decadence, hence Adeoye's *The Killers* (A Social Drama) assumes the seer's voice providing direction in a conflict

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ridden society. The paper analyses the play text with a view to exposing the barrage of social ills that have enveloped our society, as they are artistically encapsulated in the play text under examination. The paper also examines how the playwright attempts to bring to the fore solutions that may ameliorate the ills. Therefore, in this paper attempt is made to do a holistic literary analysis of the *The Killers*, showcasing the detector, prosecutor, mediator and the judicial functions that are portrayed in the dramatic text.

Review of Related Literature

Recalling the situation in the ancient African society, before the advent of the Europeans, a lot of value was placed on developments, which manifests in communal efforts; spirit of sharing within and among Africans and co-existence of people with zero degree of tolerance for conflict. This is not to say that conflict does not occur at all but the ideological concept of communality and the concept of common sharing among Africans, overshadow any crisis that may want to rear up its head. Gyekye (1996, p.35) explains that:

Communal values are those values that express appreciation of the worth and the importance of the community, those value that underpin and guide the type of social relations, attitudes, and behaviour that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community sharing a social life and having a sense of common good.

Uwazie (2008) quoting Uwazie et al, (2008, p.5), provides the foundation on which we build our understanding of what conflict means. He says: "conflict is a competition of interest satisfaction, often expressed through positioning". Gbadegesin (2005) cited in Sekoni (2008, p.7) identifies the point at which conflict would become inevitable. He says:

The object of Federation is therefore to preserve the diverse character of a political society. The idea is that each compliment unit- ethnic Nationality- no matter how big or small desires the strength in the number provided by the union with others, but not a uniformity that can retard its growth or swallow it up.

Uwazie (2008, p.7) categorises five different types of disputes to include: "Data disputes, Structural disputes, Value disputes, Relationship disputes, and Behavioral disputes. 'Data disputes' he describes as conflict created by information while 'Structural disputes' is that which arises between institutions. He describes 'Value disputes' as one that arises from a clash of ideas; and relationship and behavioural disputes as that which arises from personal commercial relationship, habit, custom and culture respectively. All the disputes enumerated above occur at the levels of human interactions and more often than not when some negative factors such as

ethnocentrism, egoism, negative criticism, selfishness and several others negative tendencies are allowed to infiltrate and negate man's peaceful co-existence.

Earlier on, we elucidated on the notions of Drama and theatre and stressed on the strength of the art and why it is recommended as a mechanism for ameliorating the effect of conflicts. Because we need a preventive proactive approach, we find this rightly in drama, hence our choice of Adeoye's *The Killers (A Social Drama)*, as a dramatic piece that call our attention to some of the crises that we live with, which have constantly demean our society.

Conceptual Issues in Adeoye's *The Killers (A Social Drama)*

The Killers (A Social Drama) by AbdulRasheed Adeoye, x-rays the prevalent multi-dimensional criminal phenomena that envelope the economic, social and political integrity of the land of WAZOBIA. WAZOBIA here is a metaphor of a nation that is referred to as a land that flows with milk and honey. Unfortunately in the land, criminal tendencies are the order of the day, one of it is the students' act of gangsterism, perpetrated under the guise of Students' Unionism, in Institutions of Higher Learning in the land. The land also plays host to various degrees of crimes, which ranges from kidnapping, killing for money rituals, corruption and nepotism to desperate quest for power in the land of WAZOBIA. These many unchecked misdemeanours eventually lead to the murder of the Director of WAZOBIA Merit International. However, the law of karma caught up with all the perpetrators of evil in the land of WAZOBIA, as they all died mysteriously one after the other.

Instances of Debauchery in our Society

In this paper, attempt is made to elucidate on numerous social ills and negative tendencies on our society that are identified in *The Killers*. It is an undisputed fact that our society is saturated with barrage of unrestrained, self-indulgent and immoral behaviours, which range from ethnocentrism to act of hooliganism, cheating, gangsterism, corruption, love of money and quest for power in the land of WAZOBIA. The first amongst them is 'ethnocentrism'.

Ethnocentrism is one act that makes man vulnerable to conflict because it bothers on ego. Ethnocentrism according to *Encarta Dictionaries* (2009) is "a belief or an assumption of superiority of the social or cultural group". This is the first misdemeanour that Adeoye's *The Killers* first drew our attention to in the epilogue of the play, which he theatrically tagged "Beyond the calculated rhythm of the drum". He presents the exposition in the metaphor of drummers, represented by Drummers One and Two in the play. The introduction of drummers in context of the scenario is a deliberate tact by the playwright to orchestrate the role of drummers as harbinger of joy

during occasions and festivals. Coincidentally too, their appearance is at the event of the Celebration of the Annual Independence in the land of WAZOBIA. A supposedly joyful event, which reflects in the announcement made by drummer two thus:

Drummer Two: Join the amicable dancers on stage to celebrate our annual legacy, the Annual Independence Competition with a short dance. Before we begin to untie the riddles in today's night..."(TK p.1)

Ironically, rather than the call being for genuine celebration, it turns out to be an invitation to conflict. The language of the drum below confirms this:

Awa lagba x2ce: We are the elders-the leaders x2ce
Adiye funfun lagba adiye. White fowl is the leader of all fowls
etc..(p.1)

In the Yoruba tradition, the above quoted language of the drum is an expression of ego, laden with selfish and provocative vitriol, which simply connotes ethnocentrism. As if that is not enough, the drum goes further to make a spiteful call thus:

Kowokowo x2ce Let it fall x2ce
Arabaowomo Araba tree is no longer falling...(TK
pp.1-2)

'Kowokowo araba o wo mo' in this context, literally interpreted means: 'Your plan that we should fall, has come to naught, therefore, you have been put to shame'. It is a bare fact most of our political leaders employ this kind of language to spite their political foes. This explains why most political gatherings are used to launch vengeance attacks on their political enemies. Such gatherings often end in chaos and bloodbath.

Again, the use of drummers in the play from our point of view, is for two purposes. One, it is to promote interaction between higher agencies and the people. Two, we consider it an artistic creativity of the playwright to extol and bring alive the story telling theatre tradition that is synonymous to Africans in the narration role that the drummers perform in the play. We opined too that the playwright employs the metaphor of the drummers, who he also in exploring his multiple role playing Neo-alienation style is also the narrator, perhaps to remind us of the roles of union leaders who act as intermediary between the government and the people, intermediaries who call peoples' attention to realities or otherwise on ground. While some of the Union Leaders have played this kind of role with fear of God, some of them were mere double-dealers. For instance, in the scenario below, we see a genuine directional call to reality:

Narrator One:- Those metallic smiles must stop... I want those pretentious dances and music to stop... Why must you

dance in the face of agonies and crisis?...why must you laugh and hiss when the nation is on fire? (TK p. 4)

In furtherance to the above, we found pleasing a call to genuine reasoning in the dialogue that we have below:

Narrator One:- ...Talk to my people about the evil called violence Let them know that peace radiates progress and prosperity while violence is a noxious stench of destruction, the last call to death (TK p.5).

At this juncture, the questions are: How many of our leaders make genuine contributions to national issues? How many of them direct their followers to toll the path of peace? The above approach, from all intent and purposes, either as a Trade Union leader, or political leader, should be adopted. It is a model that encourages followers to embrace violence-free approach as the best option to prosecuting peace and resolving crises.

In further providing direction in the *The Killers*, points to some other negative acts that are predominant in the land of WAZOBIA were also clearly enumerated. These include: acts of hooliganism, ruffianism, and gangsterism, which are common to our Institutions of Higher learning in many countries in Africa. Painfully, those acts are no longer regarded as anti-social but rather civilized trade-marks in our citadel of learning. These acts are particularly traceable to the activities of Students Union Leaders; otherwise refer to in various institutions of Higher Learning as the Students' Union Government (SUG). A caricature of such force laden and violent inclined vituperation is contained in the dialogue below:

SUG 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" (TK, p.7).

The scenario above and the mode of dialogue is what one can describe as a sinister approach, where demands are made, laden with inciting words. This kind of approach can never ameliorate conflict rather it will blow them out of proportion. Facts abound that overzealous and violent inclined Students' Executives and a few unserious students are usually behind fanning the embers of the crises, to attract undue recognition. We dug into some past practical examples of such unpleasant occurrences that some African nations had witnessed.

These issues that have caused untoward debasement in our institutions *The Killers* submits that it calls for a serious reflection. This is because, as parents or guardians, we share in the guilt when considering the fact that most of those students shouting 'Aluta Continua' are our children, possibly the last born of our mother or even a sister of our wife? Haven't we taken notice of the fact that some of the crises in our institutions have political undertone? Shouldn't we call our wards to caution rather than conclude that it is their generation? The suggestion made by Narrator one in the submission below seems to be a thought-provoking advice in the right direction:

Narrator One:- Whenever these students sing "Aluta! Aluta! to energize their zest for destruction, don't join them but rather sing a newly created and progressive song to cool their restlessness and unnecessary radicalism. (TK p.8)

The advice above sounds simple; 'sing a newly created and progressive song to cool their restlessness' but candidly, it is a subtle way of calming frayed nerves as songs are antidotes to calming frayed nerves.

Another misnomer attitude that *The Killers* calls the society's attention to in the play is the problem of unequal distribution of State resources. This is no doubt the major bane to the progress that is very rampant in most African countries; Nigeria in particular. The Niger-Delta issue in Nigeria is a case in point. The Niger/Delta crisis in Nigeria has been in the news for close to two scores of decade. Even now as this paper is being put together, the issue is taking a new dimension. On Wednesday, 7th March 2018 on Galaxy Television news, polarity among the Militant Ijaw Youths, who are the major actors in the protracted crises, was reported. Bothersome too is in the fact that the restive Ijaw youths, who have taken to arms, are those that we look up to as our future leaders. Where then is the future in this nation, when the land that has been flowing with milk and honey now flows with crises, conflicts and blood? Adeoye in *The Killers* takes notice that government's intervention has yielded little or no dividends, consequently, he uses this theatrical approach to draw attention of our leaders and followers to unabated hideous and deadly activities such as: kidnapping, killings, abduction of nationals and foreigners that occur on daily basis in Niger-Delta and by extension, Nigerian. The menace of kidnapping he brings the example to the fore in *The Killers*, where some American Nationals are kidnapped and their abductors threatened to kill them should they fail to pay the demanded ransom within a stipulated time. He explores the emotional recall strategy to excite the sensibility of theatre audiences the gory psychological torture that the kidnapped victims experience in the hands of the kidnapers as contained in the voice over dialogue of the kidnapped foreigners: "please don't kill us. We will pay the ransom demanded." (TK p.8)

Although, players in these heinous crimes advanced reasons; like neglect, deprivation, environmental degradation, political suppression, and systematic elimination of vocal Ijaw community leaders such as Ken Saro Wiwa as well as uneven distribution of resources. Thought it is a pitiable condition when one considers the dialogue below:

Azome:-... They know that we are the third class citizens in the Wazobia project, the natural owners of their main source of income. (TK p.9).

Agreed that they have suffered deprivation as contained in the pathetic statement above but I think one should be guided by the old adage that says: "two wrongs don't make a right" and allow it to speak to our conscience. What seems to be wrong today may be corrected tomorrow when we encourage jaw-jaw as against war-war or how shall we bring back lost souls or mend the strained bilateral relationship when conflicts subside?

Without prejudice to efforts made so far by the Nigerian Government, we notice that Nigerian Government's efforts towards resolving the Niger-delta impasse even as it is committed to a quick resolution was not swift enough. An historical overview of some reactionary events points to this. The resignation of one Tonye Princewill, a member of Yar'dua 2020 Committee who resigned as the Chairman, Sub-Committee on Niger Delta sometimes in June 2009 on the complaint that government allowed military invasion of Ijaw communities in Delta State then was a confirmation of the government's lackadaisical attitude towards the issue.

In another Newspapers report credited to one Mirki in the *Niger Delta Standard* of Thursday, June 04, 2009, he laments Government's slap-dash attitude thus: "...the griping poverty level, unavailability of social infrastructure and soldiers' invasion of Niger Delta communities showed the insincerity of the President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua-led Federal Government to solving problems of underdevelopment in the region."

The Killers also calls our attention to another unpleasant situation where religious leaders incite their followers against one another. Osofisan in *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980) brings to fore that kind of social menace where he presents in unmistakable terms the double-face religious clerics in the metaphor of 'Afaa' (Osofisan 1980, P.15) who are in large number in our society. The same scenario is described in *The Killers* as "Killing to sell God" (p.11).

The Killers also draws our attention to another way through which conflict creeps into our society, through 'cheating'. This is epitomised in the two drummer friends who float a joint entertainment business but ends up cheating themselves. This is expressed in the dialogue below:

Drummer One: All I know is that you cannot take all the money given to us...

Drummer Two: Why? Don't you know that I entered the professional market before you? (p.13)

This dramatic scenario educates us further on what cheating means. It also warns us to be weary and note that it does nothing, but puts spanner in the wheel of peaceful co-existence, which in turn breeds unpleasant relationship.

In another development, the play; *The Killers* exposes us to other social vices that encapsulate our society; amongst which is the 'love of money'. This is exemplified in the character metaphor of the office Messenger of the WAZOBIA Merit International, who in his search for quick wealth agreed to meet the stringent condition laid by the Diviner. The dialogue that ensued below captures this:

Messenger:- Just tell me. I will perform all the rituals better than you think. I am ready to say bye-bye to poverty. (TK,p.22)

Diviner:- Can you get a fresh dead body? (TK,p.22)

Messenger:- (Taken aback) A ... fresh dead body? ... I will get it. (TK,p.22)

Diviner:- It is done more secretly. Parley with those mortuary attendants, you will get a fresh dead body even at cheaper rate. (TK,p.22)

Drawing from the above, we cannot forget in a swift the much publicised Okija saga story in Anambra State, Nigeria sometime in 2004, where a shrine in which human parts were used for rituals was discovered.

Other vices that manifest in our society, which *The Killers* brought to fore is 'over ambition' in the character metaphor of an army officer who rose to the rank of a Major General without fighting a single war and yet wants to become a Field-Marshal. This paper draws this in the dialogue below:

Major-General:- I am eyeing Lieutenant General, then General and finally, Field Marshal, the ultimate. (TK p.28)

This explains why many African countries witness, on regular basis, avoidable but ambitious Military coup d'état as well as the sit-tight-on power attitudinal syndrome of African political leaders. It would be recalled that before Mubarak of Egypt was forced out of powers in February 2011, after he had ruled Egypt for over thirty years. Same goes to Laurent Gbagbo of Coted'Ivoire who ruled for over ten years, yet was unwilling to quit power. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Eyedema of Togo, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Kenneth Kauda of Zambia Muammar Ghadafi, of Libya are but a few examples of such sit-tight-to-power leaders. One has come to discover that they use the tactic of political deceit embellished with lies as theatrically presented in the dialogue below:

Major General:- The era of meritocracy is gone. The period we are now is, a period of social pretensions. For corruption is now a stigma to the poor and a way of life for the rich. Most of those who are fighting corruption are themselves agents of corruption. So don't be deceived. (TK p. 50)

Again, *The Killers* admonishes us on the danger that is inherent in 'caucus' syndrome, a system that we use in our daily political dispensation, a system that requires that you must belong to be relevant caucus group before you can make political progress. That is the reason why the Director of WAZOBIA Merit International is exterminated because he refuses to belong to the inner caucus of the political looters as contained in the dialogues below:

Major General: - (*Business-like*) You received two letters from the caucus, You ignored them... Have you deposited the money into those accounts?

Director: - No

Major General: - Why?

Director:- It is not easy. My religion, My conscience, My God will...

Major General:- In two days' time, you will give a thorough definition to religion, conscience and God. (TK p.30)

The refusal of the Director of WAZOBIA Merit International to belong to the caucus group leads to his untimely death. The director died, but the fact remains that no deed done under the cover of the darkness will go unpunished, if not now but later as epitomised in the law of karma. Adeoye eclectically presents this by personifying judgement in the ghost of the assassinated Director of WAZOBIA Merit International. This is illustrated below:

Ghost:- The truth will not die. In heaven there is no place for liars and traitors. No room for oppressors and aggressors but a place for the truth. Your masquerades has walked himself naked to the market, giving cloth to him is rumble. Wail for yourselves, your criminal actions now disturb your mental reasoning. That is why you don't walk again like dignified men but lament about like widows. Sadly enough like locusts you selfishly conspired to kill me. Mr. Manager, we both underwent the same academic excursion and I helped you, still you killed me. I wriggled myself out of your modern stealing and I was dealt with. Officer, thank you. Your action will lead you to your

anachronistic destruction. Mr Hangman, your love for money will end you disastrously. Remember that the truth will not die. (TK pp.50-51)

By the dialogue above, we are brought to the bare truth that no evil done against humanity shall go unpunished.

Conclusion and Recommendations

So far, we have examined *The Killers*, a socio-drama and a play in two parts, with the beginning being the Prologue, with philosophical clichés of: “Those who have ears...”, “Unionism as gangsterism”, “Can’t we reason”, “Killing to sell God” and “Money, the root of evil” while Part two, which is sub-divided into nine movements concludes with Epilogue that is tagged “A parade of the killers”. The play put to fore a caricature of the Nigerian society.

Consequent upon this, the paper encourages the Government, non-governmental agencies and well-meaning individuals to show interest in contributing financially towards production of play texts and play performances. In addition to the above, government should: build more theatre houses, give scholarship to students who are ready to pursue theatre education. In this direction, Government should also review the university admission quota policy of ratio 40/60, which has made art courses (theatre study inclusive) a subordinate to courses like; medicine, engineering, accounting and make it at par with other courses.

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