

Contextualizing Terror in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's "Terror Haiku Poems"

SAMSON OSARIEMEN EGUAVOEN & BEVERLY CHIMA ENYERIBE

Abstract

Psychological and postcolonial theories, the concepts of terror, horror, terrorism, and the principles of security studies serve as guide to how Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo contextualizes terror and assesses insecurity in Nigeria. Her Haiku poems which make up a subsection of her *Mixed Legacies* entitled "Terror Legacy: Terror Haiku Poems," form the primary text of this literary research. This paper exposes the link that subsists between post-independence disillusionment, poverty, greed, religious fanaticism, and illiteracy, on the one side and terror, terrorism, and insecurity on the other side. The reading of Adimora-Ezeigbo's Haiku poems on this subject-matter reveals the dynamics of terror in Nigeria and its effects on the psyche of Nigerian citizens. The research reveals that the goal of the poet in the depiction of terror in her poetry is not only to historicize and poeticize the events of terror, but to create an atmosphere for psychological healing. Through the different Haiku poems, she contextualizes terror and reflects its boundaries. The research concludes that Adimora-Ezeigbo's poetry and "Terror Legacy: Terror Haiku Poems" in particular, psychoanalyzes security situation in post-colonial Nigeria, for the therapeutic purpose of helping Nigerians suffering in silence to locate or create a vent to let out the steam of fear locked up inside them. Her choice of the haiku form as a vehicle for the contextualizing of terror and poetic catharsis is borne out of the aptness and concreteness of this form of Japanese poetry.

Keyword: Haiku, Insecurity, Terror, Terrorism, Psychological healing

Introduction

Nigeria's situation is very significant in contextualizing terror in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's poetry. However, terror is not new to Nigeria, but its spate increased since 2009 when the Boko Haram group launched its first attack in the Northeast geopolitical zone of the country. Adimora-Ezeigbo reflects her experience and the experience of other Nigerians to contextualize terror in her "Terror Haiku Poems," a section of her collection of poetry entitled *Mixed Legacies*.

Terror suggests that "one is intimately threatened within and without, with no

safe space at hand" (David Simpson, xi). It is also a state of mind or feeling, with a relation to external forces that are always to be specified and a pointer to internal emotions that are always open to alternative namings. All terror is some or other state of terror, in place and time. This being so, there is no such 'thing' as terror (Simpson p. xvi). Simpson's observations above are very relevant to the perspective from which we view terror in this study. He pursues the subject further when he adds- "Terror could, and perhaps should, also be used as a word describing what many women and children feel in the face of male violence, including sexual violence" (Simpson, x). Terror translates to terrorism when it becomes organized and is directed towards a select group.

Paul Wilkinson expands on this and observes that terrorism is premeditated and designed to create a climate of extreme fear and "extra-normal" (1). Wilkinson also draws attention to terrorism's definition by the United Nations Security Council as quoted below:

Criminal acts, including [those] against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism, are under no circumstances justifiable by considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar nature. (UNSC Resolution 1566).

Acts of terrorism are mostly suffered by innocent members of the community. Adimora-Ezeigbo gives an overview of terrorism when she observes that "the rise of terrorism in the 21st century has worsened the security situation globally, for there is hardly any part of the world today that is immune to the attacks of terrorist" (20). She equates terrorism with insecurity, as she narrows its effect to her home country, as she adjudges that "terrorism appears to be the most vicious and disruptive form of insecurity not only in the world but also in Nigeria" (20). From Adimora-Ezeigbo's observations above, it is logical to note that terror and terrorism are security concerns. As security concerns, all members of the society must be actively involved in rebuffing terror and terrorism. David Simpson proposes that "terrorism is comfortably established in the common idiom as a designated evil that must be aggressively countered" (Preface).

Security is seen in relation to complementary, parallel, and oppositional concepts. Security is a contested concept. Security is not only a contested

concept, but it is also about contested values (Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer, 2). The paraphrased researchers note further that security is a condition and "because it is a condition, it is imbued with values and emotions. (2)

Security, in an objective sense, means the absence of threat to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked (Arnold Wolfers, 485). Security is related to a threat to a given object of protection and it is most often linked to a threat to survival (Cavelty and Mauer). Security is also connected to existential issues which legitimize emergency response(s) (Cavelty and Mauer). It means the absence of threats and is related to emancipation. Emancipation is the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do... Security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin. Emancipation, not power nor order, produces true security. Emancipation, theoretically, is security (Ken Booth, 319 as quoted in David Mutimer).

Security is not guaranteed in any society. There is one form of threat to security or the other in every society. When there is a threat to security, insecurity arises. Insecurity drives the creation of poetry and other literary genres and forms. As is noted in the quotation below:

There is one form or another of insecurity that drives the direction of creative writing and literature. This is because literature is a response, individual or collective, to the state of things of the writer's place and time. There is no escape from insecurity in human existence or the world's history. There are civil conflicts, wars, military or civilian dictatorship or authoritarianism, religious or cultural extremism, social malaise, crimes such as armed robbery and kidnapping ... and many other forms of insecurity. (Tanure Ojaide, 2)

Terror is discussed in this paper as the psychological and sociological feedback from neocolonialism, which is mostly discussed under the theory of postcolonialism. Achille Mbembe's strand of postcolonialism is significant in this paper's exploration of terror and insecurity, as reflected in Adimora-Ezeigbo's "Terror Haiku Poems."

Mbembe explores postcolonialism from the perspective of the banality of power. He states that the banality of power does not simply refer to the way bureaucratic formalities or arbitrary rules, implicit or explicit, have been multiplied. He also states that he is not simply concerned with what has become routine-though certainly "banality" implies the predictability of routine, if only because routine is made up of repeated daily actions and gestures. He notes that his reference is to those

elements of the obscene and the grotesque that Mikhail Bakhtin claims to have located in "non-official" cultures, but that, in fact, are intrinsic to all systems of domination and to the means by which those systems are confirmed or deconstructed. Terror is grotesque. It is driven by violence.

Mbembe defines the notion of "postcolony" as identifying a specific given historical trajectory, especially that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization and the violence which the colonial relationship involves. He mentions that he is concerned with the ways state power (1) creates its own world of meanings—a master code that governs paradoxically, the logics that underlie all other meanings within that society; (2) attempts to institutionalize this world of meanings as a "socio-historical world" making the world real, turning it into a part of people's "common sense" not only by instilling it in the minds of the *cibles*, or "target population," but also by integrating it into the period's consciousness. His basic argument is the need to go beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination, such as resistance versus passivity, autonomy versus subjection, state versus civil society, hegemony versus counter-hegemony, to account for both the mind-set and the effectiveness of postcolonial relations of power.

Using examples from Cameroon, he demonstrates how the grotesque and the obscene are two essential characteristics that identify postcolonial regimes of domination. He identifies with Bakhtin's claims that the grotesque and the obscene are, above all, the province of ordinary people (*la plebe*). He maintains that as a means of resistance to the dominant culture, and as a refuge from it, obscenity and the grotesque are parodies that undermine officialdom, showing how arbitrary and vulnerable officialdom is and by turning it all into an object of ridicule.

Mbembe's 'banality of power' reflects on the loss of power due to the overuse of it. When state authority overuses power, the subjects towards whom this excessive use of power is directed begin to look for ways to rebuff power and stay sane. In postcolonial Africa, a set of persons have resorted to terror and violence as tools and instruments for rebuffing power. The people created a new set of codes to interpret the activities of those in power. The essence of these new codes is to serve as disguise for the attack of ruthlessness in government. The reaction to ruthless power, when not properly channeled, results in violence and births terror.

Mbembe concludes that the forces of tyranny in Africa must be studied within the confines of how power, in its own violent quest for grandeur, makes vulgarity and wrongdoing its main mode of existence. He adds that such research must go beyond institutions, beyond formal positions of power, and beyond the written rules,

examining how the implicit and explicit are interwoven, and how the practices of those who command and those who are assumed to obey are so entangled as to render both powerless. For, it is precisely the situations of powerlessness that are the situations of violence par excellence. Mbembe's 'banality of power' is a reflection of the notion of postcolonial Africa, as exemplary of a "collapsed society." This collapsed society is the home of violence and insecurity. Terror is prominent in such a society.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, as a poet, is concerned about the society, especially her immediate one, Nigeria. This concern has been noticed by critical reviewers of her poetry. Olawale TajuAjayi, one of the critics whose attention has been drawn to her poetry, considers her a poet whose caustic eyes capture the very essence of the Nigerian inanity. Looking at Her *Dancing Masks*, he adjudges that she legitimately recommends herself as a poet that cannot be ignored in the criticism and evaluation of modern Nigerian poetry. C. C. Chukwueloka critically observes that Adimora-Ezeigbo's poetry serves as a weapon for social criticism and reformation, in the quest to free and purge the society of certain forms of vices and evils which militate against its peace and highly expected progress. However, Lucky Josiah Nte notes that her poetry explores things bothering on humanity and the society from a variety of periscopes or perspectives.

Of her latest poetry collection, *Mixed Legacies*, which is the primary text for this paper, Patrick Oloko observes that the poet "has focused her lens on fields of experience common to all readers" (Back cover, *Mixed Legacies*). On this same collection, Celestine Okafor notes that "Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is still concerned about the socio cultural conditions of her environment ...She remains abhorrent of society's violence, bloodletting, brutality, and corruption" (back cover, *Mixed Legacies*).

The poet herself notes that: "writers have continued to imaginatively recreate insecurity in different forms with a view to exposing it and hopefully eliminating it from the country's social space" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 25). Terror and insecurity are reflected in poetry through violence. Terror reflects the "collapsed" nature of the society. Adimora-Ezeigbo reflects terror in her terror haiku poems by presenting to the reader scenes of violence and signs of insecurity. These scenes are scenes of horror to the readers, but to those who experienced them as primary audience, they are scenes of terror. The fact that the experiences relayed in the poems reveals the security threat citizens of the nation are exposed to. Terror, as a security concern, is driven by violence. The different types of violence that are identifiable in the selected poems are: sexual violence, security/force violence, criminal violence, violence of

insurgency, and political violence.

Contextualizing Terror in Adimora-Ezeigbo's Haiku Poems

Akachi Adirnora-Ezeigbo writes poetry, based on her experience as a member of a society plagued by the presence of terror manifesting in stories of horror in the media; threats to security in her immediate neighborhood; fear of unknown attacks on friends, family, or self by either unidentifiable but known or identifiable but unknown characters. This psychological disposition motivates her definition of terror as a monster that multiplies in Haiku poem 48 thus:

Terror multiplies
Comes gaily in various shapes
Carnivorous ogres

From the perspective of the poem above, not only does terror multiply, it is gay and has no particular shape. The poem identifies terror as a monster that feeds on living flesh. The poet attempts to further define terror by presenting specific effects of it in the society. She portrays the nature of a society with insecurity issues that arise out of terror in haiku poem 46, which is quoted below:

Neighbourhood crime watch
Four little boys and their mums
Walk to school guarded

As a result of the insecurity and terror in the society, some persons have to make arrangement for their security and that of their immediate family members, by employing the services of security guards. The situation reflected in the above poem has become very necessary, judging by reported incidents of children abduction by unknown gun men in our schools, especially the cases of the Dapchi girls and the Kankara boys. The poet drives home her definition of terror as she contextualizes and narrows the terrorized society to Nigeria. The persona in haiku 49 points this out:

More rounds of killings
Bodies lay like dead branches.
Keep Nigeria one!

A nation where terror thrives without control is a fallen one; this insecure society is the focus of haiku poems 34, 35, and 43.

34
You, Giant in the sun
Cuckolded by your own sons-
Mating your women.

35
 Bumblebee country
 Noisemaker of Africa
 You gobble your kind.

43
 The men, castrated;
 Women mourn their impotence
 Spirit off ear descends.

The poems quoted above aptly and sadly reflect the security state of Nigeria as a nation. This state raises concern for all members of the society, both those at home and those in diaspora. Terror is contextualized in Adimora-Ezeigbo's poetry as she explores different identifiable sources of terror in Nigeria.

Police Brutality as a Source of Terror

One of the forms of terror present in Nigeria is the one created, caused, and exacerbated by police brutality. On this, the poet notes:

Undoubtedly, there are honest and hardworking men and women in Nigeria Police Force, but the immoral and violent activities of many among them have given the police a bad name, and in a way have tarnished the image of the government as well as rubbished the much publicized fight against corruption, a cardinal point in every government's claim to legitimacy. (viii)

The poet depicts her feelings about police brutality and other police-related-terror-causing behaviour in haiku poems 54 and 52. In haiku 54, she looks at it from the perspective of random shooting ascribed to accidental discharge as quoted below:

Police brutality,
 In the eye of raging storm.
 Trigger-happy men saunter in.

She also looks at police brutality and terror from the perspective of extortion of money from road-users, as is the focus of haiku poem 52 quoted thus:

The gallant police march-
 Tramp! Tramp! Trained for extortion
 Highway daylight thieves.

She is pushed by the psychological import of their behavior to question what their

character really portends, in haiku poem 50 thus:

Are you crime fighters?
Or members of the underworld?
Men in black uniform.

The excesses of the Nigeria police cannot be forgotten in a hurry, following the very recent "End SARS" protest and its aftermath.

Bad Leadership as a Source of Terror

The second form of terror the poet unveils is the one created by those in position of power or government officials or the leaders of the people. The poet describes this terror from the perspective of how these people act and what the people have begun to view them as. Examples are captured in haiku poems 57, 26, and 28:

Media watchdog groans
That uppercut from the tyrant
Worse than dagger thrust
26
Bloodstains on your hands,
Thousands you mislead. Others
totter on life's edge.

28
Your name: Backwardness
Your identity: Tyrant
Giant with clay feet

The perspectives reflected above are from the media, writers, and the people who suffer under the weight of oppression and insecurity. The poems describe the people's representative in power as a "tyrant". Haiku poem 2 reflects on games the leaders play to justify their action. This poem is quoted below:

Your blame game goes on,
unrelenting, unending
action is stillborn.

The consequences of the failure of these representatives of the people are told in haiku poem 3:

Watch out, that whirlwind
you unleashed on your people
will sweep you first.

The persona issues a warning to these leaders of the people to avert direr consequences in haiku poem 9:

Restructure in peace
or cause conflagration,
and reap a bloodbath.

The call for restructuring the way government is run has become more pressing in this time or season of violence and insecurity, than in any other time in the nation's history.

Criminal Activities as Source of Terror

The third form of terror is the one driven into the very core of the weak and unprotected in the society, by criminals and insurgent groups. This terror like every other form identified in this study is a reflection of the failure of leadership at all tiers of government. Ritual killing as a form of criminal activity that creates terror is the focus of haiku poem 15:

Poachers of organs
Evil merchants of human flesh
Your cup of blood fills

The activities of kidnappers and assassins form the focus of haiku poems 16 and 17:

16
Kidnappers, beware-
The grave digger does hide
His act from the corpse.

17
Agoon came, calling
That dark, still night of sorrow
And left with your life.

Haiku poem 16 warns the kidnappers of the coming to people's knowledge of the secret acts. This warning indirectly tells them that there are inescapable consequences for their acts of terror. Haiku poem 17 is the reflection of one affected by the assassins' terror. The tone of the poem reflects the pains of this close relative or friend of the assassinated.

The activities of members of secret cults and the terror they spread is the focus of haiku poem 56:

Gathering of wild birds
Of prey in secret places
Bloodbath in bondage.

The poet represents these terror-causing individuals with symbols of doom and evil in order to explain to the reader the traumatizing effects of their activities. Moreover, the "bloodbath" associated with members of the secret cults, has become a part of the descriptive qualities of herdsmen whose activities form the focus of haiku poems 1 and 51:

1
Herding sacred cows,
Raping devalued women
Killing men like goats.

51
Killing days are here
Mourning times capture our gaze
The elegance of cows.

The herdsmen who are supposed to be shepherds, who care, have become terrorists and criminals who maim and destroy.

Extremism as Source of Terror

Religion is supposed to bind the people together and help them to be temperate and accommodating, but because of the failure of leadership and the greed for power in our society, religion has been turned into a tool for the brain-washing of the vulnerable, and turning them against the innocent. The activities of insurgents, like the Boko Haram, are the focus of haiku poems 10, 12, 19, 32, 53:

10
Three on a mission
To maim, destroy and slaughter;
Virgins their reward.

12
You who kill for faith
Darkness and light have no link
Evil hawks bear you away.

19
Deadly Boko Haram
Today's koboko
End-time scourge begins!

32
A village once full
Yawns empty, forlorn, confused.
In grief the trees wave.

53
There is only one head
Decapitators play God,
The sword awaits its wielder.

Nigeria is not the only country in the world that suffers under the weight of extremist terrorist groups. This form of terrorism is an international nightmare. Haiku poem 24 presents a typical example of this form of terrorism in Syria:

24
A state bleeds to death
Extremist groups storm Syria
Women, children die.

Gender Based Violence as Source of Terror

Sexual violence is another form of terror that comes under focus in Adimora-Ezeigbo's Terror Haiku poems. Haiku poems 47, 45, 13, 18, 20, 23, and 29 are concerned with terror perpetuated by men against women. This form of terror can take the shape of battery, assault both physical and mental or emotional, that leaves women scared and terrorised:

47
Then she arrived, scared
Brutality your name: Man
One year is enough.

45
Frame broken by toils,
Mind mangled by brutal acts
In this era of woes.

13
Raped at age thirteen
My bruised thighs lathered crimson
My mind a ghost trapped

18
Our lives aren't for sale
Though millions are poised to buy
From the greed market

20
Myvirginity-
Gone with the wind of passion
As your pound of flesh.

23
Words cut deep, drew blood:
"You are only a woman
Fit for the other room."

29
Anew set taken
Maidens devoured by brutes of
Ademented faith

Women suffer terror, based on how the society views their gender. The acts of terror are carried out by men as husband, boyfriend, colleague, father, armed robber, kidnapper, herdsman, religious extremist, political thug, or business-owner/advertiser/marketer. Whatever office men head, some of them use their position to oppress, terrorise and perpetuate violence against women. Some women also perpetuate violence against their fellow women, directly or indirectly. In haiku poem 41, the poet focuses on the position of fellow women on sexual terror. She adjudges such disposition as that of a slave:

Slave mentality
You hail your cruel oppressors
Who deflower your girls.

Responding to Terror

The poet proposes the kind of response that is adequate in the situation of terror,

especially sexual ones, as shown in haiku poems 59 and 42 thus:

59

Women, stamp your feet
On reddened earth and cry out:
"Our mumu don do!"

42

Women of our land
Adjust your wrappers, pull them tight
Your hearth blooms with ashes.

This response that is required of the women by the poet, should be adopted by all members of the society, both by those directly and indirectly affected by the activities of those who spread terror.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Adimora-Ezeigbo's poetry is activist and therapeutic. This paper has looked at how she explores the subject of insecurity and terror for this end. In the context of her "Terror Legacy: Terror Haiku Poems," terror is a carnivorous ogre (a mythical monster or beast in children's fables that eats up people) with different shapes that multiply. The research concludes that her poetry and "Terror Legacy: Terror Haiku Poems" in particular, psychoanalyzes the security situation in post-colonial Nigeria for the therapeutic purpose of helping Nigerians suffering in silence, to locate or create a vent to let out the steam of fear mentally locked up inside them. Her choice of the haiku form as a vehicle for the contextualizing of terror and achieving a poetic catharsis is borne out of the aptness and concreteness of this form of Japanese poetry.

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