

***Insurgency in Recent Nigerian Poetry:  
The Examples of Idris Amali and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo***

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***Abstract***

Insurgency is a threat to peace, security and national development. It reveals the worst of humanity and it is a hydra-headed monster that must be killed if human lives are to be protected. This essay, exploratory and analytical, examines insurgency in recent Nigerian poetry with the aim of revealing the effects and making recommendations on how to defeat this national threat to progress. The poems of Idris Amali and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo are evaluated as they are contained in Amali's *Efeega: The War of Arts* and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Waiting for Dawn*. This paper exploits the theory of trauma, an offshoot of psychological theory, to interrogate the poets' presentation of insurgency in their poetry. The essay concludes that both poets are preoccupied with the consequences of insurgency: psychological and physical, and that deploying science and technology as well as rehabilitating homeless children, early preparation and proactive governance are viable options which the poets have suggested in combating the monster of insurgency in Nigeria.

***Introduction***

If poetry is the evidence of things contemplated, imagined as well as perceived from reality, the substance of things aspired to or suggested to improve the human condition, then recent Nigerian poetry can aptly be described as humanitarian poetry. The poems are concerned with depicting acts which are inimical to human comfort and pleasure. The poets, relying on their poetical acumen, depict, with almost intolerable disdain, the tragic experience of humanity caught in the crossfire of violence, unrest, militancy and insurgency.

The history of insurgency and its manifestations in Nigeria are somewhat new and diverse. Although these have existed in the north-eastern part of Nigeria for a long time, their radical

nature and extremity are only recent. They are associated with a warped sense of ideology either of religion or politics, or even, of ethnic supremacy. Never in the history of Nigeria have we seen the magnitude of lives lost, of property destroyed, of people displaced and of communities deserted, like we have witnessed in recent time, all because of radicalized revolt. Insurgent kingpins and their followers have engaged in detonating bombs in places of worship, kidnapping and killing school children and hoisting Islamic terrorists' flags over some regions in the north. As earlier indicated, all these are recent experiences in Nigeria and recent Nigerian poems are beginning to capture them. The keynote of this essay is insurgency. It examines the poetry of Idris Amali and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo in order to identify the effects of terrorist attacks on Nigerians as well as reveal the various strategies that the poets suggest in fighting insurgency in Nigeria.

### *Theoretical Background*

This study is anchored on the theory of trauma, an offshoot of psychological theory. According to Sophie I. Akhmemokhan, trauma is “a singular type of violence and a staple ingredient of terrorism” (2). In other words, trauma is a product of violence which also defines terrorism. Akhmemokhan traces the origin of trauma in Nigeria to “the periods of colonialism, neocolonialism and recolonization” (2). She adds that trauma is an archetype that has continued to manifest in our national life. Also, Charles Spielberger (qtd in Akhmemokhan, 4) asserts that trauma ‘embodies injury, horror and helplessness’. These elements, to a large extent, characterise the various insurgent attacks in states engulfed by terrorism. There is the sense of overwhelming helplessness, of physical and emotional hurt and of fear which run through the literature.

Focusing on the consequences of trauma, Judith Herman writes that:

Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bond between [the] individual and the community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others” (214)

Our sense of community is encapsulated in our relationship with one another. This ‘bond’ that often connects all humanity is eroded during insurgency. Thus, terrorism etches on our consciousness the images of pain, hurt and fear. With these, the zeal to commune and live as one is weakened. Herman has earlier on argued that: “to study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events... the victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the

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burden of pain” (7). Through the writer’s depth of knowledge, he depicts the fearful experiences of his characters and calls attention to them. Victims of terrorist attacks invite the reader to empathise and act in order to redress the situation.

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle trace ‘trauma’ to its Greek origin meaning, ‘a wound’. They write that: “trauma theory is concerned with ways in which traumatic events are represented in language” (327). Trauma criticism deals with the apprehension of societal violence and conflict from where wounds are inflicted. Language, being dynamic, offers writers the unique opportunity to express the experience and to convey the pain and terror of victims of insurgency.

Finally, Sigmund Freud views trauma from the psychological angle. He is of the view that human beings have ‘natural aggressive instinct’ and ‘the hostility of each against all and all against each’ (313) is a product of external pull. Granted that aggression is in-born but the fundamental issue is how this violence is driven and directed. Insurgent aggression is often propelled by religious, ethnic and political or ideological influences. Quite often, our differences in terms of religious affinity, political cleavage, ethnic diversity and ideological leaning have sustained insurgency because out of these, are inequality and inequity, injustice and insincerity, corruption and discrimination. The sum of all these stokes the fire that has continued to incinerate nations.

The poetry of Amali and Adimora-Ezeigbo have enjoyed critical attention and reviews. For example, Bello D. Bada (2006), Babayo Wakili (2009), Sule E. Egya (2009), Kola Eke (2011) and Amos Luka Bwala (2014) have looked at the poet’s preoccupation with the subject of military dictatorship in Nigeria. As for Adimora-Ezeigbo, Christian Chukwuloo Chukwueloka and Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika (2011), Niyi Akingbe (2014), Godwin I.N. Emezue (2014) and Clement Eloghosa Odia (2016) have paid critical attention to her feminist sensibility, environmental criticism and several other issues. While my paper has immensely benefitted from the insights provided by these studies on Amali and Adimora-Ezeigbo’s poetry, it attempts to transcend current literature on their craft by demonstrating that psychological trauma and physical destruction are the consequences of insurgency as well as suggesting the improvement of science and technology and the rehabilitation of homeless children as ways of fighting terrorism in the poems of Amali and Adimora-Ezeigbo.

### *Psychological Trauma*

The phenomenon of insurgency, particularly its psychological impact on Nigerians, is captured in Amali's poetry. It is impossible to read the poem, "Pounding Gwange (Maiduguri) to rubbles" (EWA, 62-64) without noticing the psychological trauma that the citizens are compelled to go through owing to the growing cases of terrorism in Nigeria. The speaker, in the opening stanza, narrates his frightful experience and the general sense of panic which describes how the people of Maiduguri have reacted to Boko Haram threat:

I ran from the city centre at dawn  
As even the goats, donkeys, camels and horses  
Took to their heels.  
When the market breaks into chaos  
No one need tell the deaf. (62)

There is a subtle use of simile to compare the way the speaker 'ran' from the scene of violent attack to the way the animals 'took to their heels'. Apart from the persona, several inhabitants of Maiduguri are depicted as having to bear the brunt. The picture of 'goats', 'donkeys', 'camels' and 'horses' running is meant to accentuate the enormity of the threat. It also lends verbal support to the reason why the speaker has to run for his dear life. Amali sums up the mayhem with a fitting proverb: "when the market breaks into chaos/No one need tell the deaf". The point being made is that the chaotic atmosphere which the insurgent group creates in Maiduguri, as in other parts of the country, does not need to be explained to anybody. The confused state is apparent for everyone to see. Thus the deaf do not need to hear the sound of bombs going off but they will see people running and they too will join them and run for safety.

And we noticed civilians in groups brooding  
Along the streets silently  
One comes trotting with the sign:  
Turn back!  
We know something is in the offing  
And the sound comes in  
Shaking the entire earth on which we stand. (62)

The speaker is able to capture emotions quite effectively with clever deployment of auditory and visual imagery to convey the pain of insurgency. For example, 'civilians' are seen brooding 'silently'. People get to see the 'Turn back!' sign conspicuously displayed. Later, the persona employs hyperbole to express the devastating effect of the sound of bombs: 'shaking the entire

earth on which we stand'. Maiduguri indigenes on a daily basis live through the horror of the time and are often terrified:

Convoy of cars with red hazard lights  
 Head for our stand  
 As we took to our heels  
 And into the abode of learning  
 Far from the city crowd.  
 We head for distant sanctuaries  
 From the imagined fields of war in urban war. (62)

The terrible treatment meted out to civilians by insurgent groups points to an incontrovertible fact: that the militants regard vulnerable Maiduguri indigenes as their enemies and consequently subject them to terror. For this reason, the excerpt is suffused with the sense of fear. One sees the people running from the insurgents as they pursue innocent citizens. Maiduguri has become 'fields of war' where the people have no safety. Each stanza presents the image of running from assailants. Those running are the people of Maiduguri and the terrorists are Boko Haram members. This situation has created the sense of pervasive insecurity.

We now know  
 What went off  
 Now we can venture out of our doors  
 To listen to this distant music of gun battles  
 In various tones and formations relentlessly  
 They must target a target  
 As my heartbeat quickens her strides. (62)

The speaker's emotional state is captured through the personification of anxiety and fear conveyed in the expression: 'my heartbeat quickens her strides'. In the sentence, 'heartbeat' is personified as a human being who has legs which have to be quickened in order to leave the scene of violence. Another source of fear in the poem is the sound of bombs. In the context of this poem, the sound of guns is described as 'music of gun battles'. The exchange of gun shots is presented as a battlefield where different type of sounds are heard. This further increases the speaker's fear: "And the battle rages strongly/As turmoil rages/As thick black smoke engulfs Gwange of malignant surge" (63). The sense of a city gone out of control is further emphasised by the use of repetition. The word 'rages' is used twice to underscore the sense of terrible anger that has been given free expression. This is further exacerbated by the picture of devastated

environment in which, ‘thick black smoke engulfs Gwange’ as well as ‘malignant surge’ of smoke is released into the air. All these heighten the worry and fear of safety in the land:

The last one sounds like cluster bombs  
 The next kaka ko! Kaka kaka gbuum!  
 The next gbuum!  
 My earth several kilometers trembles  
 And threatens my foothold. (63)

The richness of the above excerpt comes from the ideophonic implications of words. They recreate the sound of bombs which account for the speaker’s fear. From the deployment of sound, the speaker tries to describe the various sounds that he has heard on that fateful day. First, he uses simile to evoke the sense of an endless release of bombs. According to the speaker, one of the bombs resembles the sound of several bombs. The next bomb sounds “kaka ko! Kaka kaka gbuum!” and the next sound “gbuum!”. The implication of these sounds is that they are loud and catastrophic. The speaker conveys the depth of emotional torture to which he is subjected. The repetition of this sound creates the sense of helplessness and dread.

The speaker ends the stanza by capturing the effect of the sound on his household. He tells the reader that: “My earth several kilometers trembles/And threatens my foothold” (63). Notice the implication of personification in which ‘the earth’ is described as trembling as well as describing his ‘foothold’ as being threatened. This is a perfect example of a transferred epithet. The real victim of the sounds is the speaker and not ‘the earth’ and his ‘foothold’. Thus we can conclude that it is the speaker that actually experiences the trembling and the threat of the bomb.

Now this single thin one kpoom!  
 And now running in the heavy one gwuum!  
 The music of guns, death salutes us  
 As our heart trembles  
 No concrete news filtered in  
 From the battlefields pitched against  
 Walls, embankments, the armed and unarmed. (63)

There is an apparent contrast in sound between “kpoom!” and “gwuum!”. Running through this poem is a concern with the impact of gun battle to heighten the emotional state of the speaker. The conflict in sound deepens the inner turmoil of the persona who has to endure the ‘music of guns’. The sense of fear is underscored in the personification ‘death salutes us/As our heart trembles’. It reveals the psychological impact of the insurgency.

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Rumours of vehicular movements take over  
 And rumours of war and products  
 Of kpa! Kpa! Kpa!  
 Gwuum! and gbuum!  
 As the city rose in fear  
 With only the brave for a glimpse  
 As only rumours of death tolls and arson  
 Send fear down the civil spine. (63)

The poet persona continues to emphasise the emotional stress occasioned by the fear of death using the ideophones built around the sound of guns and bombs. Apart from recreating the war situation, it evokes the atmosphere of tension which many people go through in Maiduguri. By describing the city as being in fear, the speaker paints the picture of pervasive fear gripping the inhabitants of Maiduguri.

In another poem, Amali reveals how insurgency affects the people psychologically. This is captured in the poem entitled “To Mohammed: In Bradford” (EWA, 58). This poem contains the basic characteristics which explain the popularity and effectiveness of Amali’s poetry: simplicity, lyricism and use of apt diction. The poem opens with an impetuous suddenness that jars the reader into fuller awareness and expresses moments of deep emotional significance: “Gwosh erupts again/More violent than ever/In hot-tempered heart beyond wisdom” (58). The power of the above stanza rests squarely on the definiteness and absoluteness of ‘erupts’ which conveys the sense of explosion. The speaker underscores the bombing of the city of Jos through the detail he writes into the word ‘erupts’. The eruption of violence is said to be triggered by unnecessary temperament:

Additional troops from formations  
 Head to Gwosh and Bukuru  
 Armed in battle-ready gear  
 For battles not by war  
 To mow down their brethren  
 In gullible minds  
 To gladden the heartless minds of the west.

The persona reiterates the fear which the masses experienced when additional troops were deployed to Jos and Bukuru towns. The soldiers are said to be “Armed in battle-ready gear” and their aim is to “mow down their brethren”. Amali’s verse is enriched by apt images to

convey the tragedy of war. The word ‘mow’ suggests killing. The language employed contains some subtlety and indirection in terms of reference to death and war:

All family members have been trapped for days  
 But are safe  
 24 hours curfew persists  
 But the hate-tempered city  
 Remains hot-tempered Gwosh. (58)

The trauma which the citizens face as a result of insurgent bombs is expressed in this poem. For example, members of the society are ‘trapped’, that is, they are compelled by the state imposed curfews on the people to stay indoors. The curfew is “24 hours” and the stress of staying at home doing nothing truly perplexes the speaker’s mind.

### *Physical Destruction*

It is impossible to read the poems of Adimora-Ezeigbo and Amali without noticing their depiction of physical destruction as one of the consequences of insurgency. In Adimora-Ezeigbo’s ‘Darfur’, physical assault is presented as one of the manifestations of physical destruction:

The Khartoum jackals  
 Cannibals masquerading as saviours  
 Predators perpetrating rape orgies  
 Presiding over fountains of black gold  
 In ‘richly poor’ region. (WFD, 18)

The whole passage breathes the sense of savagery and wildness. The stanza is replete with animal imagery with which the persona depicts physical destruction occasioned by insurgency. For example, ‘jackals’ is used to refer to wild dogs while ‘cannibals’ refers to flesh eating animals particularly, those which eat their kind and this underscores brutal killing of citizens. As for ‘predators’, it suggests plundering, devouring and killing which characterise the city of Khartoum. According to the speaker, the soldiers whose activities cause pain and destruction are the ‘jackals’, ‘cannibals’ and predators who perpetrate ‘rape orgies’ and preside ‘over fountains of black gold’, a metaphor for crude oil. These soldiers by their actions have made their country (Sudan) a ‘richly poor’ region. This is an oxymoron and it draws attention to the economic ruin that the war has caused.

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Mark them, legislators of the soul:  
 Wolves in a world gone awry  
 You are in Darfur,  
 Therefore, dying is fine  
 Allahu Akbar –

The brilliance of the poem immediately comes to life with vivid and effective use of metaphor. The phrase ‘legislators of the soul’ is a good example of metaphor. It compares the way legislators have power to make laws over the affairs of a country to the way insurgents exercise power over the souls of their victims. They are metaphorically addressed as ‘wolves’ because of their wildness and capacity to do evil. The world recreated above is one that is completely upside down. The expression ‘Allahu Akbar’ simply means ‘God is the greatest’. These insurgent soldiers who perpetrate grave destruction do these in the name of God. They are thus depicted as hypocrites:

Their cry after acts of bloodletting,  
 Playing dice with lives  
 Hide-and-seek that sickens,  
 While life ticks away, bells toll for the dead  
 A tragic dance is rehearsed and staged,  
 Deceiving AU and UN, EU and OIC  
 That watch this dance of shame.  
 Millions starve, thousands die  
 Amidst rape and butchery. (WFD, 18)

Insurgency and the fight against terror have left indelible marks on the nation of Sudan which is effectively captured by the destruction of lives and property. According to the speaker, these terrorists are playing games with the lives of the people which underscores the mindless brutality, slaughter or killing of the people. As these ‘acts of bloodletting are committed, ‘millions’ in camps continue to ‘starve’ leaving ‘thousands’ to ‘die’. Also, ‘rape’ and ‘butchery’ are perpetrated without remorse.

Time is running out for traitors  
 who barber the souls of their people,  
 Misappropriate abundant resources  
 Dictators, trading in oil and blood,  
 In the wake of continuing conflict,  
 storm in a tea cup, a cliché mouthed by many

To justify the absence of a UN peacekeeping force!

The persona expresses the reason behind the insurgent war. It is economic consideration. The speaker uses metaphor to convey the sense of trade. The insurgents are said to ‘barter the souls of their people’. They get ‘oil’ by spilling the ‘blood’ of the people. Thus they exacerbate the ‘conflict’ and deceive ‘the UN peacekeeping force’ when they describe the situation as a ‘storm in a tea cup’. This ‘cliché’ is deployed by the writer to underscore the deepening sense of international apathy to the Khartoum imbroglio: “Even as the number of the dead skyrockets./Surely the time of reckoning will come/When all traitors will drown in their own blood” (19). The persona is more concerned here not with the physical destruction in Khartoum but the sense of justice and repercussion that will befall the ‘traitors’, that is, the insurgents. According to the speaker, there is a high scale of physical destruction that the insurgency has created. There is a tinge of expectation or prophecy that those who make life difficult for the people are the traitors.

In yet another poem entitled “Riddles” (*WFD*, 30), Adimora-Ezeigbo exposes the physical destruction caused by insurgents. Through the technique of a riddle, the poet draws attention to the subject of terrorism: “I know that I’m a rope dangling from a roof/What do you say I am?/You are a murderer’s gateway to oblivion”. The image of ‘a rope dangling from a roof’ reveals the sense of danger and threat to the lives of the people. The insurgents use these ropes to kill and thus become ‘a murderer’s gateway to oblivion’: “I am a parcel hidden in someone’s robe/What do you say I am?/You are the time bomb hugging the flesh of a suicide bomber”. The image of ‘a parcel’ is used to convey the instrument of destruction. This ‘parcel’ is ‘hidden in someone’s robe’ and this smacks of terrorist weapon hence it is ‘the time bomb hugging the flesh of a suicide bomber’. Through this riddle, the speaker conveys the horrendous scale of physical destruction of lives: “I am a mighty forest sheltering a multitude of trees/What do you say I am?/You are a privileged predator sustaining a vampire sect”. The image of ‘a mighty forest sheltering a multitude of trees’ refers to a highly placed individual who sponsors ‘a vampire sect’. The said vampire sect is the Boko Haram group who are metaphorically described as ‘vampire’ because of their thirst for blood and bloodletting.

Always remarkable for her depiction of physical destruction, Adimora-Ezeigbo, in another poem entitled “No relief in our national tragedy” (*WFD*, 54) emerges as a poet of national consciousness:

It’s a play unto death, enactment of blood-cuddling

Antics that swallow compatriots, clans and communities;  
 Odi was the first port of call, wasn't it?  
 Many more have followed  
 Niger Delta is a death row  
 The theatre of terror spreads faster  
 than locust invasion. (54)

The poem is cast in the mould of a parody in which the poet takes a humouric look at the terrorist activities in the country. She recalls the mindless killing in Odi, a town in Rivers State where some soldiers were killed which attracted reprisal attacks from their fellow soldiers killing many Odi citizens – men, women and children. This hapless destruction paints a picture of physical ruin. Next, the poet takes a look at the horror of violent killing in Niger Delta which speaks of terrorist attacks. For the poet, these killings are acts of terror with insurgent colouration.

This national tragedy becomes the 'theatre of terror' which is spreading across the land like a 'locust invasion'. These metaphoric expressions evoke the pain and magnitude of physical destruction.

Preoccupation with physical destruction dominates Amali's poem entitled "To Jos" (EWA, 90). The poem provides one of the instances of insurgency in Nigeria.

Jos you boil again  
 While the wounds, pains and scars  
 Of the immediate past  
 Live with us.

What distinguishes this poem is the metaphoric construction of ideas which, when seen, clearly provides sufficient information about the scale of devastation which occurred in Jos. The word 'boil' reveals the sense of conflict and destruction that happened in Jos where many people were wounded leaving 'pains and scars' for the people to bear.

Death is like throwing a stone up  
 In a gathering crowd  
 No one knows  
 On whose head it will land.

Amali's depth of thought is even more revealing when he employs simile as a device to expose the sense of uncertainty and vulnerability of those who live in Jos during the terrorist attack.

The detail is not only informative and accurate, but, in a sense, significant. Thus, the richness of the poem comes from the parabolic implications of the poem's statements.

This is Jos  
 The city of easy death  
 That has known no peace  
 In a weather clement  
 For human growth  
 God save you people in Jos  
 And the nation... Nigeria. (90)

The seemingly inexhaustible resources of language intoxicates the poet, rejoices in metaphoric expressions to uphold with great vigour the sense of physical devastation. The poet emphasizes the effortlessness with which the insurgents take the lives of Jos residents. This is achieved through the speaker's premodification of 'death' with the word, 'easy' in 'easy death'. The essence of this line is to attract attention and invite the reader to know the magnitude of the loss of lives in Jos. This technique smacks of exaggeration. In the subsequent lines the persona employs a hyperbolic statement to buttress the theme of physical ravage or killing: "The city of easy death/That has known no peace" (90). If the city experiences 'easy death', it therefore follows that it will know 'no peace'. This repetition is used to emphasize the general state of insecurity of lives. As a result of this situation, the speaker offers prayer for the city of Jos and the nation of Nigeria in order to restore peace and sanctity of human life again.

### *Fighting Insurgency*

In the preceding sections, one has demonstrated Adimora-Ezeigbo's and Amali's preoccupation with psychological trauma and physical destruction as consequences of insurgency. There are also poems in which the poets suggest ways of fighting insurgency as antidotes to Islamic terrorism. One such poems is by Adimora-Ezeigbo with the title: "Terrorism" (*WFD*, 16-17). In this poem, the speaker suggests the deployment of Science and Technology as a way of fighting insurgency:

What it costs the West  
 To stay one step ahead  
 'Islamist terrorism'  
 Can heal the suffering south  
 Launch a thousand ships of hope

According to the persona, technology gives the people advantage and put them ‘one step ahead’ of the Islamist terrorists. Fighting terrorism with technological weapons and gadgets is the modern way to end insurgency. When the entire process of deploying technology is completed, it will ‘heal the suffering’ of many people and bring ‘hope’ to many children who are the direct victims of insurgency, and end the misery of refugees.

In the speaker’s opinion, with the aid of Technology, a lot can be achieved:

One step ahead in trick of technology,  
 Disarms suicide bombers,  
 Outwits nameless and faceless human robots  
 Faith merchants bound to paradise,  
 Before mindless attempts  
 At self-incineration, collective annihilation. (16)

The persona outlines the advantages of using Technology to combat terrorism. First, it will help to disarm ‘suicide bombers’ and reduce carnage. Second, it will hinder several unknown ‘human robots’ who are used to perpetrate terrorist acts. Third, it will help to stop radicalized Islamists from ‘self-incineration’ and ‘collective annihilation’. What the speaker wants to make clear is that, with technological devices, it will be easy to stop terrorist attacks before they are carried out.

The speaker makes a quick recourse to history, particularly the Second World War, to explain how Science and Technology was employed to win the war:

Could they repeat the past feats:  
 That saw the bouncing bombs in WW II,  
 crafted by the ingenuity, the brain power of Barnes Wallis,  
 The wizardry of computing pioneer, Tommy Flowers  
 And wonderman enigma code cracker, Alan Turing?  
 Three history inventors  
 That won a technological battle against the Noazis. (16)

The speaker is intrigued by the technological inventions of great scientists like Barnes Wallis, Tommy Flowers and Alan Turing whose contributions to the advancement of technology is unquantifiable. In the opinion of the speaker, the ‘ingenuity’ of Wallis led to the development of bombs. Also, the ‘wizardry’ of Flowers brought the use of computer to aid in the fight during the war. Finally, Turing’s enigmatic ability to crack codes helped a great deal in the war.

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To fight insurgency, the poet indirectly suggests that technological inventors are needed in the fight against it. Computer experts and code crackers are required to be trained and deployed to combat terrorism.

The speaker is not sure whether nations of today are prepared to employ Science and Technology:

How prepared are the descendants to match  
The glory of hallowed ancestors?  
The scale of the threat rises,  
The battle line well drawn,  
Calling for swift response  
As the struggle permeates every level. (16)

In the speaker's opinion, the time to use Science and Technology is now, particularly when terrorist 'threat' is on the increase and the 'battle line well drawn', thus demanding for a 'swift response' in dealing with the scale and threat of terror.

Another method suggested by the poet in fighting terrorism is prompt preparation to meet the challenge of insurgency:

A sign of terror spreads everywhere, even the blind see it;  
But no sign of preparation greets our watchful eyes  
Except the sight of things forgotten and discarded:  
Moribund warships, comatose war planes,  
Badly trained and 'intrainable' crime-fighters  
Who murder the innocent and crown the criminal. (17)

The poet berates Nigeria, particularly her preparation to match the threat posed by insurgents. The speaker is shocked that despite the palpable and visible threat of insurgency, there is 'no sign of preparation'. The persona then makes an inventory of the obsolete weapons that are available. To him, these cannot be used to win the battle against terror. Today, we see 'moribund warships' that cannot be used and the 'comatose war planes' which are of no help at present.

Apart from these, the human capacity needs some building or development. To the speaker, there is urgent need to train crime-fighters to be able to meet the threat posed by terrorists. Consequently, the poet has some more suggestions on how terrorism can be combated:

Let us revamp our stillborn technology  
Let us begin by motivating our scientists

Tease them out of their lethal sleep  
 By arming them with the right tools.  
 Beware, you who give deaf ear to the din of war  
 Take heed lest you end up inside the shark's belly.  
 Let the chick flee while the kite perches on the iroko. (17)

The poet suggests the motivation of scientists as an antidote to insurgency. Our scientists are presented as suffering from 'lethal sleep'. The poet's gift is, above all, that of irony, and that gift provides the right way for understanding the message. The irony lies in the fact that instead of the scientists to produce 'lethal' weapons, they end up in 'lethal' sleep. More than that, the poet wants the government to provide better pay and tools for them to do their work. The poet ends the poem on a note of warning that the time to act is now and that ignoring this warning may have grave consequences.

Another strategy that runs through Adimora-Ezeigbo's "Waifs and Strays of the City" (WFD, 24) is rehabilitation of homeless children.

There was indeed a time  
 stray dogs and cats  
 Paraded the streets of our orderly city,  
 Foraging in the garbage bin.

The point being made is that in time past, 'dogs and cats' often strayed and ate from the 'garbage bin'. These were the kind of animals that were used to roaming the streets. The persona looks at the city of today and identifies the new 'strays':

Today,  
 The waifs and strays of the city  
 Are children  
 Homeless, abandoned.

These ones are a common sight in Nigeria and the persona believes that these children constitute a major threat to peace and development. Accordingly, the speaker calls on those in authority to act fast before things get out of hand:

Let this be a clarion call:  
 Take these children off the street  
 Behead the monster serpent before it strikes  
 Quench the fire before it becomes a conflagration

Remove the monkey's hand from the soup pot  
Before it turns to a human hand!

Insurgency thrives in a permissive environment, particularly where aimless and homeless children abound who become willing tools in the hand of insurgents. To this end, the speaker makes a wakeup call to the government to 'Take these children off the street' as a necessary step towards combating insurgency. The visible threat that these children pose is conveyed through the image of a 'monster serpent'. The act of getting rid of the children amounts to beheading 'the monster serpent' before it strikes and kills people. Thus, these children are a potential danger to the Nigerian state. Another violent image employed to describe the threat represented by these homeless children is that of 'fire'. The speaker warns that it is better to 'Quench the fire' before it becomes 'a conflagration.' What this means is that it is easier to eliminate insurgency at the infancy level. Leaving the children to be radicalized has its enormous national consequences.

Admittedly, the poet strives for the perfect union of sense and symbol and is acutely aware of the contribution that each makes to the other. If she succeeds as a poet, it is because of the coherence in the deployment of symbols, so that there is added force and vividness to the message. For example, 'the monkey's hand', 'the soup pot' and the 'human hand' operate on a clear symbolic level. The lines containing these symbols are couched in the form of a proverb which conveys precise ideas. The 'monkey's hand' represents the undesirable and by extension, the homeless children while 'the soup pot' symbolises our national life, particularly the states these children live in. Finally, the 'human hand' stands for a veritable and full blown insurgency. This proverb functions therefore, as a means of cautioning us against the neglect of the abandoned children because whoever takes care of them becomes their master, and who may in turn deploy them for nefarious acts.

### *Conclusion*

This essay has opened up a window into the hazardous world of recent Nigerian poetry and in it, we see the inner workings of a society which has completely gone off course and skidded into orgies of violent killings. The entire human race is portrayed as endangered as the sanctity of human lives pales into insignificance. The redeeming quality about this brand of poetry is how the poets turn despair into resurgent hope, promise and possibility. The poems remind all humanity of the need to get together and fight the scourge of insurgency rapidly making the

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world a theatre of violence and terror. The moral duty of the poet, therefore, is that he must deploy his poetry for the service of humanity. The cornerstone of this essay is the examination of insurgency in contemporary Nigerian society through the literary lens of Idris Amali and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. The muse of these two poets is evidently that of insurgency or a desire to fight insurgency by exposing how dangerous it is so as to stoke the fire that will eventually incinerate terrorism from its roots. These poets are imbued by the patriotic spirit to rid Nigeria of every trace of militancy, terrorism, violence, and of course, insecurity.

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