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**Boko Haram Insurgence and the Rape of Nigeria's Post Colony in Patrick Oguejiofor's  
*Maiduguri Requiems and Other Poems***

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**Abstract**

This paper titled: "Boko Haram Insurgence and the Rape of Nigeria's Post-colony in Patrick Oguejiofor's "Maiduguri Requiems and Other Poems" adroitly interrogates the gruesome activities of the Boko Haram sects and its financiers; the alleged steerers of our wheels of progress. The paper was informed by the barbaric and senseless massacre of innocent citizens, the rape of their livelihood and the unending bloodbath in a city that was once known to be the hub of revelry and peaceful coexistence. In unraveling these dehumanizing practices and social realities in the North Eastern part of the country, Oguejiofor's collection of poems are viewed as protest avenues. From the perspective of Oguejiofor, an average Nigerian have two enemies to contend with: the prejudiced leaders who appropriate retrogressive traditions and the insurgency that has permeated the sensibilities of vulnerable Nigerians. The poet is uncompromising in his stands because he realizes that for a lasting solution to insurgency and visionless leadership to be achieved, Nigerians must strive to spice their social existence with some revolutionary drive. This paper adopts Marxism as the basic theoretical framework because it strengthens the vision of the poet and exposes the unpardonable massacre meted the masses in the cosmic reality of our environment. The poet deploys stylistic techniques like foregrounding and symbolism to convey the poet's heightening frustration and desperation in our deteriorating political space. The research finds out that there is this glistening and vivid image of the battle for survival by the people, the barbaric killing of the indigents and plundering of our country's natural resources by the leaders.

*Keywords:* Insurgence, Marxism, Post-colony, Boko Haram, Visionless Leaders

**Introduction**

The post-civil war Nigerian poets have a belief system or a myth which embodies the memories of hopes, the quest for liberation, and what Nathaniel and Onuoha (2016) call "... [Keeping] faith

with the realities of human society.” (p.81). This is why an average Nigerian poet’s powerful images of hope and disenchantment with the situation in the country still remain in a fluid state. The social institution in Nigeria have been caged or imprisoned by the wielders of political power and is likened to what African Americans described elsewhere as “Jim Crow era”; a system built on a cabal-feudal system/economy. The onus rests on the African writer to function as a purposeful agent of change and watchdog against insurgency, kidnapping and banditry in the society. It is against this backdrop that Odey & Ogar (2021) argue that “the poets of this generation use their poems as avenues to register their grievances against the demeaning and subjugating position of the masses” (p. 165). Odey and Ogar’s assertion lays credence to the notion that the contemporary poets and their craft have gone beyond the preoccupation of art-for-art’s sake. By inhibiting the utilitarian function, their poetry opens a fissure where socio-political issues are addressed.

In order to adeptly do justice to the subject matter, a well-versed consciousness is needed; a consciousness which draws from the social existence of the people by directing the forces of transformation. It is through Marxist conception of our social existence and reality that the utmost degree of the freedom in emotion and feelings can be achieved by the African poet. The Marxist vision/ideology endows the writer with a sense of dignity and commitment which no other vision can offer. Wright (2020) observes that

Marxist has laid bare the skeleton of the society, there remains the task of the writer to plant flesh upon those bones out of his will to live. He may, with disgust and revulsion, say no and depict the horror of capitalism encroaching upon the human beings or he may, with hope and passion, say yes and depict the faint strivings of a new and emerging life. But in whatever social voice he chooses to speak, whether positive or negative, there should always be heard.... (p. 1407)

The African/Nigerian poets have to look inward when unmasking the problems in the society. This vision should be intricately woven with some complexity so as to create an environment where the ills of the society would be exposed and corrected by the people that bear the brunt of this massacre of the body and soul. The preponderance of these dispassionate and barbaric practices has remained ingrained in the psyches of most Nigerian poets like Oguejiofor who succinctly lays bare our predicaments in his poems.

But before the emergence of Boko Haram Insurgence, other militant groups were already taking toll in the country. Affirming this view, Ebonyi, (2019) states that

Nigerian, before the emergence of Boko sects, was hitherto inundated with various security challenges arising from the activities of sectarian groups. These groups include major ones like the Niger Delta militants (under different names), the Odua people's congress (OPC), and the movement for the actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB) among others. However, the Boko Haram has unsettled the Nigerian state more than all the others combined in terms of loss of lives and property as argued by different scholars. (pp. 555-556)

The prevalence of this monolithic concern in the north eastern part of the country and the turmoil in the area have displaced so many Nigerians, destroyed lives and property and unraveled the insensitivity of the leaders toward the plight of the citizenry. The infiltration of the military by the Boko haram sects have been a thorn in the flesh of the people as they could barely differentiate between the military and the sects. As a result of this, the people are easy prey in the hands of these bandits. The wanton rape of the livelihood of innocent Nigerians and bombing of churches have made so many people homeless and also ushered a renewed wave of famine that is sweeping through the region. This malevolence appropriated by the Islamic sect is what Oguejiofor abhors in *Maiduguri requiems and other poems*. Oguejiofor's poetry is a lamentation on the senseless killing of Nigerians by insurgents in the North.

The security problem in the country has been worsened by the prevalence of insurgence and the proliferation of ethnic militia groups. Armed resistance has further degenerated into serious violence, hostage taking and kidnapping for ransom. This unhealthy situation has created avenues for cheap and dubious financial gains by some unscrupulous elements sponsored by desperate political bigwigs. In this research, our search light is beamed on the activities of Boko Haram as depicted in the poetry collection under review. A lot of issues have been attributed to the menace of Boko Haram as enunciated by some critics.

Tafida, Tukur, Adebayo, Ndaghu, Onu, and Momodu, (2023) focused on the vulnerability of households in communities affected by the Boko Haram insurgence, laying emphasis on how the insurgency has affected their existence. The authors are of the opinion that

the economic, social, and general livelihood of the communities have been affected in multiple ways like breeding hunger, poverty and denial of comfort. In their views,

The activities of the insurgency and counter-action from the government forces have simultaneously affected the livelihoods of the people in the area, and the coping mechanism that could be used to improve the livelihood is being weakened sustainably by the insurgency. It can be deduced that people in our study areas left their homes and sources of livelihood and became internally displaced for safety. (p. 3)

To address the attendant effects of the uprising in the communities, the authors recommended the provision of infrastructural facilities, basic amenities, access to markets and improving the security architecture of the region. The authors hope that this strategy will go a long way in addressing the plight and vulnerabilities of the people. Several persons have been killed, livestock destroyed in their numbers and some rustled, living houses and business premises were all destroyed. The study also uncovered instances of vandalization of social infrastructure like source of water supply and electricity were damaged, social and financial institutions like banks, schools, hospitals, police stations were severely damaged.

Signe and Sine (2015) report's on the Boko Haram insurgency corroborates Tafida et al's (2023) summation. Signe and Sine provide a damning but compelling portraiture of the sect's activities. They opine that "the consequence of people forcefully taken from their ancestral land breeds hunger, diseases and poverty." (p.13) Their study illuminates the humanitarian angle of the guerilla warfare, how humans are objectified and used as expendables in the face of the war. Similarly, Ilugbami, Adeniran, Gbemileke, & Tobio (2023) commented on the insurgents' implications on security and socio-economic situations in the North East part of Nigeria. They argue that Nigeria's insecurity has affected other socioeconomic dynamics, and suggest potential solutions to the uprising in Nigeria. They contend that the Boko Haram warfare can be curtailed only if the

Nigerian authorities and the international community must prioritize both security and long-term socioeconomic solutions. This involves comprehensive methods to combat extremism, enhance education, generate jobs, and promote social harmony. Only via a diversified strategy can Nigeria expect to reduce BH's destructive impact on national development and strive toward a more peaceful and prosperous future. (p.14)

The excerpt resonates the inevitability of peace agenda in the quest to enthrone development and sustenance of the masses. The authors recognise the severity of insecurity in the region, nothing that the nation's military is overwhelmed. The necessity of collaborating with nations armed with superior military wares, as noted by the author, is believed to reduce the uprising.

Doe (2019) interrogates the discourse of Boko Haram which is human-centered. In the article entitled "Boko Haram and the Human Security Dimension" Doe examines the impact of Boko Haram's activities on human security in Nigeria. The author focuses on the group's targeting of civilians and the humanitarian consequences of its operations, and argues that addressing the human security dimension of the Boko Haram insurgency is essential for achieving long-term stability and security in the region. (p.81) Doe notes that human security encompasses a wide range of issues, including political, economic, social, and cultural factors, as well as threats related to violence and conflict. The author condemns in strong terms the Boko Haram's targeting of civilians, including attacks on schools, markets, and residential areas. The critic highlights the devastating humanitarian consequences of these attacks, including loss of lives, displacement, and damage to infrastructure.

Doe also examines the impact of Boko Haram's operations on the psychological well-being of individuals in the society and communities affected by the conflict.

To address the human security dimension of the Boko Haram insurgency, Doe recommends a comprehensive approach in addressing the underlying political, economic, and social factors that contribute to the group's rise. The author notes that this approach should prioritize the protection of civilians and the provision of humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict. Doe also emphasizes the importance of promoting social cohesion and inclusive political processes as a means of building long-term stability and security in the region (p.79). It is implicit in Doe's perspective that political stability will drastically erode the menace of insurgency in the society. By extension, this will go a long way creating a society devoid of anarchy and rancor.

The review, thus far, underscores the multidimensional nature of the Boko Haram issue. While not losing touch of the humanitarian dimension and how hapless the masses are in the

midst of the chaos, critics are vexatious about the absence of empathy by leaders, the reason the insurgency had gone unabated. In all, the critics, whose works are reviewed here, provide a valuable contribution to the understanding of the human security dimension of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. They also highlight how imperative it is to end the group's activities and the need for a comprehensive approach to address the underlying perpetrators of the conflict. Tafida et al (2023) are concerned about the vulnerability of the people ravaged by insurgency, while calling on the relevant authorities to provide aids to address the lack of social amenities.

Doe, on the other hand, provides details on social cohesion among the affected communities and calls for a lasting resolution of the underlining problem. Signe and Sine (2015) are not entirely different from the preceding critics. The writers give insight on the multi-faceted effects of the insurgency on the people and call for the provision of social amenities for the masses. In all of the views presented by these scholars, the masses seem to be helpless but are complaisant due to the demonstration of indifference in the midst of deprivation and insecurity.

From the review done thus far, it is established, to the best of our knowledge, that they has not been any critical literary criticism on the select poetry collection which examines the author's representation of mayhem orchestrated by insurgency. While it could be argued, plausibly, that the critics examined above harped on social realities in the insurgent-ravaged regions, this study on stemmed from the literary dimension and touched on the poets' poetic oeuvre. The study offers a fresh dimension on the discourse of Boko Haram from the Marxist literary dimension. The research premised on Marxist ideology, indicts the leaders of their insensitivity and calls on the suffering masses to take their future in their hands. They should protest against the leaders who have deliberately sacrificed the happiness and comfort of the masses on the altar of negligence.

### **Boko Haram Insurgence and the Rape of Nigeria's Post Colony**

In African literary tradition, poetry is and has always been a driving force of social change and an avenue of interrogating the life of the people in the war-torn region. It is this skillful manipulation of words and robust display of imageries that establish Oguejiofor as a major voice in contemporary Africa nay Nigeria poetry. In "Requiem Maiduguri", the poet rips open the

gruesome practices in the region deploying religious term to show the intensity of the cruelty. The title “requiem” is a Christian ceremony of a mass for a person who has recently died, especially, in the repose of their souls. In this context, the poem is likened to a ceremony in honour of the irrational killing of the masses in Maiduguri, Nigeria.

I shall write you a poem  
I shall sing you a dirge at twilight  
Tears rolling through the night  
I shall observe the various station of the cross  
My sweats thick like blood  
Like years on Golgotha

So the AK7s came

Mass burial, the bulldozers  
The onlookers, silent carnival  
Burial of humanity

The unspoken tears, lost courage  
The menace of foreign faith brought us here (p.78).

The poet unravels the endless cry of the victims of this insurgence attack and the imposition of a religious belief hitherto unknown to a people with an established religious faith: “the menace of foreign faith brought us here”. This display of inhuman practices and gory sight is what the poet persona describes as “so the AK7s came /mass burial.../burial of humanity”. The deployment of bulldozers is a metaphor of a pathetic sight which gradually snowballed into what the poet calls the “burial of humanity”. By extension, it also connotes genocide and a serial extermination of a particular group of people in the society. The families of the people who should be celebrating the demise of their love ones are engaged in a silent carnival that is bereft of revelry and stifled by a faceless religion. The right of the masses has been repressed, subverted and made willing tools in the hands of a sect that discountenances the essence of existence.

What actually pains the poet persona is that our leaders have remained adamant and complacent in the face of these unwholesome practices: “Hopeless ballot boxes, our birthday gift/ of history forgotten”. The contemporary Nigerian setting is defined, partly, by leadership ineptitude. Ogar & Odey (2023) in their article entitled “Violent Rhetoric as Response to Global

Hegemonies in the Poetry of Amiri Baraka and Peter Onwudinjo” allude to the subject matter in view. They bemoan the insensitivity of leaders where “the people remain dejected, hopeless and downcast because of the ruining of their livelihood by environmental degradation perpetuated by the government.” (p. 97) The issue of insecurity, undoubtedly, has exposed the masses to unbearable hardship and extermination. Sadly, the continuous insensitivity to these hydra-headed monsters does not only expose the lack of empathy by those in leadership position, but an attempt to willfully unleash pain and anguish on the masses. The lamentation of the poet persona is quite agonizing, tearful and bizarre as the poet persona asseverates:

...A plague of Ebola loose  
Pounding, punching and tearing  
Through the night of love  
Scorching warriors of God  
Diminishing our humanities by seconds (p.78)

Islamic religion is noted for its peaceful coexistence, unity and a violent free environment. But this sect has been unfair to the ideology of religion as the poet persona bemoans the supposed propagators of the Islamic faith evidenced in their belief or ideology. The poet persona's position is clear on this matter: calling for a revolutionary action against terrorism.

This sect came with the ideology that we have desecrated their religion and they also say that education is couched in profanity and sacrilege. Oguejiofor's "My Faith is Sin", is an outright disapproval of the forceful imposition of a religion hitherto unknown and a call for resistance against any act of oppression. Oguejiofor recalls Berth Lindfors critique of Ayi Kwei Armah's histories that "The degenerations of the past are responsible for the chaos one sees in Africa at present and (that) only by understanding that past and present will Africans collectively...be able tackle the problems of the future" (p.4). Oguejiofor is committed to the cause of innocent Nigerians and soldiers who are serially murdered in an unjustifiable war. The poet persona laments

They made me watch vultures feast on corpses  
The corpses of those who did not return  
Like pallbearers solemn  
They led me to the hangs man



They said my faith is a sin

Our seers and priests are false prophets,  
soulless  
I was a witness to their slaughter  
For the crime of the living (p.77)

Christians in this area are used as sacrificial lamb by Boko Haram sect whenever there is a need to shed blood in the area. It is because of these lethal practices in the region that the poet persona could no longer suffer alone, especially, when he interrogates the existence of God in this pragmatic submission:

They pass the death sentence on me  
They said I have no religion  
My gods have eyes that cannot see  
An ear that cannot hear my dirges  
No heart feels my pains (p.77)

This tearful cry of the poet persona is akin to the plight of the Israelites in the wilderness; a situation where many of the Israelites derided the laws of Moses and ended in shame and disillusionment. The poet persona sees “gods” which by implication is a Christian God as insensitive to the plight of the masses in face of the massacre perpetrated by Boko Haram. The author frowns at the manner with which a particular religion superintends on other religions. The incident in Afghanistan is a case in point; where Talibans are wielding the carrot and the stick to making sure that their belief system stands the test of time. The deployment of negative imageries like “My faith is sin”, “vulture feast on corpses”, “hangs man”, “false prophet”, “soulless” and “slaughter” graphically portrays the heroic wreck by this Islamic sect. The masses are left with no other option but to defend themselves in the war of attrition. The poet describes the supposed savior of the indigent and oppressed masses as “My Redeemer” My redeemer as used in this context is a metaphor for inept and bad leaders who are selfish harbingers of the country’s natural resources.

These leaders who are supposed to be the vanguard of morality are major financiers of Boko Haram insurgence in the north eastern part of Nigeria. The poet persona is agitating for a paradigm shift in this dwindling ideology and a site that Oguejiofor succinctly looks at in this

manner: “Our guides to promise/Are fake prophets and thieves/Yet beyond the sky/Hope lingers in adoring ecstasy) (p. 66) The leaders are described as “fake prophet and thieves” because of these re-occurrences of mouth-watering promises that have become a norm in the society. Instead of building walls to fight the sect, bridges are constructed to ease the movement of these men of the underworld and filling their blood banks with the blood of innocent Nigerians. It is against this backdrop that the poet persona has vowed to confront the situation as they show up. In agony, he fumes:

I must wail for the dead  
I must wail for the pardoned gods  
  
I must wail for the cobwebbed shrine  
I must wail for the unburied dead  
The flirting spirits, though mourned  
  
Yet clamoring for vengeance  
And out my confusion  
behold my redeemer (p.66)

The poet persona who has resigned his fate and resorted to continuous wailing for the departed have chosen to revenge the death of this barbaric act perpetuated by this devilish sect in the name of their ideology. The repetition of the phrase “I must wail...” shows the poet persona’s desperation to avenge all atrocities and mayhem caused by the Islamic sect. Looking at the poem from the Marxist perspective, the poem is a desperate bawl of insolence against the avaricious and acquisitive impulse of the leaders and their cohorts in the field who indulge in this game of destruction. It can be interpreted that the persona, one of the maligned persons, is calling for a revolutionary action of ferociously fighting back against this Boko haram insurgence. This sect has plundered humanity with their visionless and meaningless agenda and has left millions of Nigerians starving.

In the poem “Just for You” the poet persona takes reader round the world: “I have traversed the world/ransacked my brain and my village”, as the author washes the dirty linens of the leaders in the public. The author uses his loved ones as metaphors of a Nigerian who is not really abreast with the norm and belief system of the political class. All effort to develop oneself is met by a stiff opposition that the poet could barely understand. Oguejiofor interrogates the

ordeals of certain places in the society which he sees as dehumanizing and wicked; detests anything that has to do with Islam not for any reason but because of the relationship it has with the Boko Haram sect in this manner

But it suddenly occurred to me that you could be a victim  
of Arab-Jewish love for death  
so I gave up the idea, cursing myself forever  
imagining such a vile idea for you (p. 58).

The Arab Jewish love for death is a metaphor of Boko Haram insurgence's love for the death of innocent Nigerians/masses at any slightest provocation. So, the poet persona has vowed neither to have any connection with such sect nor his kinsmen by relishing any of their activities. The poet persona also satirizes the avaricious disposition of the leaders who are accomplices to this dastardly act. The leaders steal and starch the resources and wealth of the country in foreign land.

I thought of sending you to America God's world  
Capital of the world, a world where men walk on water  
But alas, I made a mistake; America was one of the numerous lands  
Grains stolen from my village are starched there (p. 58).

The poet use of the word "grains" is reflective of abundant natural resources that should have been used for the country's development and growth. He berates Egypt as country whose indigenes are product of these dangerous Islamic practices and an alleged cradle of civilization. The recent war of the Israelites and Palestinians have shown that many tunnels of Hamas and Hezbollah are linked to Egypt; a society adjudged by the Zionist as terrorist. The poet persona writes:

I dreamt of a tour of Egypt for my love  
To behold the wonders of ancient civilization  
Painfully too, I realize it was the same land  
Where men kill their sisters to demonstrate the love for God  
An accursed land of men married to self-immolation (p. 58).

The women in Egypt are seen as the most suppressed and subjugated by their male counterparts and are "married to self-immolation" as their faces are buried in shame. The author narrated the ordeals of innocent Nigerians whose blood have been shed in Maitama, Asokoro and Wuse by men of the underworld which the author describes as a "black garden built on the people's blood".

The use of black and blood portend danger and a bad omen for Nigeria's post-colony. According to the author Kano, a city famous for its industrial drive have been infested by a "strange deity" which by implication are the activities of Boko Haram, banditry, herd men attacks and kidnapping. Kaduna is described a city of crocodile; and a crocodiles known for not sparing its prey. The author likens the activities of this sect to a crocodile whose sole aim is to destroy the human race and the city is seen as a place "where your faith/is sealed by your faith/ and your death sentence confirmed. The poet describes Maiduguri as the home of insurgence; a home where love and the dignity of human person have been thrown into the dust bin of history. Bombing and killings of innocent Nigerians are so rife that people can no longer sleep with their two eyes close, even with the Nigerian army's renewed onslaught on banditry. The military has drastically reduced the ranks of the insurgents because they have taken the war to their camps.

### **Conclusion**

The poet's iconoclastic approach in his poetry is reflective of a writer who aims at correcting the anomaly bedeviling a debased society. The masses are at the mercy of these men of the underworld because the leaders who are supposed to be the vanguard of morality are bestriding the camps of terrorism and the people. The confidence the masses reposed on our leaders have also been systematically eroded. It is this lack of confidence that has led to the creation of security outfits like Amotekun, Egbesu Boys, Vigilante and Hunters and others in some parts of the country. The unified thematic exposition and structure of Oguejiofor's poems show his redemptive voice as agent of social change. The author's works do not necessarily draw emotional response from the people, but mobilizes the masses by sowing seed of reformation that must be fruitful in all fronts. In this sense, his poems find strength and validity in the theoretical core of social consciousness to Marxism.

### **Recommendation for policy directions**

It is recommended that more research be carried on not only Boko Haram insurgencies but banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery and trafficking in persons to authenticate and establish the

vision, nature and temperament of Nigerian poetry. This would be of immense benefits to scholars, readers and critics of African literature.

To ameliorate the suffering of the people, particularly the children, we recommend an all-inclusive intervention to address the needs of the vulnerable people in the war ravaged areas. These interventionist approach should include making immediate plan for the nutritional, educational, economics and health needs of the populace. Also, the security agencies should work assiduously with other agencies with sophisticated technology to nip the problem of insurgency in the bud. This will no doubt, restore peace and progress to the north eastern part of the country and the nation at large.

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