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BUILDING A
SAFER

WORLD

THROUGH

EDUCATION

Edited by

M.K. AKINSOLA

K.O. OJOKHETA

J.A. ADEMOKOYA

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EXPLORING THE PERSPECTIVES OF T. S. ELIOT'S WORK: "MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL" FOR BUILDING A VIOLENCE-FREE WORLD

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Abstract

This paper has attempted to throw some light on how a violence-free world can be achieved. It lays emphasis on the role that Literature-in-English, particularly dramatic works, can play to achieve this purpose in the life of societal members. Literature-in-English enriches minds by providing thinking skills, pleasure and experience to readers and listeners. The paper examined specifically, the relationship between dramatic works and violence, using the play, "Murder in the Cathedral" as a reference point. The paper used Karl Marx's Conflict Theory as an anchor to emphasise the properties of political conflict in Murder in the Cathedral. As a way of curbing conflict, T. S. Eliot in this play, endorsed humble submission to the will of God while labouring for things of eternal values rather than the ephemeral things of the physical world.

Introduction

Insecurity is rampant in the world today and it has arisen as a result of various causes. Child abuse, neglect, political conflict, unemployment and ostracism are factors that commonly breed insecurity in societies. In a multilingual country like Nigeria, where different religious inclinations abound, inter-ethnic clashes and religious conflicts have led to violence and insecurity. According to Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013), insecurity constitutes one of the major setbacks in Nigeria. According to these authors, the security of individuals and communities should be properly ensured if national development would be achieved. Abdulrahman and Zuwaira (2016) asserted that the causes of insecurity in northern Nigeria include political violence, ethnic or religion-based violence, proliferation of arms and government's inability to provide the basic needs of the people.

Generally speaking, political violence, poverty, youths unemployment and religious intolerance are factors responsible for the absence of safety in Nigerian community. Owing to this insecurity among the populace, people tend to take violence to help themselves. Unfortunately, violence gives rise to injuries, deformity and deaths, particularly if it is not curbed by the authorities. This paper focuses on ways of creating a safer world by exploring the literary perspective – drawing lessons from the work of T. S. Eliot – “Murder in the Cathedral”. While hinging the ideas expressed in this discourse on Marxist's Conflict Theory, the paper draws a parallel between the themes in “Murder in the Cathedral” and the negative happenings in Nigerian Society. The benefits of studying Literature – in – English and suggestions on how to build a secured society from literary point of view are discussed.

Dramatic Works and Violence

Dramas and theatrical performances are tools that can be used in society to teach moral lessons either directly or indirectly. Satirical plays, which could be comedies or tragi-comedies and even tragedies, can be used to point out the mistakes of some individuals in society with a view to correcting them. A couple of plays by notable authors (including T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral) have been able to achieve this objective. In some cases, a play, though enjoyable to its audience, might include violent scenes to the extent that it apparently becomes non-didactic. The morality play “Murder in the Cathedral” which has in it, the gruesome murder of Becket, possesses this characteristic. Such plays have important lessons for society.

In the play “Macbeth” by William Shakespeare, one sees the seed of violence sown by the three witches when they prophesied to Macbeth that he (Macbeth) would be the Thane of Glamis and later, a king. Ambition welled up in him, together with his wife, and the rightful reigning king, Duncan, was murdered. Banquo, who had warned him to be careful about believing the witches' prophecy, was

also killed. At last, Macbeth saw the emptiness of the witches' prophecies. The play gives an insight into the dangers of dabbling with or toying with the supernatural. It also reveals that power can be destructive if it is not properly handled.

"Behind Closed Doors" by Janet Shaw is a play that concentrated on domestic violence. In this drama which is a two-act comedy, two students who belong to two separate social classes, succeeded in bringing their families together after many years of violence. Eddie and Vernon, both in their forties, acted as fathers in the two different families. They both maltreated their wives.

While Eddie, Pearl's husband was mild in his approach, Vernon was blatantly violent and never saw anything good in his wife. Their wives, Pearl and Harriet, bore their spouses' ill-treatment in different ways; while Pearl took solace in a fantasy husband, Harriet utilised alcohol. At the end of this two-act play, these two families that were from two separate social classes were brought together by their children- Sandra and Tarquin. The play shows that marital issues cut across low and high classes but couples, and in particular women, have need of patience in order to achieve marital objectives. The play also reveals that accepting marriage values can frustrate the effect of violence in homes.

The "Bacchae of Euripides" by Wole Soyinka is another play that reflects violence, and still teaches important lessons. An adaptation from a Greek tragedy written by Euripides in B. C. 407, the play portrays the havoc wrecked by Dionysus in Thebes, against his relations who refused to accept his divinity status. Having been denied his rightful place by Pentheus, the rightful king - who was also his cousin - he cast a spell on all women of Thebes, including Pentheus' mother, Agave. This possessed woman tore her son into bits, thinking she had brought the head of a lion from the mountain. The play teaches that individuals should know their limits, and respect the powers that exist. Pentheus would have survived were it not for his disrespectful dealings with Dionysus. The play encourages mankind to find room for the "irrational" in society who, if not

tolerated, could cause damage. While Dionysus represented the irrational and the instinctive, Pentheus stood for the civilised, yet the civilised was permanently destroyed because he could not stand the wild nature of the deified Dionysus. Pentheus became a sacrificial animal when the god had to showcase his powers.

Literature-in-English, Literacy and Violence

Literature-in-English is a discipline in the humanities encapsulating different written and spoken works of art that are entertaining, didactic, and are reflective of certain periods. According to Lombardi (2017), literature refers to the works of creative imagination including poetry, drama, fiction, journalism and in some instances, songs. Some experts have described literature as life or experience. This is because literature is a reflection of life. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines literature as pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novels, plays and poems. These, of course, can be made up of fictitious and non-fictitious writings as structured by the imagination of the writer. Non-fictions include true stories, autobiographies and biographies which are written with some form of embellishment. Oral literature also exists in form of chants, eulogy and songs. In such oral forms, poetic devices like assonance, alliteration and rhyme patterns exist.

These are also entertaining and didactic.

In expatiating on the meaning of literature, Onukaogu and Ohia (2003) indicated that literature might not necessarily be limited to the three genres- prose, poetry and drama but to "whole texts". According to these authors, "whole texts" which reflect literature are "all kinds of print matter that promote information sharing and message transactions. They include the conventional literary genres and print-books (fictional, informational, poetic) magazines, newspapers, journals, letters, notes, lists, poems, stories, observations and descriptions. The sense in which literature is used by these authors reflects the whole language philosophy where authentic texts and various genres can be used in language pedagogy. They

emphasised that literature performs the following functions:

- Thinking and problem solving
- Inter/intra ethnic harmony
- Preparing our children for life
- Provision of aesthetic experiences
- Formation of community of learners.

All the functions listed above point to the fact that literature can be used for adolescents' and adults' attitudinal and behavioural changes such that harmony can be achieved instead of violence. In addition to the submission made by Onukaogu and Ohia, Roe and Ross (2010) added that there are different benefits derivable in the study of literature. They explained that literature plays the following roles in the lives of listeners and readers:

- i. It provides pleasure to listeners and readers.
- ii. Literature builds experience.
- iii. It provides language model for those who hear and read it.
- iv. It develops thinking skills.
- v. It supports all aspects of language arts programme – these are listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- vi. Literature helps children deal with their problems.

Summarily, Literature-in-English is an umbrella term used to reflect all forms of literary writing done in English Language. It is not limited to literary works done by English people like Charles Dickens or T. S. Eliot. Works by African authors, Carribeans and all others, are subsumed under the discipline "Literature-in-English", so long as they are written in the English Language.

There is a strong connection between literature and literacy. According to Lombardi (2017), the term "literature" is derived from the Latin word "Literatura" meaning "writing formed with letters". The creative imagination and aestheticism required to produce and enjoy the work of arts cannot fully be unravelled without literacy. Literacy (alphabetism) is the ability to read, write and carry out computation with a reasonable degree of intelligence.

Analphabetism is non-literacy which is a state of "intellectual blindness", a condition in which a person can neither read nor write. It therefore means that a degree of literacy is needed to enjoy Literature-in-English while Literature-in-English helps to build up literacy in return; this type of effect can be seen at the level of functional literacy.

Functional literacy is the level of literacy attained when learning obtained through reading is channelled towards solving the problems in society. It is the idea of putting into practice, benefits derived from the reading of written texts or listening to spoken texts. When ideas obtained from studying Literature-in-English are utilised in achieving harmony in society, creating good governance, ensuring self-teaching among others, then, the literacy obtained is said to be functional. When societal members acquire literacy without putting it into use, it will not facilitate transformation.

The acquisition of literacy through Literature-in-English and even other avenues, affects different activities in life including the literate persons' attitude to violence. Non-literacy may not exclusively be the cause of violence, but studies have shown that communities characterised by non-literacy experience high level of poverty, disease, violence and crimes. Gillis (1994) examined the impact of literacy on major crimes of violence, homicide and suicide between 1882 and 1914 in France. He noticed that decrease in rates of crimes, and homicide could be associated with increasing literacy. Also at the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment, one of the reports presented in 2010 had it that low literacy cost United States the sum of two hundred and twenty five (225) billion dollars a year, due to non-productivity in the workforce, crime and loss of tax revenue arising from unemployment. Quoting the World Health Organization (2002), Fairholm, Singh and Smith (2009) defined violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of

resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. Based on these definitions, there is no doubt that various forms of violence can be collective, interpersonal or self-directed. Self-directed violence includes suicidal behaviours or self-abuse. Building a violence-free world involves ensuring that these forms of violence are curbed or totally eradicated if possible.

Theoretical Framework

The ideas and position maintained in this discourse are hinged on the Theory of conflict propounded by Karl Marx. Marxism exposes the exploitative tendencies of the bourgeoisie or the "haves" towards the pauperised in societies who are the "haves nots". According to this theory, what causes the conflict in societies is the gap created by social stratification (Molyneux 2004). The upper class in such situation struggles to retain wealth at the detriments of the poor. Karl Marx maintains that there are struggles between the rich and the poor because of inequality in the distribution of wealth. As the rich struggles to maintain their wealth, they become oppressive against the poor who may decide to set a goal of overthrowing the ruling class. This theory therefore explains the possible origins of conflicts at state level, church and within the family and society.

In the play, "Murder in the Cathedral", King Henry represents the bourgeoisie while Becket could be seen as belonging to a lower cadre, though his upward social mobilization was facilitated by King Henry who wanted to use him (Becket) to achieve his political objectives. Having been ordained a bishop, after a tenure of Chancellorship, Becket, decided to shun the mundane benefits of political manoeuvrings, thereby disobeying some directives of the king. The conflict between King Henry and Becket eventually led to Becket's death since Becket chose to die as a martyr. This cruel murder was done in his church by those who took it upon themselves to eliminate him in honour of King Henry.

The storyline of 'Murder in the Cathedral'

The play "Murder in the Cathedral" is a historical and morality play done to enact the conflict that existed between the Archbishop of

Canterbury, Thomas Becket and king Henry II of England, culminating in Becket's death in the year 1170. Even though the parties had been friends (the king actually placed Becket in the position of a chancellor and finally in the position of an Archbishop), the thought of using the Archbishop to consolidate his control of the church did not yield fruit. This problem exacerbated their enmity. Becket had to flee to France on exile. The play opened with the society expecting Becket's return from France. The chorus singers lamented over Becket's arrival from France after seven years of exile. They were of the opinion that he would meet some chaotic situations. The priests who were loyal to Becket also showed some fears. The third priest, for instance talked about violence in the land.

I see nothing inclusive in the art of temporal government

But violence duplicity and frequent malversation

King rules or barons rules.

The strong men strongly and the weak men by caprice

They have but one law, to seize power and keep it

And the steadfast can manipulate the greed and the

Lust of others.

This described the nature of King Henry's government generally. Pointing out that it was full of violence and negative discussions. Eventually, the Archbishop returned and assured the priests of his end, which would be "simple, sudden and God given" p23. He was eager from the outset to die a martyr.

Several tempters tried to dissuade the Archbishop from engaging in his hidden agenda (martyrdom) but he remained adamant. Having reconciled with the king, (King Henry II), the first tempter encouraged him to settle down to a period of pleasure. At this point in time, the Archbishop had changed his lifestyle and was more spiritually inclined. The second tempter asked him to resume his chancellorship; the third advised him to lead the barons in revolt against the king since he did not see any genuine friendship existing between him and the king. Finally the fourth tempter told him to

pursue his objective of dying as a martyr: What can compare with the glory of saints dwelling forever in the presence of God?

Thomas Becket rejected all the options. Even though the last option was most preferable, he hated the idea of involving in martyrdom out of sinful pride. The Archbishop gave a Christian sermon (the interlude) in which he spoke clearly about his death as one of the upcoming martyrs. Eventually, the Archbishop was murdered in the cathedral by four knights who willingly decided to execute him owing to the friction between him and the king. Thomas voluntarily exposed himself to his assailants for murder, since he had always looked forward to dying as a martyr.

Events in this morality play might look obsolete but one can draw some parallels between these events and the nature of violence experienced in Nigeria. The first theme to be identified here is the theme of sacrilege. Thomas Becket, an Archbishop, was murdered in cold blood without regard for the sanctity of the altar. Such sacrilege is a common sight in the northern part of Nigeria where worshipers and their priests are murdered at random in churches. This theme has portrayed the assailants as hoodlums who did not have regard for human lives and did not seem to have any concrete reward for their actions. The four knights drugged themselves before the act and mentioned that they had admiration for Thomas. They confessed that they did the deed in honour of the king and were particularly disinterested in the action.

The second theme that points to violence is the theme of self-sacrifice. Thomas rejected all the pieces of advice given to him by the tempters and the priests and decided to die a martyr. His martyrdom appeared exceptional in that he defied different avenues of escape from death. He rejected the respect he should have given to the state if he had acceded to the king's request after their reconciliation. While one cannot rule out the role played by pride in this decision, there is temptation to consider what the fourth knight meant when he said that the Archbishop committed suicide out of unsound

mind. This is reminiscent of another religious group in Nigeria in which various individuals engage in suicidal bombing- a terrible form of violence against self.

The third theme is the theme of political conflict. There was a serious gulf between Archbishop Becket and king Henry II. One could see the king as belonging to the bourgeoisie while the Archbishop was originally a low class subject. He was virtually brought to the lime light by the king who wanted to use him to exercise his control over the church. Since Becket could not submit to the king's desires, he was maltreated. Both parties were vindictive as they maltreated and excommunicated each other's supporters. The relationship between the king and Becket was seen as that "between the hammer and the anvil," depicting a harsh relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. The feeling of pride and dignity in both parties hastened the tragic events that ended the play, bringing death to Becket and unpopularity to the king. Incessant killings of politicians are common in Nigeria's political circle.

Some lessons against violence as portrayed in the play "Murder in the Cathedral"

The play "Murder in the Cathedral" represented an actual historical event – the conflict between Henry II and Becket the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1164 to 1170. This morality play was done to enact the enmity that existed between these two personalities, with a view to bringing out some lessons.

In the first place, the play as a morality may portrays the spiritual and psychological struggles occasioned by various relationships that humanity faces. Personal choices may point to freedom but the play emphasizes the need for proper consideration of alternatives rather than taking to violence. The play sees pride – either spiritual or political – as a factor that fuels violence. Neither Becket nor King Henry was willing to succumb to the plea for compromise from the populace. The tension therefore heightened until Becket was killed.

Secondly, the play represents a clarion call to rulers and people in the position of authority to avoid the mundane, the ephem-

eral and embrace the spiritual as a way of avoiding violence. Becket, who became spiritually inclined, disregarded the futility of retaining his chancellorship position but rather embraced martyrdom.

The play therefore insists that man should labour for things of eternal values in a violence-laden world.

The play, as a corrective measure to the Nazis who were brutal in murdering their opponents, emphasizes the need to shun tyranny and follow a peaceful course in rulership to avoid violence. The king (Henry II) savoured violence as the path to transcendence hence he said:

“Will anyone rid me of this priest?”

This statement empowered his guards to go after Becket. On the other hand, the members of the chorus and Becket chose humble submission to God's will as the best form of transcendence and this was endorsed by Eliot. Becket therefore said:

“I give my life to the law of God above the law of men”.

Unlike Becket however, members of the chorus were content with just living rather than emulate Becket's pattern of embracing transcendence.

Conclusion

Violence is characteristic of human lives, with its consequences amounting to insecurity. One of the approaches to be adopted to create violence-free society is the study of Literature—in English, specifically dramatic works. Since non-literacy is associated with violence, crime and poverty, exposure to literary works is sure to bring about a re-orientation that can quell violence in society. Various dramatic works like “Macbeth” by Shakespeare, “The Bacchae of Euripides” by Wole Soyinka and “Behind Closed Doors” by Janet Shaw have been used to show how violence is initiated in societies and the need for caution. The morality play “Murder in the Cathedral” has been treated in this discourse to show that pride, social stratification, spiritual and psychological struggles occasioned by discontent allies can lead to violence. T.S Eliot is of the view that humble submission to God's will, preferring things of eternal values and shunning the mundane, are the best ways of avoiding violence.

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