

**COMMUNAL CONFLICT: A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY**

**AS EXEMPLIFIED IN TWO OF ONYEKAQNWX' S DRAMATIC WORKS *NWATA RIE*  
*AWQ* AND *XWA NTQQQ*.**

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**ABSTRACT**

*For decades, nations, states as well as communities world wide have had to grapple with the prevalent phenomenon of communal conflicts or crisis which have plagued humanity. This bizarre situation and inhumanity of man against his fellow man inflicts alarming and severe consequences on the victims. This paper ex – rays communal conflict as a threat to national security causes and effects of the conflicts, using two of OnyekaqnwX's dramatic works *Nwata Rie Awq* and *Xwa Ntqqq* as examples.*

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Conflict as a concept has been defined by many scholars according to their levels of understanding. Mbagwu (2002:102) defines conflict as “a situation of incompatibility between people which must be addressed honestly from the root”. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10<sup>th</sup> Edition) defines conflict as “fight, battle, war, a competitive or opposing action or irreconcilability. From the above two definitions, one will say that conflict implies a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings and wishes. For a long period of time, nations of the world had to contend with the unprecedented and massive conflict occurrence, Nigeria inclusive.

The after effects of these conflicts have been colossal destruction of human lives and resources with dire consequences on security and national development. Ikenga (2006:218) asserts that conflict has been a scourge on humanity from the earliest times. The contemporary world, following its older counterparts has witnessed not a few intra and inter communal conflicts which have resulted in massive loss of lives and properties, displacement of people, large turn out of refugees and general destabilization of human beings and insecurity. For instance, there were and are upheavals in many countries of

the world. In Nigeria alone, there are conflicts in the Niger Delta region, recurrent Benue–Taraba conflict, the Zangon–Kataf conflict, the metropolitan unrest in Jos, the Aguleri–Umuleri conflict in Anambra state and a host of others. The consequences of these crisis on humanity are enormous.

Literature is a piece of writing which deals with the peoples' lives and is influenced by time and space and even temperament. It is expressed via the three genres of literature namely: prose, poetry and drama. As a literary writer does not write in a vacuum, he writes of what is obtainable in the society and communal conflict is one of them. These conflicts can be between families, kindreds, villages, and communities.

All the genres of literature can deal with communal conflict, but the genre that brings it to mind most vividly is the dramatic genre. This is because of the dramatic mode of expression which makes people feel the impact of these conflicts more. This brings us to asking what drama is.

According to Dow (1966), "Drama is the art of expressing ideas about life so that they may be interpreted by actors before an audience assembled to hear words and witness actions". As witnesses of communal conflicts and their negative effects, this paper tries to analyze how dramatic literature is used to showcase communal conflicts and their security hazards using two of Onyekagwax's dramatic works. The paramount objective of this paper is to showcase causes and effects of communal conflict as observed in *Nwata Rie Awq* and *Xwa Ntqqq* which are dramatic works of literature.

### **1.1 A Short Historical Background of the Study**

Nigeria is one of the complex societies where a "dilution" or even a "crack-up" in the next decade and half is to be expected. This is expected due to incessant ethnic and religious conflicts and violence going on. The frequent mayhem and carnage periodically unleashed by religious groups, ethnic and community groups call for concern. The unabating phenomenon of communal and ethnic conflicts dates back to the olden times. It became more aggravated during the "structural problem of nationhood that bedeviled Nigeria". This period of time as Olaniyi (2007: 56 – 57) rightly captures, predates 1914 and stretches to date.

Since then, an inexhaustible range of conflicts have dominated the nation's scenario. There was the Maitatsine uprising in Kano in 1980. One of the most glaring as cited earlier is the Niger-Delta revolt which erupted sometime in the early 2000s. The intractable and desperate upheavals are deeply rooted in socio- economic factors. There has been series of conflicts and violence in Northern Nigeria for the past 30 years. This is mainly in the urban areas in form of urban riots. It has pitted Moslems against Christians as well as confrontations between Islamic sects. There has been land dispute somewhere in Kaduna state – the Zangon – kataf communal conflict in Southern part of Kaduna State recorded in May, 1992. It is also of note that there is the Tarok – Hausa Fulani conflict and the Jos metropolitan unrest which occurred in Wase Local Government Area of Plateau State between 2002 and 2004. There is also the Jos municipality conflict.

Across the Benue–Taraba axis, there is the perennial inter ethnic Tiv–Jukun conflict in Wukari. Mention must also be made of the communal clashes between the Ife and the Modakeke in Oyo state. The feuds between the two ethnic groups is traced by Albert (1999; 145) and Peters (2003; 155) in Alueigba (2008) to have centered around settler – migrating and illegitimate land occupation. Last in our list of chosen instances of communal conflicts in Nigeria to be touched is the Aguleri-Umuleri communal clashes and out burst in Anambra State of Nigeria. As Eke (1992; 2) and Ibeanu (2003; 192) submit, “The dispute between the two communities is both homogenously and genealogically motivated. The conflict is an intra-ethnic antagonism between sub-ethnic factions that belong to the same homogenous Igbo ethnic group, the same state and even the same Local Government Area (Anambra East). The communal conflict which we have illustrated in this work is a micrococcus of the many intra and inter-ethnic and communal conflicts in Nigeria. The country has to contend with this over a long period of time. We cannot exhaustively capture the entire scenario of the conflict situations in Nigeria for want of time and space.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

Community is one of the regular features of African societies. The issue of community has become the most viable factor which explains the social reality of post-colonial Africa (Eke, 1975). For the fact that different communities exist, there also exist communal conflict as a result of differences in opinions.

The term “communal conflict” embraces both inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflict. It may also include inter-village clashes where narrow identities define the parties. According to Chabal and Daloz (1999), the inter-communal conflict may turn to violence resulting to what may be termed “communal genocidal wars”. He says that such may erupt over land and other matters of purely local nature. We have such in Nigeria like the conflict between the Aguleri-umuleri communal conflicts in Anambra State. Ikeazor (1996) contributing opines that communal consciousness amongst people can be found in many communities in varying degrees. He contends that it can be divisive and of parochial form. He further states that these undesirable forms of consciousness have particularly in their unfettered forms, plunged many communities into quagmires of blood-letting strife and instability.

Osaghe (1993) on his own part says that communal conflict are either *jaw-jaw* (war of words) or *war war*. It begins from the point of single disagreement to a point of where open violence becomes inevitable. This in turn perpetuate hostile environment if it is continuous. Osaghe continuing says that communal conflict can be classified in a number of ways. There may be distinction between **public realm community** which involves conflicts related to the determination of who gets what, when and how and **private realm community** that may not invite state intervention. What we have in Africa is public realm community. Osaghe went on to say that communal conflicts are not always violent. More usual or “normal” conflicts are non-violent and occur as part of normal life. He says that in most cases, they are underground or latent and may not be obvious to the observer. Non-violent communal conflict he observes can be referred to as civil communal conflict.

Chazan et al (1999) contends that communal conflict can take the form of competitive party politics, judicial redress, media protests and in some cases peaceful demonstrations. The last example is the case in one of the text of study by Onyekagwax. In the text *Nwata rie awq*, Obiqma’s people went on a peaceful demonstration to the market square of Awqrq’s town. They did this to let the people of Amangwu (Awqrq’s town) know that they are aware of what they did to their daughter and her child.

In the last few decades or nearly half of a century, African societies have been going through difficult times of communal conflicts, antagonism and violence (Horowitz, 1985). He further states that the weak boundary structure, endemic poverty, winner-takes-all philosophy, insufficient land among others propel inter-communal rivalry. The general

attitude of the political elites reinforces the inter-communal hatred that is experienced in Africa, Nigeria inclusive. All these generate communal conflict.

### **3.0 Causes of Communal Conflicts**

Divergent interests, feeling and values may limit consensus and mutual cooperation among members of different ethnic groups.

Conflicts may be triggered off by ethnic, racial, religious or economic differences in values, beliefs and attitudes regarding issues. Again, conflicts may arise as a result of threats or disputes over territory, whether the boundaries of the territory are physical, social or work boundaries. Judging from the illustrations above, most of the issues which have instigated communal conflicts in Nigeria are predicated on land, indigene, settler and or aboriginal and migratory status of the inhabitants. Nigeria so to say is an agrarian country and as such there is the quest for land. This is for farming purposes and residential purposes by certain groups of people which has constantly occasioned unhealthy and coarse rivalry between communities over ownership. This circumstance is typical of the Zangon-Kataf, Tarok-Hausa-Fulani, Tiv-Jukun, Jos metropolis unrest, Ife-Modakeke and Aguleri-Umuleri conflicts just to mention but a few.

Finally, persistent and pervasive level of poverty and ignorance also contribute immensely to ethnic conflict in Nigeria. It is against this background that Onugu in Daniel (2005) in his editorial analysis identifies seven cardinal factors that are responsible for series of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria thus:

- (i) Land and space resources available, claims about the original owner.
- (ii) Disposed jurisdiction between traditional rulers and some ethnic groups reject hegemony of a traditional ruler or chief.
- (iii) Creation of new local government headquarters.
- (iv) Individual sectional competition over access to scarce political and economic resources.
- (v) The composition of Nigeria as a macro and micro social entity with conflicting cultural and other value systems.
- (vi) Population growth and expansion.
- (vii) Lack of regards for cultural and religious symbols and pollutant of cultural practices.

Despite the above mentioned factors, literary works like drama has a hand in bringing to limelight these conflicts as well as their causes and effects. Also worthy of note is the threat to security by the reenactment of these happenings. This is to make the society aware that these phenomena are not new. They started in the past in form of specks from which they graduated to the enormity that we have today. Killing with matches and bringing home few heads was the order of the day in communal wars in the past. But today, sophisticated weapons have made death toll to rise to hundreds and thousands in seconds in communal wars arising from communal conflicts.

#### **4.0 Drama a Means of Portrayal of Communal Conflict as shown in the Texts:**

##### ***Nwata Rie Awq and Xwa Ntqgq***

For proper understanding of this work, it is pertinent that we define drama and it's mode of expression. Drama is something one goes to see which is being arranged and presented as a spectacle" In his own contribution, Nwadike (1992:32) defines drama as, "Imitating human beings and nature shown in all one is doing" Ekwealor (2009:30) contributing explains drama as "One placing oneself in some other person's position or other things to imitate what that person did before" Drama is quite different from the other genres of literature because of it's mode of expression. The mode of expression involves body movement and speech by actors involved in the production to express their minds and for learning. There is no aspect of human life and existence that cannot be dramatized be it favorable or offensive. The reenactment of these life experiences are geared towards enlightening the society as well as serve as a means of encouragement or deterrent.

Communal conflict arises between two distinct communities over something like trespassing on land, land ownership, stream ownership, first settlers issue, killing a member of either communities involved, kidnap and other vices. Drama portrays communal conflict when characters playact these conflicts for the society to see. The purpose is to bring to life the actions involved in the conflicts through their actions. Drama gives the actors the chance for individual expression and participation in the conflicts to bring the causes and effects on the society home to the populace and the threats to security. In the text *Nwata Rie Awq*, Awqrq the male protagonist schemes and sprinkles poisonous substance in the food Obiqma his wife served him. Awqrq did this just to frame Obiqma up as wanting to kill him. The frame-up results in Obiqma being

sent home. This leads to reactions and counter reactions that give birth to inter communal conflict. Two communities, Amangwu (Awqrq' s community) and Isiama (Obiqmas' s community) now have communal conflict. The people of Isiama found out that it is Awqrq and his people who abducted Obiqma and her child and sold them into slavery and they staged a peaceful demonstration to show their grievance. They called on their god to go for revenge on their behalf. When they were invited for the alleged crime committed by their daughter, they demanded for justice by asking Amangwu people to allow their daughter swear an oath to prove her innocence but they were denied this request. Onyekaonwu puts it this way:

Okwukqgx: Bikonx nd[ qgq m ka m tinye okwu a qnx. Mgbe m  
B[aruru nx ihe e kworo kpq m, akpqqla m ada m  
Nwaany[ jxcha ya elu jxq ya ala maka okwu a. Q  
S[ m na aka ya na ihe ad[gh[ ya. N'ih nke a, q ga -  
asq m ma xnx bute iyi ka q lxqrq xnx (NRA.56).

(Please, my in-laws, let me contribute on this issue.

When I came and heard the reason why  
I have been summoned, I called and have  
thoroughly questioned my daughter on the issue,  
she told me that her hands are clean. Because of  
this, I will prefer her swearing an oath for you).

Obidike: Qgq m nwoke, i kwuru nke qma kama ihe d[ ya  
(d[ka iwu obodo any[ siri d[) bx na q lxgodu iyi  
q lxgh[ iyi, a ga-achxpxr[r[ ya n'obodo a (NRA. 56)

(My in-laws, you have spoken well. But the thing is  
(as the law of our land demands) even if she swears  
an oath or not, she must be ostracized).

In the text *Xwa Ntqgq*, there is intra-communal conflict. Intra-communal conflict is a conflict between groups within the same community. In one of the texts *Xwa Ntqgq* under study, the paramount cause of the intra-communal conflict between Ebubedike's people and Agameevu from **JMEL September 2014. All Rights Reserved. 23**

another village of the same town is the murder of Ebubedike. Agameevu just to marry Qnxkwube, Ebubedike's wife who they thought dead because he did not come back from the communal war between Isungodo and Umuagada on time murdered Ebubedike. But before this murder, Ebubedike's funeral ceremony was going on when he suddenly entered his compound. There was jubilation by his people but Agameevu felt that his coming back will spoil his plan of marrying his wife Qnxkwube. He then vowed to kill Ebubedike and he did. Onyekaqnw puts it this way:

Agameevu: ...Qnxkwube m kpachaarala n'obi m ka m  
ga - esi gaa lxghara ... Aga m emeriri ihe m  
zuwere ... Ebubedike, I ga - azar[r[ qnw  
oku... I ga - anwxr[r[ nke taa, nke echi  
(UN. 8 -9).

(... Qnxkwube whom I have planned how to  
marry ...I must fulfill my desire ... Ebubedike  
you must answer death's call ... you must  
die immediately).

Agameevu carried out his wish by poisoning Ebubedike to death. He did this on the day of Ebubedike's son's naming ceremony. Incidentally, it is also the day for cleansing the land for the abomination of having his burial ceremony while he is still alive. When Ebubedike's kinsmen found out that it is Agameevu who murdered Ebubedike, there is conflict. They decided to go for revenge when Oguamalam finished narrating his ordeal with Agameevu. Onyekaqnw showcases Ebubedike's peoples' plan thus:

Ekwegbara: Xmxnna, xnx ahxlanx  
G[n[ bx echiche xnx n'okwu a?

(Kinsmen, you have seen.  
What is your opinion about this matter)

Anaetoo: ...ohoo, ya bx na kemukemu ahx a  
nxburu na q d[kwanx ka Agameevu q  
maara anya ihe mere Ebubedike  
abrxrla eziokwu? Ya bx qkxkq mmanya  
na-egbu ezutelanx ufu na-aw[ ara.  
Agameevu ga-ewetar[r[ ihe q tqgbqrq  
n'ogbe Xmxinwere a. Q ga-ahx.

(...ohoo, so the wisps we heard before that it seems  
Agameevu knows what happened to Ebubedike is now  
confirmed. But a fowl that is drunk has met with a mad  
fox. Agameevu must collect what he kept in this  
Xmxinwere village. He will see)

Agbarakwe: Nke ka nke bx ihe riri xtara  
[gaakwa rachakpqq ofe nri.  
A na-ekwu na oke tagburu nwa mmadx  
Ngwere ach[r[ ego gaa ap[meze  
A na-ekwu na Agameevu tara isi  
Ebubedike  
Q gaakwa kpqrq nwunye ya lxwa...  
Any[ ga-eje qbq  
A gxpx ije qbq, s[ gxpx m.

(The worst thing is that what ate foofoo is going to lick the  
soup.

We are saying that rat killed a man

Lizard collects money to go and file his teeth

We are saying that Agameevu killed Ebubedike, he went and  
married his wife...

We will go for revenge

If there is no revenge, count me out)

Qha mmadx: Any[ ga-eje qbq  
Agameevu kpxrx agagh[ n'ite

(We will go for revenge  
Agameevu has bitten more than he  
could chew)

Xkpaka: Xmxnna, echegh[ m  
Na okwu a rijuru afq  
S[ gxppta okorob[a ise  
Aka kara aka, tinyere mx onwe m  
Uchichi taa, na r[qmr[qm abal[  
Any[ ga-eje tqrq nwa anxqh[a gbufuo  
(pp 43 - 44)

Kinsmen, I don' think  
That this is a serious issue  
Let's select five able bodied young men  
Including myself who are strong  
Today, in the middle of the night,  
We will go, kidnap the stupid man and kill him.

Ebubedike's kinsmen swore never to let their secret plan be revealed. One of them Inweregbu told Agameevu their plan and advised him as a friend to run for his life. After revealing their secret plan to Agameevu who ran for his life, Inweregbu dropped dead after taking two steps.

Agameevu's action of murdering Ebubedike and marrying his wife brought intra-communal conflict between the two communities. Through this drama, the society is made to understand how some of the communal wars occur in the past and present, what causes them and the effects they have on the security of communities in particular and the nation at large because they are reenacted by life actors.

#### **4.1 Effects of Communal Conflicts in Communities and the Nation**

Not all conflict is bad and not all cooperation is good (Robinson, 1972). People tend to view conflict as a negative force operating against successful competition of community and national goals. Conflict can be harmful to a community and or nation but may also serve some potentially positive functions depending upon the type of groups within which it occurs and among communities and or nations between which it occurs. In other words, we have negative and positive effects of communal conflicts.

Positively, communal conflict can improve the quality of decisions, stimulating involvement in the discussion and building cohesion. It can define and sharpen issues. As sides form on an issue, arguments and positions are clarified and people can more easily distinguish two different points of view (Robison, Clifford, 1974).

Internal social conflict which concerns goals, values and interests that do not contradict the basic assumptions upon which the relationship is founded tend to be positively functional for the social structure. Such conflicts tend to make possible the readjustment of norms and power relations within groups in accordance with the felt needs of the community.

Communal conflicts may lead to alliances with other communities, creating bonds between them. They may now unite to fight the other community and may win for an Igbo adage says *Igwe bxi ke* – Unity is strength. Communal conflicts often help gain recognition for the communities involved.

Negatively, inter-communal conflicts in which the contending parties no longer share the same basic values upon which the legitimacy of the structure rests threaten to disrupt the structure. Communal conflicts may increase bitterness, alienation and divisiveness within the community in case of intra – communal conflicts and among the communities in case of inter-communal conflicts. It may have long lasting effects upon future cooperation among the communities holding opposite views. Communal conflict can bring about hostile feelings which may be seen as a threat to the unity and security of the communities involved and the whole nation at large.

Communal conflict can become violent and in extreme cases leads to destruction and bloodshed. Conflict does not necessarily imply or lead to violence, “communal conflict becomes violent when

the process turns to overt hostility and involve destructive behaviour". Why communal conflict be it intra or inter should not be encouraged is that it may lead to blood shed. This one sacrilegious act of bloodshed makes the so called positive effects of communal conflict a mirage.

As regards the dramatic texts under study, we can assert that the intra and the inter-communal conflicts involved have negative effects. In the dramatic text *Nwata Rie Awq*, the conflict between Awqrq and his wife Obiqma led to series of negative effects. Awqrq's false accusation of his wife, Obiqma led to his sending his wife and child home to her parents and the subsequent abduction and sold into slavery. This also led to the sin of incest committed by Awqrq because he unknowingly married his daughter. The sin of incest is an abomination in Igbo land and whoever that commits it has to cleanse the land and then has to live with the shame for the rest of his life. On finding out, that he committed the sin of incest, Awqrq committed suicide. This conflict also led to the peaceful demonstration by Isiama people (Obiqma's people) to Amangwu market place (Awqrq's place). The demonstration is to show that they now know what happened and that they want their god to fight for them. The conflict as well strained the relationship between the people of Amangwu and Isiama.

In the other text – *Xwa Ntqqq*, there are also negative effects. Although the remote cause of the conflicts is not known but the effects are enormous. The conflict resulted into inter-communal wars between Isungodo and Umuagada Communities. There is also intra-communal conflict between Ebubedike's kinsmen and Agameevu because Agameevu murdered Ebubedike to marry his wife, Qnxkwube .

This also led to other murders and even suicide. Obidiya, Agameevu's wife whom he married at the death of Onukwube his wife, committed suicide for killing her daughter Qlamma mistakenly. She killed Oguamalam to avenge the death of her husband, Agameevu and her step –son, Xwad[ogbu. She killed them with poisoned wine which her daughter also drank.

All these negative actions and chain reactions are brought home to the people through drama.

### **Suggestion**

It is pertinent to note at this juncture that communal conflict exists in so many parts of Nigeria in particular and the world at large. So long as there is a plural heterogeneous structure in Nigeria, communal conflict of varying degrees of interest and value is bound to manifest. It is as a matter of peace and security to proffer suggestions on how to resolve these conflicts. Some of the measures towards communal conflict resolution are as follows:

- The policy of the Nigerian government should be directed towards addressing the problems of poverty and ignorance through the medium of oral presentation in the urban and rural areas of the country.
- Mass enlightenment campaign should be taken seriously through the use of dramatic literature on the need of upcoming generation of Nigerians to understand and respect the territorial boundary, culture and religion of others.
- Government at all levels should seriously address the issue of indigene/settler dichotomy through the use of dramatic literature in order to reduce the level of hatred among the Nigerian citizens.
- All Christians and Moslems of this country in all sectors of the economy must shun greed and self – centeredness.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In this paper, attempt has been made to understand communal conflict as a situation in which people, groups or communities are involved in serious disagreement. The study also has established the fact that drama serves as a means of portraying communal conflict through the reenactment of these conflicts by actors on stages for the society to see and learn from.

The study also looks at various causes of communal conflicts and their effects as well as the security threats they pose to the nation and to the communities. It aptly demonstrated that many people look at communal conflict as having negative effects only as is the case with the texts under study, and in other places where there are communal conflicts today. But, we are made to understand that some communal conflicts can have positive effects in the nation, communities, groups or individuals as the case may be. The effects of the conflicts can be said to be many and varied but suffice it to say that the negative effect is more as it involves loss of human lives. The

paper also made suggestions as to how to solve this problem that is fast eroding the peace and security of almost all the nations of the world at large and Nigeria in particular.

We sincerely hope and pray that if all the stake holders put their hands on deck, certainly dramatic literature would assist greatly in resolving communal conflict in Nigeria.

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