



ETHNOCENTRIC CONFLICT AND HATRED IN OLU OBAFEMI'S *NEAR AND DISTANT CRIES*

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ABSTRACT: *The continuous, unending and unabated killings from clashes between various ethnic groups in Nigeria have been continual features on the pages, screens and sounds of the various forms of media. The dramatic text employed in this study, Olu Obafemi's Near and Distant Cries, portrays vividly the nearly-extinct polarised unity of our dear nation resulting from the clashes. These clashes have led to the death of thousands of people, displaced families, and turned children into orphans, wives into widows and husbands into single parents. This study thus explores the relationship between literature and society, taking into serious consideration the use of literature as a viable tool for resolving ethnic conflict and hatred in contemporary Nigerian society. It also highlights the solution required in curbing the excesses of parties involved in the continual conflicts. This paper concludes by highlighting and revalidating the social commitment of literature in the resolution of ethnic conflicts, ensuring peace and stability and promoting nation.*

KEYWORDS: nation, ethnic conflict, literature, ethnic groups, peace, Olu Obafemi, *Near and Distant Cries*.



INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of time, the concept of conflict has been a multifarious hydra that keeps on growing despite many attempts to stop its growth, raising its ugly head and challenging human efforts for peace, unity and stability from generation to generation. From the Holy Writs, biblical and Islamic perspectives, the first recorded clash of conflict and hatred was in the story of Cain and Abel, where the former murdered the latter because God accepted the offering of Abel and rejected the one by Cain (Hendel, 2021; Alim, 2022). Since then, the world has been thrown into a tumultuous state which has challenged human's claim to modernity, civilization, and sophistication.

The first armed conflict in history recorded by eyewitnesses was the Battle of Megiddo in 1479 BCE between Thutmose III of Egypt and an alliance of former Egyptian territories under the leadership of the king of Kadesh (Joshua, 2009). Warring on, international peace and security have been mainly threatened by ethnic clashes which further degenerate into a global conflict. The present war between Russia and Ukraine; the severe conflicts in Afghanistan, Yemen, Kashmir, Venezuela, Israel, Palestine and Ukraine, just to mention a few, are recent examples of conflict in the 21st century (Crisis Group, 2019).

Today, various parts of Africa such as Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda to mention a few, have experienced or are still undergoing dangerous scenes of dysfunction and conflict, which have occurred between communities, ethnic groups and religious groups (Adetiba, 2013). Nigeria is no exception. Crossing the Atlantic Ocean en route to the Sahara Desert is Nigeria which gained independence in 1960. The country borders the Benin Republic in the South West, Cameroon in the South East, the Republic of Chad in the North East and the Niger Republic in the North West. The three major ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo while there are other minor ethnic groups which include the Kanuri, Ijaw, Ibibio, Igbira, Jukun, Tiv etc. The major religious groups are Islam, Christianity and indigenous beliefs.

At independence, Nigeria was an abode for both foreign and local investors. Cocoa in the western region, palm produce in the eastern region and groundnut in the northern region was the metaphorical oars on which the ship of the nation's economy rested. However, within a generation, the tale of this country changed. Within a generation, the one-time top dog in the comity of world nations dropped suddenly to become an underdog; the once boisterous nation which Liesl Louw-Vaudran regarded as having the potential of becoming a superpower is now described as the second poverty capital of the world (Borgen Magazine, 2020; Louw-Vaudran, 2015). From hero to zero, high life to low life, excellence to mediocrity, pinnacles to pits and from the palace to prison, the tale of Nigeria's plunge down the drain in many aspects of human life has been told many times. The nation, over the years, has been pressed down tightly by the Chauvin-like leg of insecurity, underdevelopment, ethnic clashes, bigotry and hatred which has led to the nation's economy and security clamouring for a new lease of life.

Compounding the problem of underdevelopment in a country like Nigeria is ethnocentrism which poses a great threat to peace, security and progress of the nation. Ethnic affiliations have separated Nigerians from each other and constitute one of the major factors hindering effective national integration. The truth of the matter is that there can be no development in a crisis-ridden environment since one of the pillars of development is peace and stability. The ethnic tension that resulted in the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 is a critical case in point. The resultant



effect of this lingers on in the life of the unborn generation, and as Prof. John Pepper Clark Bekeredemo (1970), puts it, “We are all casualties (line 31)” of the volcanic eruption from the ethnic conflict and violence. Ethnicity has thus added another feather to the cap of the already polarised nation. The tension it generated plunged the country, first, into the secession of the East, and then, the civil war of 1967-1970 that engulfed the country when the Eastern part of the country led by Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu tried to break away from the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon-led government.

The period that came with the military rule witnessed the process of subdividing the country into smaller units all in an attempt to curtail ethnic conflicts. But this has not in any way achieved the aims and objectives for the creation of the states; to foster unity in our diversity. Rather, it has added fuel to the raging fire. A classic example of this is the Ife-Modakeke war of 1997 that stemmed from the aftermath of the dispute over the creation of a separate local government area for the Modakeke community (World Organisation Against Torture [OMCT] & Centre for Law Enforcement Education [CLEEN], 2002). Today the country is bedevilled with myriads of conflicts stemming from the inability of the state to provide adequate socio-political and economic security for all ethnic groups. The circumstances continued to impact negatively on the forces of national integration and cohesion in an ethnically-divided Nigeria. A country that is troubled with a series of ethnic difficulties can only face an enormous loss of lives, destruction of property and refugee crisis, which frequently redirect the attention of government from the business of governance to crisis management.

Conceptualising Nigeria’s Ethnic Conflict and Hatred

Ethnic conflict refers to the clash between two different ethnic groups as a result of differences in thoughts, attitudes, knowledge, interests, requirements and perceptions (Dagunduro, 2019). Dagunduro also asserts that,

Conflicts arise whenever individual groups have different values, opinions, needs, and interests and they are unable to find a way out... the existence of disagreements between two different ethnic parties in their interactions and over differences in values, beliefs, emotions, goals and struggle for space, positions, dominations, scarce resources, etc” (2019, p. 82).

Nigeria is a country with multiple ethnic and religious identities and it has contributed significantly to the continual and unabated conflicts in the country. “The cultural diversity of Nigeria is one of the most difficult and complicated to handle in the world” (Ali & Yahaya, 2019, p. 70). Ali and Yahaya further state that,

The multicultural nature of Nigerian society with its sharp ethnic and religious differences and divisions has generated various versions of identity question which has threatened the existence of Nigerian communities by turning to ethnic violent conflict, and have created dangerous suspicion, distrust and conflicting antagonistic relationship among the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria (2019, p. 70).

These differences resulted in violent ethnic conflict and political gladiators are using this worsening situation to pursue their political ambition. The political, economic, social and psychological aspects of the country rest on a time bomb because of these ethnic hostilities. According to Moraa (2019), the causes of ethnic conflicts are found in “competition for resources and often in the struggle for power and influence” (p. 26). Similarly, Sa’adu (2016) identifies seven causative factors of ethnic conflicts which include: the quest for land and space



domination; lack of definite custom rulers and chiefs; establishment of local government councils; economic wealth; population increase and clashes emanating from farmers-herders crisis; and the awareness of cultural symbol and the contamination of cultural application. Adedeji (1999), in Ali and Yahaya (2019), highlights the causes of conflict as follows: the struggle for political power; lack of visionary leadership and accountability; lack of good governance and transparency; non-adherence to the principles of human rights; poverty; inequitable allocation of national wealth and resources; social inequality; bureaucratic system; ethnic hatred; cultural detachment; and the search for ethnic identity.

From the foregoing, the causes of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria can be explained from the different perspectives generated. The first perspective states that the cause of ethnic conflict in Nigeria should be traced to the period of colonial administration that merged the Northern and Southern protectorates to become a single entity, “which later resulted in deep hatred, competition, distrust and persistent conflict” (Ali & Yahaya, 2019, p. 74). Most ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are outcomes of foreign influences – colonisation and unification of disparate peoples around the River Niger area into a country by the British colonial forces without due consideration for their ethnic diversities (Akwaru, Agba & Edino, 2013). Ejimofor (1987), as quoted in Ali and Yahaya (2019), also believes that the decision to amalgamate three separate and loosely independent regions is a bad and irrational decision and the resultant effect of this decision is the resonance of violent ethnic conflicts with heavy losses of lives and properties. Thus, prejudices, hatred and rivalry become the order of the day amongst the ethnic groups in the country. The country experienced a great deal of disunity as a result of the imposition carried out by the colonial administration (Ali & Yahaya, 2019). Countries that have experienced and still experiencing political stability and unity are people who share the same history, tradition, language and origin. In the case of Nigeria, the British Government forced different parallel lines together, which should have never met in the first instance.

The second perspective is that the perpetrators go unpunished and the Nigerian government fails to prosecute the offenders. A year after the Sasha Market crisis, between the Hausa-Yoruba traders, in Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo state in 2021, the perpetrators of this mayhem are yet to be apprehended. In a similar twist, an ethnic-induced conflict also took place on the 19th of May, 2022 at the Dei Dei International Food Market between the Hausa and Igbo traders, which also saw the death of over four people, destruction and looting of hundreds of millions of naira worth of goods and properties (Premium Times, 2022). Apart from the closure of the market, no tangible and visible milestones have been recorded, as the perpetrators are yet to be arrested. These stories and many more further make these acts keep on spreading over the length and breadth of the nation.

Another major cause of conflicts, most especially in the northern part of the country, which has invariably earned the titular conflict-ridden, is the introduction and imposition of the Sharia Law. This imposition is totally against the unity of the nation as enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; it has led greatly to the polarity of the unity of the country. The introduction of the Sharia Law became “attractive to almost all the northern states in the country with its disastrous consequences” (Jacob, 2012, p. 23). Following the already stated fact is another cause of conflicts in Nigeria, which, is the issue arising from the clashes between the farmers and herders across several states in the country. This conflict before it spread to other parts of the country has dominated the North-Central parts of the country, particularly Plateau and Benue states respectively, for ages. The herders claim that they have a grazing right to graze their cattle and as a result, can settle in any place in the



country while the farmers are of the opinion that herders' settlement must be in accordance with their dictates as the owners of the land (Jacob, 2012). The result of these confrontations resonates through the long history of violent conflicts replete across the country.

Due to the irremovable imprint the mark of ethnic conflict has left on the garment of the country's unity, and even the whole world at large, the majority of the people, based on assumption, generally agree that ethnicity is the major cause of conflict in Nigeria but that assumption has not been weighed to be true (Ogochukwu, 2017). Several contributory factors such as population, the quest for space and dominance, economic domination and prosperity all serve as major proponents of conflicts in Nigeria. However, it is noteworthy as well that, most of these fracas may partially relate to ethnicity because the parties belong to different ethnic groups. Thus, Sa'adu (2016) asserts that the clashes between contenders belonging to various ethnic or sub-ethnic groups make them look like ethnic conflicts. Ogochukwu (2017), in corroborating this fact, points out that "the contenders do not always attack each other due to their ethnic backgrounds, but instead on minor personalised or represented issues that may not directly be related to general ethnic groups" (p.18). In addition, he states that "the contention begins on individual rather than ethnic bases (Ogochukwu, 2017, p. 18).

Ethnocentric Conflict and Hatred in Olu Obafemi's *Near and Distant Cries*

Olu Obafemi's *Near and Distant Cries* project the horrible historical experiences between the Berom and the Hausa/Fulani sub-nationalities of Plateau State. The continuous unending violence has catapulted the crisis to the long list of genuine security concerns in the country. Plateau State, which was once celebrated as the "Home of Peace and Tourism", is now synonymous with an abode of ethnic killings, violence and mortal combat. The state symbolically represents Nigeria, with its peace forcefully bruised, battered and brutalised in the hands of this menace; and its unity strewn into pieces. The two ethnic groups whose Obafemi's play revolves around are the Berom and the Hausa/Fulani. The Berom sub-nationality is the largest autochthonous ethnic group in Plateau State with an estimated population of one million people (Idris & Ochefu, 2002). The Barkin Ladi area of Plateau State which features as the setting of the play is "one of the oldest known local government areas in the State that has been engulfed with the challenges of conflicts" (Cinjel, Joseph & Ayeni, 2020, p.1). The area is predominantly dominated by the Berom who are referred to as the indigenes, mostly Christians. Other settler groups include the Hausa/Fulani, Mwashavul and Ron who are characteristically Muslims by way of religion (Sanni, 2006).

The play opens with the discussion between three villagers cooling off with 'fura de nunu' at the marketplace. Lost in the ecstasy of the moments, the first villager uttered a what-seems to be a blasphemous word against the Islamic faith. Thus, this discussion plays out between the trios:

VILLAGER 1: (*smacks lips on the fura, his face glowing with satisfaction*) Wayo Allah! I cannot but say that anytime I drink here, it feels like I just had a taste of the fura made in Al-Jannah, *wallahi!*

VILLAGER 2: *Awusubilahi!* Tell me, my friend, how do you differentiate between the taste of fura made in Al-Jannah and the one made elsewhere? I am sure you do not even know the road that leads to Al-Jannah, being an infidel!



VILLAGER 1: Says who? Do you know how many times I have seen the golden streets and pretty virgins that parade the streets over there?

VILLAGER 3: Very well, very well indeed. I am sure you have been having many wet dreams lately. Keep dreaming, my friend.

VILLAGER 2: But he is speaking blasphemy, *wallahi!* Were he not my kinsman, I would have run this knife through his roughneck. How can you profane the things above? It is wrong. Fura is fura de nunu (Obafemi, 2018, p. 15).

From this conversation, Obafemi flashes a beacon of light to illustrate the first major cause of ethnocentric conflict. There is a high degree of religious intolerance shown here. What appears to be a friendly conversation almost degenerates faster to brawls and fracas. A larger percentage of this conflict, fuelled by ethnoreligious crisis, has predominated northern Nigeria (Okoye, 2013). “Mass killings and exterminations have remained sporadic and have persisted for decades, primarily between extremist Muslims and Christians or non-Muslims” (Okoye, 2013, p. 1), particularly in Jos city in Plateau state and other Northern towns and cities that include but not limited to Kano State, Kaduna State and Borno State, just to mention a few.

The villagers’ conversation gradually shifts from this highly sensitive talk to reflecting the present state of things in the country. Obafemi uses this diversion to truly portray the fraying and fragile state of the country. Insecurity, like gangrene, has deeply eaten into the once-evincing strength and health of the country. The rottenness is displayed for all and sundry to see, and the stench emanating from this rottenness overfilled our nostrils with all its pungency.

For instance, in the Middle Belt, the region that housed the Plateau, Adamawa, Niger, etc, there is a fraying degree of attacks launched in such rapid succession that targets the girl-child and her mother. Thus, to portray its gory state, Obafemi (2018) states that: “...Did you hear about the recent attacks in Razat? It is said that they raped every girl they met at the stream. They even took some away with their mothers!” (p. 16). Similarly, in what appears to lend more credence to Obafemi’s story, a report on Xinhua Net affirms that, in 2018, over 200 people were killed in a coordinated attack at Razat, Nekan, Ruku in what appears to be a genocidal and ethnic cleansing (Saliu, 2018).

In response to this,

VILLAGER 2: Yes, but it is the same everywhere, even in the South. I heard the government and the Niger Delta militants are slugging it out over there. There is endless vandalism over pipelines, which leads to the death of many innocent fellow citizens (Obafemi, 2018, p. 16).

Obafemi, thus, clearly states what is obviously visible to the blind and audible to the deaf that the present state of insecurity is not common or particular to the northern region alone. There is a high degree of vandalism, oil thefts, pollution, gas flaring and kidnapping which has done more harm than good ever since the discovery of black gold in the southeastern part of the country. Like Ezekiel, one of the major characters in Christie Watson’s *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away*, whose tender dreams of becoming a medical doctor were forcefully uprooted when he joined the Freedom Fighters; several other individuals like Ezekiel have been victims of these evil monsters represented by British and American oil companies (Watson, 2011). The recent spike in the crime of kidnapping seems to emanate from this region. As Obafemi puts it,



VILLAGER 2: Don't forget to mention the crime of kidnapping which has become the order of the day there. Just yesterday, I heard on the news that a certain traditional ruler was kidnapped, and his throat slit (Obafemi, 2018, p. 16).

Aside from the evil menace that has been dealing heavy blows on the nation's economy, Obafemi gives us a quick peek into the act of ethnic hatred demonstrated in the play through the character of Wang, who was denied employment opportunities because of his name in a reenactment that goes thus:

VILLAGER 1: Good day. Sir, please I need food for my stomach and shelter for my family. I do not mind working for you to get that, Sir. I need help

WANG: Oh, what is your name again?

VILLAGER 1: Sir, I am Wang Umaru Lalong.

WANG: (*He is terrified.*) You are from the Plateau?

VILLAGER 1: Yes, Sir.

WANG: I see. How is the Plateau?

VILLAGER 1: Fine, Sir. As peaceful as always, Sir.

WANG: Hmm... You were born and bred there?

VILLAGER 1: Yes, Sir. I also reside there, Sir.

WANG: Okay, okay. Give me some time to think about it. (VILLAGER 1 *leaves.*) Awusubilahi! There is no way on earth I am letting that animal get next to me again! (Obafemi, 2018, p. 19).

For instance, names are associated with violence, and, it seems there is undisputable hatred for people that comes from a particular place or part of the country. And, just like the major character in Alex Hailey's Pulitzer prize-winning novel *Roots*, Kunta Kinte, "who resisted both his enslavement and the name 'Toby' that his owner imposed on him" (Estauh, 2014, para. 4). After his fourth attempt trying to escape, his owner gave him a choice, either he is castrated or he loses half a foot. Kunta Kinte chose the latter, and he was subsequently immortalised. But, where the character of Alex is proud of his identity, the reverse is the case for Obafemi's character, Wang.

However, before the advent and surge in the waves of violence and killings spread over the length and breadth of the nation, the region of Jos/Plateau is one replete with peace and tranquillity; and its people are accommodating to strangers. Obafemi depicts this through the characters of Fa'izah who hails from the village of Rakung, and Nenrot who has his root in the village of Garshish. Symbolically, the two villages – Rakung and Garshish – represent the once-peaceful-but-now-extinct peace of the state strewn into pieces by the canine of the beast: insecurity and ethnic-induced tension and crisis.

For instance, Fa'izah's village portrays a life of exceedingly tranquillity and harmony.



FA'IZAH: (*To the audience.*) My people, what you are about to see is what happened in a village called Rakung. We were all living in peace and harmony. I remember my mother, oh Mother! (Obafemi, 2018, p. 30).

Similarly, Nenrot's village symbolises economic prosperity. This is reenacted through the following enactment:

(It is a market. People are buying and selling as tradesmen and women go about their businesses. Everyone is a neighbour to the other, so it takes a while before business transactions are done but no one is in a hurry to leave. A few residents are seen in clusters around the market. Traders run in and out of these huts to get commodities for their customers. NENROT is in a corner cheerfully selling grilled suya to his customers) (Obafemi, 2018, p. 33).

These quick peeks by the author into the period prior to the era of ethnic conflict further reaffirm the ageless titular declaration of the African classic writer, Chinua Achebe, that indeed there was a country – a nation that exist before sinking deeper into the abysmal state due to the persistent internal rife and conflicts, weak leadership structure and unending corruption. Pamela Ajayi's poem lends further credence when she avers that the whole nation is now an "Echoes of what once was" and "Whispers of the way it should be" (Ajayi, 2005, lines 1-2).

Also, in what seems to be like an age-long conflict, Senator Panshuk, a Berom man, in a show of eye service promised a scholarship to a Fulani boy who he took from the Internally Displaced People (IDP) camp, only to end up treating the boy as a second-class citizen. A second-class citizen, not because of his gender nor is it because of his colour, but because of his ethnic affiliation. The boy is from the Fulani descendants while he (Senator Panshuk) has his ethnic affiliation with the Berom tribe. The conversation between the duos further reveals this:

PANSHUK: Will you shut up? I have told you countless times to stop loitering around my living room! What if I was coming with dignitaries? Is this how you would have embarrassed me? You this Fulani boy of no descent. I have had enough of you and your people; go and pack your rags at once! You will leave this house today! I have to start downsizing this house and it starts with you! (Obafemi, 2018, p. 23)

Thus, there couldn't have been a contrast of irony than this. In the face of the camera, Panshuk is described as a friendly and all-easy politician, but turns into a ravenous beast, highlighting clearly, the distinct lines between his supposed glorified tribes and other tribes whom he describes as "of no descent" (Obafemi, 2018, p. 23). It is also quite ironic that during elections, politicians embrace all and sundry in order to garner votes but change immediately after they have secured the bag.

Furthermore, the bandits – the true definition of the idle hand in the devil's workshop – all seem to have forgotten that we are all humans until religious and ethnic differences separated us. Fuelling the consistent attack in the region are the government's officials (the SENATORS), and the religious leaders (the ALHAJIs) who are keen on dominating, subjugating and annihilating descendants of other tribes. Thus, the violence thrives and blossoms even more. In what appears to be an ironic situation, the protector is the intruder, and the defender is the attacker. The following conversation plays out between them:



ALHAJI: And the most amazing was yesterday when you killed the Emir of Rakung. You see, these people are not meant to live, my friend. They have been trying to outsize our people in number which is very dangerous to the sustenance of our race here. Some of them are also a threat to our religion. The more reason to put them where they belong. (Obafemi, 2018, p. 35)

SENATOR: Good of you, boy. We are all proud of you. Those people have not had it all. The next set of operations must reach Vom, Kuru, Riyom, Rayfield and Shendam! Ermm ... please by 12 am tomorrow, be at the port, the ammunition will arrive. (Obafemi, 2018, p. 36)

Since the government, which should have been the last hope for the common man, has failed grossly in its responsibility to its citizenry, the menace of ethnic conflict has further dealt greatly, without any mercy at the citizens, gnawing, wrenching and leaving the untold graphical description of gory events, scenes and circumstances. A few of these pathetic and malfeasant situations that have become an eyesore are captured by the strokes of the wordsmith, Olu Obafemi.

Thus, using the conference convened by the villagers to find a lasting solution to the incessant killings, Obafemi uncovers the worsening situation through the horrific narratives shared by village heads at the conference.

SPEAKER 4: ... About three weeks ago, they went and destroyed one house in UngwanIshaku and they killed about three people. One Idoma man got his throat slashed and a girl of eighteen years was strangled and raped, while another teacher teaching at Excel School, was beheaded. The second day after that, they killed the elder brother of that Idoma man and it is these same strangers. As if that was not enough, they killed my neighbour and threw his body inside the well! In a well I say! (Obafemi, 2018, p. 39)

SPEAKER 7: Yes! That is not all; they went to his house and killed him, with his wife, children, daughters-in-law and grandchildren. I saw their bodies lying lifelessly in the sand. They went again to another house and killed about four people there. One Mr Roberts was killed with two of his tenants who were Civil Defence Corps officers living in his house. The assailants climbed the fence and entered the compound (Obafemi, 2018, p. 39).

SPEAKER 5: In Rayfield, the perpetrators kept claiming that they have captured the community, so no one can enter. They came in great numbers and attacked every visitor in the community before they drove away all the indigenes. We are tired! (Obafemi, 2018, p. 40).

WANG: I greet you, Aboki. Ina Kwana? ... I am sorry but I overheard you talking about the recent attack in Razat. I must say it has been one of the goriest events I have witnessed. I was on the farm that fateful day checking out the watermelon seeds I planted when they invaded the town. At first, all I heard were strange voices chattering in the faraway bushes, then I heard men screaming like babies and then I heard gunshots and faint groans as our brothers fell. They did not stop there. Before they shot them, they made sure that at least sensitive parts of the men's anatomy were brutally yanked off before they were gunned down! When I got to the scene, I saw a lifeless body of a man without his eyes and manhood. They removed them and placed them in his hands before shooting him through the skull (Obafemi, 2018, p. 16-17).

The above illustrations from the play point out – to a greater extent – the level of gory tales perpetrated by these men of perdition. The villages, highlighted above, represent the numerous villages in the Jos/Plateau that have been victims of lawlessness and chaos. Thousands of lives



were cut down at their primes. Properties worth millions of naira were torched by the raging bandits. Few orchestrated this violence, but in the words of John Pepper Clark, thousands are indeed burning that have no say in the matter. Without an iota of doubt, women are mostly the victims of these senseless killings and ethnic prejudices. They are always caught between the anvil and the hammer and the effect of this mostly results in displacement, rape, girl marriage, and unwanted pregnancies.

Unarguably, the question Obafemi asks no one, in particular, is this: “When will these people lay down their arms?” (Obafemi, 2018, p. 22). One would have thought the government would be at the frontline of resolving these intra and inter-communal clashes. But unfortunately, the government that should have championed the cause of resolving these conflicts has failed in its responsibility. The representatives elected by the people and demonstrated through the characters of Panshuk are not proactive enough in securing the lives and properties of its protectorates. They, themselves, cannot secure their own life; talk less about securing other people’s lives. In a manner that depicts a lack of concern, Panshuk, a Senator representing Barkin Ladi federal constituency, voices out by saying that “It is a sad case, really, but there is nothing I can do about it on my own. I have tried to convince the Legislative Assembly to speed up their intervention but it is all at a snail’s pace. They will have to be more patient.” (Obafemi, 2018, p. 49)

This makes one wonder why governmental intervention is at a slower pace during clashes that are claiming the lives of people, damaging properties worth millions of naira, turning children into orphans, wives into widows and able-bodied men as destitute whose sources of income have been destroyed as a result of the raging inferno of ethnic clashes. But they are always at a faster pace when it comes to embezzlement of public funds. This inability of the government to be responsible to the citizens made them (the citizens) put their absolute trust in God. While the placement of absolute trust is not a bizarre act, yet, it becomes bizarre when the responsibilities of the government are being turned over to God. To this end, the villagers admonish themselves not to “lose faith in Allah because... one day, very soon, He will hear our cry and wipe out these hoodlums from our villages” (Obafemi, 2018, p. 40).

However, the solution to the ethnic clashes is not spiritual. It is rather a physical approach than a spiritual one. The solution to the persistent and unending ethnic clashes is also not in another election as opined by Nenrot who, trying to capitalise on the frailty of the victims of the conflict to get elected into public office, says that,

NENROT: Now, what do we do at this point? Where do we go from here? My people now is the time to speak for ourselves! When the time comes to vote for that person who will represent our interests and not for his selfish gain but for the sake of our people, don’t stay in your houses. Come out in your numbers and vote. That is the only voice they will wait to hear from you. That is the only way to bring change. Vote against the suffering of our women and girls. And if you ask who will go for us? Who will stand for us and against them? Who will fight for our cause selflessly? **I will!** And if I fail to do so, recall me instantly. It is in your power. My people, now, where do we go from here? [Emphasis mine] (Obafemi, 2018, p. 50-51)

Though election plays a minor part to an extent in resolving ethnic conflict, yet, the issue of the ethnic conflict is beyond “state affairs” (Obafemi, 2018, p. 51). The playwright – using the character of Fa’izah – passes two distinct messages across to the audience. One, girls are a symbol of national hope and progress if properly invested. Using Fa’izah, Obafemi campaigns



indirectly for women's active participation in decision-making at various levels – family, community and nation. It is highly necessary for them to take part in the role of mediation since ethnic clashes and conflicts affect them the most.

Finally, the second message Obafemi uses the character of Fa'izah to pass across is that the solution to the persistent and unending clashes is for us to “cast the stone on which the foundations of ethnic and religious tolerance will stand” (Obafemi, 2018, p. 51). After all, Pravinee Hurburg once said, “We were all humans until race disconnected us, religion separated us, politics divided us and wealth classified us” (n.d, para. 1). Thus, we must set aside all weights of hatred and aspersions that easily weigh us down and strive with all our might to embrace unity, love and tolerance. Hence, hatred for one another should come to an end while humanity should triumph. Thus, at the end of the play, Fa'izah comes out to address the crowd:

FA'IZAH: ... (*She addresses the crowd. At this point, the assailants have appeared once more.*) My people, why do we kill ourselves? For the glory of it, or the satisfaction it gives? Come, my brothers, lay down your ammunitions, end your hatred for one another and let humanity triumph. Let us put a stop to hate speech and hate action. Whether Hausa or Fulani, Berom or Mupun, whether Muslim or Christian, we all remain connected by flesh and blood and endless family ties. I beseech you, let peace dwell once again in our lands. (*Suddenly, WANG steps forward and drops his ammunition and the other assailants do so too. The crowd surged to appreciate their surrender but the assailants hurriedly depart into thin air. Blackout.*) (Obafemi, 2018, p. 51).

CONCLUSION

This study, without an iota of doubt, lends credence to the fact that ethnic conflict poses a greater threat to the unity of the country. Evidently, the unabated conflict has claimed thousands of people's lives in the most brutal and gruesome ways one can ever imagine. It has rendered hundreds of thousands homeless. It has led to the massive destruction of individual properties and the vandalism of governmental assets. Furthermore, the negative effect of this crisis resonates deeper with the aged, women and children as they are always at the receiving end of the crisis. This leaves scars of traumatic experiences on the victims, mostly women and girl children, as they are most time raped, kept as sex slaves or sold as slaves to modern slave traders. In addition, the study also revealed that politicians and religious leaders frustrate the efforts in resolving ethnic conflict in order to achieve and sustain their personal interest of staying longer in the corridor of power or to dominate and subjugate other ethnic groups as the case might be. These set of people are the metaphorical drummers who lie in a nearby bush while their bird dances to the rhythm emanating from their drum by the roadside. They are the people who are “meant to rub the back but adorn their calloused palms with forbidden thorns and bastard weeds” (Obafemi, 2018, p. 6).

Finally, this study concludes that the government has failed in its responsibility of securing the lives and properties of its citizens. As Obafemi puts it, “They say the government will come. They did not show up till the whole community was razed” (2018, p. 33). Rather they have used the weapon of ethnic and religious differences to keep the ship of the progress of the country docked at bay for decades. Hence, the greater responsibility lies in the head of the



citizens in maintaining peace and progress, in paddling the ship of this nation over the turbulent water of ethnic hatred and prejudices to the shore of unity and progress. The citizens need to make the hard choice of casting aside all manners of ethnocentric attitudes and mindsets to embrace the challenges associated with building a nation with a full focus on understanding and breaking intolerance. To then end ethnic conflict in Nigeria, an effort must be made to create and foster an enabling environment which results in peace and stability and assured the security and well-being of the people

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