

Metaphors of Chaos: A Posthuman Appraisal of Violence in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry

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Abstract Recent developments such as the escalation of violence and terrorism around the globe projects man as having put himself in deep crisis. Humanism appears to be under serious threat as the traits of superior intelligence and moral rectitude which distinguish man from other animals seem not to matter any longer. In this article, I identify extreme violent acts as notably overlooked dimensions of posthuman crisis. Regarding their manifestation in poetry as posthuman metaphors of chaos, I discuss their deployment by some Nigerian poets in portraying the spate of violence and terrorism in Nigeria in recent times. Drawing theoretical inference from Posthumanism, the paper discusses the poems in the context of contemporary violent eruptions in Nigeria and how some poets have imaginatively recreated such bizarre socio-political occurrences. It regards these violent incidences as part of the emergent posthuman ethos that reflects a near global failure of human relationships--a kind of posthuman inhumanity.

Keywords Posthuman Inhumanity; Contemporary Nigerian Poetry; Electoral violence; Boko Haram Terrorism; Farmers/herders clashes

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Introduction

Violent conflicts have escalated in recent times around the globe. Nigeria is witnessing pockets of violent activities and ethnic/religion-based crises since the

return to civilian rule on May 29 1999 after many years of military misrule. As David and Manu (2015) observe, “Nigeria’s conflict problems became exacerbated with the recommencement of democratic rule in May 1999. Nigerian polity since this development have been experiencing various dimension(sic) of violent conflicts, and crimes ranging from intra-communal, inter-community, indigenes/settler conflicts, farmer/herdsmen conflicts, ethno-religious, militancy kidnapping, area boys/gang groups [...]” (5). According to them, contemporary Nigeria is fraught with increasing rate of violence among which are rise in inter-ethnic and religion-centered violence which have led to the emergence of virulent terrorist groups like Boko Haram which has terrorized North-eastern and North-central regions of Nigeria since 2009. These violent incidences have led to colossal loss of human lives and property. In the face of the foregoing, it is expedient to inquire the extent to which Nigerian writers; especially poets have reacted to these aberrational social situations.

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, a metaphor is “an expression, often found in literature that describes person or object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to that person or object.” It relates an object or a thing to another in a way that the sense realised from such comparison helps in manifesting meaning clearly. That is why Sanders agrees that “all theories of metaphor agree that it proceeds by relating one thing to another” (1). Metaphor is a veritable medium of expression especially in the literary domain where the high point is the application of imaginative reasoning and thinking. Such tendency warrants Lakoff and Johnson to see metaphoric use of language as the heart of most poetic engagements because it is “a novel or linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept” (3). In such circumstances, the knowledge of a thing or object is linked to another unrelated but familiar object. Metaphors of chaos as used in this paper encapsulates the variegated forms of imagery, symbols and language structures which Nigerian poets have applied to depict the various shades of social, political and economic upheavals that have characterized the Nigerian society in recent times. According to Orhero, poets writing under this seemingly ubiquitous expression, “contemporary Nigerian poetry,” “cover the writings of poets who started writing from the 1990s and 21st century poets” (16). This means that it is the contemporaneity or the currency of issues on which a poet writes, that determines the poet’s inclusion as a contemporary poet.

This article is structured into four segments. The introductory part foregrounds the work by giving an overview of the key ideas espoused in the paper. The second

segment first highlights the meaning of Posthumanism as a philosophy, after which it explains Posthuman Inhumanity, the literary framework applied in the study. Next is an exposition on some metaphoric representations of 'Posthuman Inhumanity' in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry. This is followed by a concluding segment. The poets whose works are discussed in this paper include Tanure Ojaide, Joe Ushie, Idris Amali, Richard Inya, Igba Ogbole, Muhammad Kaigama Alwali Kazir, Mohammed Auwal Ibrahim, Iquo Diana Abasi-Eke, Tusi Umanah, Success Akpojotor, Melody Thahila Kuku and Rex Mayo Ubini. The guiding parameters for selection are their artistic (poetic) craft, immediacy or currency of subject matter and direct relationship or link to any form of violence.

Conceptual Framework

Posthumanism is the main conceptual framework applied in this study with special reference to Posthuman Inhumanity. As noted by Ranisch, Ihab Hassan, a postmodern philosopher, coined the term "Post-humanism" in 1977 when he said that "[W]e need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism" (Qtd. in Ranisch, 2014 13). Hassan in the excerpt above forecasts that humanism may be coming to an end and it is being replaced by post-humanism. Posthumanism implies that there is "humanism" which is the "state of being human." In the words of Badmington,

the human being occupies a natural and eternal place at the very centre of things, where it is distinguished absolutely from machines, animals, and other inhuman entities, where it shares with other human beings a unique essence; where it is the origin of meaning and the sovereign subject of history; and where it behaves and believes according to something called 'human nature.' ('Posthumanism,' *Routledge Companion...* 374)

"Human nature" is characterised by humanism, a view which according to Jasen et al, implies "the idea of man as the unique being; that is 'the universalist posture of the idea of 'Man' as the alleged 'measure of all things'" (224). Man by this, is placed at the pedestal of noble deeds as well as in a position that is superior to other animals. But casting doubts on man's ability to retain the above human essences in recent decades, Susen in a most recent essay argues that:

The human has become a question mark, indicating that it has become an

increasingly contentious task to determine who and what counts—and by implication, who and what does not count—as ‘human.’ Just as one may be required to prove one’s ‘humanity’ when accessing a particular website by confirming that one is not a robot, one may be expected to present evidence of one’s humanity when confronted with a number of behavioural choices by validating that one’s decision making process are guided by cognitively sound and morally justifiable consideration. (1)

The underlining point in Susen’s statement is that the ability to undertake rational thinking and apply moral principles is the prime characteristic that differentiates humans from animals and machines. Man is thereby given the aura of human or humanism and this can be contrasted with posthuman or posthumanism. According to Ferrando, “posthumanism is a philosophy which provides a suitable way of departure to think in relational and multi-layered ways, expanding the focus to the non-human realm in post dualistic, post-hierarchical modes, thus allowing one to envision posthuman futures which will radically stretch the boundaries of human imagination” (30). It means a domain of knowledge through which various inquiries can be made on the human subject; its actions, essences and imaginative powers. It is a philosophy deployed in describing and discussing numerous “array of phenomena ranging from academic discipline and artistic movements to political advocacy campaigns and the development of commercial technologies” (Sapenko 244). Also “defined as post-human and as post-anthropocentrism” (Ferrando 29), posthumanism is a plethora of views that question the rationality behind the notion that humanity is the centre point of planetary existence as it has become increasingly difficult to determine what actually constitutes human. It “refers to a systematic attempt to challenge humanist assumptions underlying the construction of the ‘human’” (Susen 2), as it questions almost every aspect of the human entity which includes man’s relationship with other humans, other animals, other species and even some technological products like machines. As Hauskeller points out, “posthumanists generally refuse to see humans as a superior species in the natural order [or that which is] ontologically distinct from animals on the one hand, and machines on the other” (4). Agreeing with this, Braidotti (2013) states that posthumanist views “rest on the assumption of the historical decline of Humanism but goes further in exploring alternatives, without sinking into the rhetoric of the crises of Man” (37). Substantiating this in another paper, she avers that “the turn to post-humanism is a response to growing public awareness of fast-moving technological advances and also of contemporary political developments linked

to the limitations of economic globalization, the risks associated with the ‘war on terror’ and global security issues” (Braidotti 13). She relates posthumanism to series of ricocheting events in current global dispensation and it is from such perspective that we draw the theoretical principle of Posthuman Inhumanity that is applied in this paper.

The word “inhuman” means to exhibit characteristics detrimental to; not like or not related to human beings. As Chukhrov notes, “the concept of in-human presupposes alternative agencies, and presences parallel to human existence” (339). Inhuman exudes the meaning of “being contrary to or against human existence.” It “is that which escapes rationalization, that which has no meaning or reason for existence. It is just there-senseless, brute existence...regardless of whether organic or artificially produced” (Kolozya 200). The inhuman has no reasonable basis for its immanence; it is an action that betrays human motives and is bereft of conscionable rationale or lacks proper reasoning and explanation. “Posthuman Inhumanity” is an expression specifically generated for this paper to distinguish a kind of posthumanism that is entirely negative or inhumane. As a new framework generated to expand the general understanding of posthumanism as a critical endeavour, this paper projects the spate of violence consistently ravaging the world in the present times as forms of posthuman inhumanity. As negative posthuman acts, violent acts are manifestations that are beyond human rationalization as there are hardly no cogent or requited reasons to justify their eruption because they are not only senseless but portray humans as beasts and destroy the human essence.

This is in consonance with Braidotti’s exhortation that she takes “the posthuman predicament as an opportunity to empower the pursuit of alternative schemes of thought, knowledge and self-representation. The posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who, and what we are actually in the process of becoming” (12). Most discussions so far, on posthumanism, are dominated by scholars whose notions point to it as a positive development with little or no attempt made to highlight its negative dimensions such as violent acts and other inhuman machinations. This underscores our rationale for advancing the new conceptual framework of Posthuman Inhumanity. The motive is to expand both the understanding and repertoire of posthumanism by giving perhaps a new angle to its interpretation and analysis. Efforts in this paper are geared towards pursuing an ‘alternative scheme of thought’ that is characterized by ‘critical and creative thinking’ as suggested by Braidotti above. This new perspective, projects a new form of critical posthumanism which sees violence as an indisputable aspect of human existence and therefore should indubitably constitute an aspect of posthuman

discourse. This is hinged on the fact that it seems that the only language common to the globe at the moment is killing and destruction. Mbembe has this in mind when he asserts that “this new moment is one of global mobility. An important feature of the age of global mobility is that military operations and the exercise of the right to kill are no longer the sole monopoly of states, and the ‘regular army’ is no longer the unique modality of carrying out these functions” (31). Then illustrating this scenario with Africa, he states that:

Many African states can no longer claim a monopoly on violence and on the means of coercion within their territory. Nor can they claim a monopoly on territorial boundaries. Coercion itself has become a market commodity. Military manpower is bought and sold on a market in which the identity of suppliers and purchasers means almost nothing. Urban militias, private armies, armies of regional lords, private security firms, and state armies all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill. (32)

Also regarded as Posthuman inhumane, the new framework sees violent acts as part of posthuman indignities. This trend is a remarkable departure from the plethora of perspectives on posthumanism which view it ordinarily as forms of positive human development and technological-advancement. Rather, the sense in which posthumanism is considered in this paper is that which sees it as a negative aspect of human transformation.

By posthuman inhumanity, we mean that humans seem to be fast losing their once celebrated human essences and instincts. They seem to have gotten to a situation where they now act like beasts, destroying, devouring, maiming and killing one another with gusto. Posthuman inhumanity, as used in this paper, portrays the crises that are at the centre of all social and political upheavals ricocheting around the globe at the moment. This is in line with Mambrol’s observation that “posthuman, by way of contrast, emerges from a recognition that ‘Man’ is not the privileged and protected centre, because humans are no longer and perhaps never were—utterly distinct from animals, machines, and other forms of the ‘inhuman [...]’” (1). This indicates a situation where humans seem utterly incapable of controlling their fate or working harmoniously towards a peaceful, purposeful, prosperous and violent-free world. Such critical discussion based on posthuman inhumanity is a critical foray into the situation where humans seem to have outgrown the natural human essences and have therefore embraced bestial and animalistic thoughts and tendencies in form of violent behaviours. In a bid to resolve the puzzle that has arisen from current

global dispensation where humans are eliciting behaviours that are bereft of seminal human attributes, thinking and considerations, posthuman inhumanity as deployed in this essay, spearheads the quest to interrogate the ways some Nigerian poets have portrayed some posthuman ethos like acts of violence, in their works. It is a hermeneutic analysis of posthuman metaphors of violence as portrayed in the works of some contemporary Nigerian poets. By this, it examines the ways these poets have portrayed humans as those behaving as if they have crossed the Rubicon of the human epoch into a post human era. Applied in this form, the essay identifies some marked breakdown in human relationships in Nigeria and the macabre incidents and events they have triggered as they are artistically captured by some Nigerian poets.

Posthuman Metaphors of Chaos in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry

The artistic recreation and ingenious portrayal of violent incidences that reflect posthuman inhumanity in poetry is what this paper regards as posthuman metaphors of chaos. They involve the application of imagistic emblems and linguistic repertoires that are redolent with violent human orchestrations. One notable Nigerian poet who has been quite consistent and productive in deploying poetry to explore the current vagaries of contemporary Nigerian society is Joe Ushie. In his most recent poetry collection, *Yawns and Belches* (2018) that is strongly symbolic of the Nigerian society, he portrays electoral violence which has been a negative feature of elections and electioneering in Nigeria. In a poem entitled “Ballot Season,” Ushie recreates the violent scenarios that dominate political activities in Nigeria.

Now is our harvest season, the ballot season
 When the air-bound bird barges into us who
 Yawn our yearnings all-ways below the cloud
 In this season of return to roots, of re-membling. (*Yawns* 28)

In the poem, Ushie’s poet personae recounts the celebratory mood of some electorates who ‘ballot season’ has offered a one-time opportunity to retaliate the neglect of “a self-insulated” politician who like “the air-bound bird” would now stoop and swoop on them to obtain votes. To repay the politician for his heart-wrenching neglect, which to them is a kind of violence, the electorates prepare to take violent actions against him for they regard the politician’s misrepresentation as an affront. They rally round to unleash a kind of violence on him:

This is the time to give the king a sharp cut on the head
 Now that his bushy head is in the barber's grip
 Before he soars back into oblivion, high above the clouds
 [...]

When will we realize that in our vote is our trap, and in our
 Voice the sling to make the air-bound bird earth bound. (*Yawns...* 28)

The whole poem is structured with violent imagery and coercive diction. The politician has been inhuman to the electorates by absconding since they voted for him and now that another round of electioneering has come, he has come to seek for their votes again, and to repay him, the people are spoiling for revenge. Metaphorically portrayed as a "king," the politician is poised to be given a cut on the head, since his bushy head is in the electorate's grip. One is forced to conjure the picture of a king who is forcefully held down to be given a hair cut or an air-bound bird which has been entrapped by votes amassed to forcefully bring it earth-bound.

Similarly, another poet who deploys metaphors of disorder to depict the vestiges of human cantankerousness and animalistic violence that has infiltrated Nigeria's social fabric in recent times is Richard Inya. Regarded as one of the strong voices that are coming up in the Nigeria's literary firmament, Inya in his collection *Katakata* (2013) which is onomatopoeic of discordance, upheaval, mayhem and fracas illustrates what Rik Bertrand refers to as "the turmoil in a nation and the struggles endured by the people" (*Katakata* 3). In the short eponymous opening poem with the title "*Katakata* (i)," the poet personae paints a sombre picture of a weak and poor mother whose multitude of children are about to shoot to death.

In our benevolent home
 Lies our graceful mother
 On a mat of gun-powder
 Her one hundred and seventy million
 Or more or less children
 Train nozzles of machine-guns
 To her head, speaking strange words;
 The tongues they once spoke
 That burnt part of her gown,
 Leaving our mother half-naked.
 Would you not join to save her?
 Now, her lifeline is a precarious lot. (*Katakata*, 13)

The tempo in the poem is palpable while the imagery is that of uncaring attitude, war and despoliation. The shambolic, precarious, half-naked, graceful mother in the poem above is metaphorical of Nigeria with her approximately one hundred and seventy million people who through their numerous discordant activities such as militancy, insurgency, terrorism, violent agitations, electoral, ethnic and religious violence, are aiming the nozzles of their machine-guns on her head, ready to blow it off, thus disintegrating the nation. The poet personae further recalls that a part of the gown worn by this mother of trigger-happy children had once been burnt by 'the tongues' the children spoke. This reminds one of the Nigeria-Biafra War fought from 1967 to 1970, which is seriously believed to have been caused by ethnic mistrust among Nigerians. The life of Nigeria as a nation is fraught with so many upheavals (negative posthuman behaviours) and that is why the poet also remarks that the woman in the poem is lying on a mat of gun-powder; meaning that the violence can degenerate into a full blown war if nothing is done to abate it.

Though, the above poem is full of posthuman violent imagery, they cannot be compared to the ones in another poem "Electoral Fire," where posthuman act of electoral violence is frontally reflected. In the poem, Inya through a poet personae, who is afraid of electoral violence recounts a typical electoral violent scene witnessed:

Mad scattering and escape
 In score of directions
 Inciting and scathing talks
 Blow electoral fumes
 Fanning reactionary roles
 Heads roll, blood flow
 Glass domes come down
 Charred buildings and cars
 Stand and stare, as bodies
 Litter the main streets
 With undying fire... (*Katakata* 31)

Nigeria's electoral season is a volatile moment when many forms of violence are perpetrated with blood freely flowing on the streets and many people killed or maimed. It is as if during elections, Nigerians throw their humanity to the winds and pick the inhuman elements to go about their electioneering. This makes the elections

to be quite violent, thus depicting so much negative posthuman traits.

Nigerian poets have also reacted in various ways to the issue of violent extremism which has become a recurring manifestation of the posthuman era. Chief among them is Idris Amali, who in his poem “Peace Forgotten,” looks at the world as a terror-infested domain where violence is rising exponentially and crisis and physical combats are celebrated instead of being condemned:

As our world has harvested peace forgotten
And we pride our clenched fists
And fibrous muscles
With bold faces (*Back Again* 22)

Having reaped forgotten peace, which invariably translates to violence, people have embraced violence—“And as cannons of threats and rhetorics transform/Into cannons of smoke and fireworks at dusk/Silent destruction takes its stead/With men maddened by actions of war” (*Back Again...22*). However, amidst this frenzy of crises, Amali’s poet speaker makes a startling observation:

I saw no one near nor afar
To direct the hose of fountain
Against engulfing flames
Except children
Children who know no roots and rhythms of war
Except to be costumed
In costly robes of war:
Inflated wombs (*Back Again* 22)

The mental picture evoked in the lines above is both palpable and horrific. The violence— “engulfing flames,” visited on the people is so enormous and no attempt is made to douse it— “direct the hose of fountain,” rather children are portrayed as those exacerbating the crises by actively participating in it by becoming willing tools in the hands of those stoking the war. The poet in the lines alludes to the sinister practice of recruiting children as suicide-bombers-“costumed in costly robes of war.” From the recruitment of child-terrorists, Amali’s poet speaker in another poem “Pounding Gwange (Maiduguri) to Rubbish” gives an eye-witness account of a typical terrorist attack in Maiduguri neighbourhood. Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, north-eastern Nigeria, is the epicentre of Boko Haram terrorism in

Nigeria. Painting a picture of a pathetic melee, the poet speaker recounts: “We know something is in the offing/And the sound comes in / Shaking the entire earth on which we stand /...Convoy of cars with red hazard lights / Head for our stand.... / Now we can venture out of our doors / To listen to this distant music of gun battles” (*Effega* 62). Giving a cinematographic narration of the attack, the poet speaker goes on:

The last one sounds like cluster bombs
 The next kaka ko! Kaka kaka gbuum!
 The next gbuum!
 [...]
 Rumours of vehicular movements take over
 And rumours of war and products
 Of Kpa! Kpa! Kpa!
 Guum! and gbuum!
 As the city rose in fear (*Effega* 63).

This is a cinematographic invocation of the various sounds perceived during a terrorist attack: from the cracking of guns to the shelling of bombs and mortars. Compare it with this near semblance of thought in this poetic scene created by Mohammed Auwal Ibrahim in his poem “In Borno” where he recounts the horrible and harrowing experiences people in Borno state grapple with in the hands of insurgents:

Like snake,
 We rolled on our stomachs
 To escape from running bullets
 Above our heads
 From cockcrow to sunset.
 ...
 Like ball
 Men heads fell rolling on ground
 Kissing sand
 In those days.
 Like water
 Blood is seen in streets
 House by house

Making many orphans

Widows and childless (*ANA Review 2019* 115)

one is forced to wonder whether they are still human beings or beasts in human physique.

The rise of Boko Haram insurgents is not traceable to any particular cause but rather it is a result of the internal political, social, economic and to some extent religious factors (Akokegh 47). However, Babalola quotes Chothia (2012) to have said that “Ustaz Mohamed Yusuf, a charismatic Muslim cleric, founded Boko Haram in 2002 in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno state in north-eastern Nigeria and that the sect’s philosophy is rooted in the practice of orthodox Islam, and the group’s official name in Arabic, *Jama’atu Ahlissanah lidda’awati wal Jihad* translates to ‘people committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s teachings and Jihad’” (15).

The emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria in 2009 introduced a terrorist dimension to the Nigerian criminal space as series of bombings, raids and kidnapping have been carried out by the sect. Boko Haram is an Islamic movement which strongly opposes man-made laws but seeks to abolish the secular system of government and establish Sharia Law in Nigeria. The movement whose name in Hausa is “Boko Haram” translates as “Western education is sacrilege or sin.” The ideology of the sect is based on its total hatred for western concepts, structures, education and ideals thus Boko Haram which means that western education is forbidden. The philosophy of the sect which is rooted in orthodox Islam abhors Western education and the civil service (Oviasogie 25). In July 26 2009, Boko Haram members attacked and destroyed Dutsen Tanshi police station in Bauchi. Over the next four days, they launched attacks in the town of Maiduguri, Lamisulu and Gamboru where government establishments like prisons, police stations and barracks, primary schools and Directorate of Employment offices in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa states were destroyed (Forest 62). The Nigeria Army was deployed to quell this wind of insurrection. This led to the arrest of many members of the Boko Haram sect. Mohammed Yusuf, their leader and his father in-law, Baa Fugu were among those arrested and paraded in humiliating fashion outside the police station. As Forest further notes:

Yusuf along with his father in-law Baa Fugu and other sect members—were publicly executed on 30 July 2009 outside the police station in Maiduguri. Police claimed that they died after an intense gun battle with officers on duty, but video clips that later emerged showed that they were executed in cold blood. This alleged act of extra-judicial killing of their leader and his father-in-law highly incensed and radicalized the sect. This brief period marked a

turning point for Boko Haram, whose new leaders—Imam Shekau considered as the spiritual leader and operational commander with Kabiru Sokoto and Sheik Abu Muhammed made the sect to be more radical and extremist.... the death of Yusuf served to amplify pre-existing animosities towards government. (63-64)

With this, the sect became quite ruthless and it is not only a militant group but the most devastating and ruthless in Nigeria's history. (Aro 1). Members of the sect have been quite virulent and vicious in their attacks and they have inflicted and keep inflicting heavy human and material damage on the Nigerian state.

In a poem entitled "Boko Haram," Melody Tahila Kuku describes the heart-rending aftermath of Boko Haram's raids which are becoming quite a regular occurrence:

Blood, fresh red blood
 Everyday I smell it.
 Foul stench of humans
 Slaughtered like cattles (sic)
 And we accept it
 It's part of our lives now,
 What can we do?
 I hear men say.
 (<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/book-haram/1>)

To Nigerians, Boko Haram is an infectious curse, spreading death all over the country, that is why the poet persona is poisoning to fight back to destroy the terrorists. "Let my blood match their blood,/My anger, theirs,/My zeal for my country/With their zeal for madness" ("Boko Haram," 3). The persona sues for retaliation and summons for equal force to neutralize the destructive powers of Boko Haram. In another poem "Boko Haram Tufiakwa!," Rex Mayor Ubini invokes acerbic curses on Boko Haram, to show how it is manifestly detested and abhorred:

Let no snail rent you
 A shell for hide out
 Till you bring back our maidens!
 Let no ant-hill rent you
 A cave for hide out

Till you bring back our maidens!

(<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/book-haram/> 1)

The poet prays that no creature should assist Boko Haram with a hiding place until the group returns the maidens. The ‘maidens’ here is an allusion to ‘Chibok Girls.’ As Omilusi explains, “in [April] 2014, no fewer than 276 schoolgirls were abducted in Borno [state] by the Boko Haram sect that has ravaged the region since 2009. The audacious kidnapping brought the insurgency to world attention, triggering global outrage that galvanised support from many local and international actors. The failure of Nigeria’s former government to act to free the girls sparked a global Bring Back Our Girls movement” (1). Though some of the girls were later released by the insurgents, some are still being held captives by the insurgents till date and the poet’s voice in the poem invokes virulent curses to visit Boko Haram unless it releases the abducted maidens. These are marked acts of man’s inhumanity to man; acts depicting posthuman inhumanity.

The abduction of Chibok Girls is central in the discourse about the Boko Haram terrorism in north-eastern Nigeria as it marked the peak of their terroristic machinations. Though the incident attracted global attention it constitutes the preoccupation of some poets in Nigeria. In a poem “Colours from Chibok,” Success Akpojotor sees the carting away of young vibrant school girls by the Boko Haram terrorists as the zenith of their affront on the Nigerian state. Couching her ideas in highly symbolic and metaphoric lines, the poet chronicles the dastardly action thus:

Their maroon bowl reached its brim,
filled with black haemoglobin
scooped from the red-letter Nyanya ritual
and carting away into the green Sambisa
two-ten white Chibok virgins...

(<http://www.poetsreadingnews.com2017/09/colours-from-chibok-poetry-success-akpojotor/> 1)

The first line “Their maroon bowl reached its brim” refers to the atrocities of the Boko Haram sect. It sees it as having reached its highest point with the abduction of the Chibok girls—“the Chibok virgins.” Before then, they had detonated a suicide bomb in a motor-park in Nyanya, a town at the outskirts of Abuja which maimed and killed so many people. The poet metaphorically refers to this inhuman act as the ‘red-letter Nyanya ritual’. Furthermore, suicide bombing of civilians is a regular

fighting tactics of the Boko Haram terrorists, so it has become their ritual. The ‘two-ten white Chibok virgins’ depict the number that was abducted. The same line of thought is shared by Iquo Diana Abasi Eke in her poem “Centenary Condolences” where she mourns for Nigeria as the country celebrates the hundred years of the amalgamation of its northern and southern protectorates by the colonialists in 1914. Amidst the rendition of this threnody, she infuses the unpalatable tale of the Chibok Girls’ debacle:

A thousand tears for your daughters,
never to return whole; or sane

A hundred tears for dusk time games

Never again to be enjoyed

After the dance into captivity....

(<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.legit.ng/822128-chaos-herdsmen-attack-imo-enugu-still-bleeding-poets-react-with-condolences.html> 1)

She mourns the Chibok girls who will no more return as virgins as they left, nor will they participate in evening games as they used to observe in their dormitories, having danced into captivity—been abducted. The same trend of thought is expressed by Martin Akpan in the poem “Invaded Innocence” where he shows a kind of frantic revulsion for the innocence of the Chibok girls which were squelched by the insurgents: “Ripped, raped, and whacked:/You have lost your virginity;/ Your innocence is forever gone,/O haemorrhaging Chibok” (*ANA Review*, 2019 84). However, another poet, Muhammad Kaigama Auwal Kazir gives a graphic imaginative account of the cruel suddenness of the Chibok abduction:

In your night gowns, in your monthly flows

You left your beds untouched, the taps running

Your dinner uneaten, your exams unfinished

(“Chibok 269” *ANA Review*, 2018 59)

The pictorial imagery (metaphors) in the lines are exceedingly heart-rending and touching. They explain the depth of the unforeseen disruption which became the fate of the Chibok girls. It takes only the inhuman to perpetrate such uncanny act of swooping at some innocent school girls and abducting them. From the above, none of the schoolgirls ever envisaged that their life would take such a dangerously circuitous turn that evening. As reports had it, they were all going about their normal

duties in their dormitories when Boko Haram insurgents invaded their school and forcefully kidnapped them.

A dimension of posthuman inhumanity or bestial acts of violence that has also captured the attention of Nigerian poets is the clashes between Fulani herdsmen and native farmers. The Fulani are pastoralists whose ancestral home is traceable to Futa Toro in Senegal. They usually live a nomadic life, herding their “cattle, goats and sheep across the dry hinterland of their domain, keeping somewhat separate from the local agricultural populations” (Anter 1). The Fulani has a history of political and religious conquest and this has enthroned them as the ruling class in most parts of northern Nigeria. Most Fulani live a pastoral life; they traverse several villages in Nigeria in search of greener pastures for their cattle, sheep and goats. There is the elite Fulani who most times, are the real owners of the livestock that the nomadic Fulani rear across different regions of the country. In recent times, the crises between farmers and the Fulani herdsmen have taken a frightening dimension as fighting erupts incessantly in various parts of Nigeria with many lives lost and property destroyed. In a report on *The New York Times* on the crises, Akinwotu writes: “Many parts of the country have been affected by the conflicts, including in the north, where Muslims constitute most of the farmers. But much of the recent surge in violence has taken place in the Middle Belt, where the herders are typically ethnic Fulani and Muslim, and the farmers are mostly Christians” (1). This has given an ethnic and religious twist to the conflict, thereby creating much tension in the land.

Among the poets who have spared some thoughts for the Herdsmen/Farmers conflict is Tanure Ojaide. In his poem entitled “Herdsmen” a mother puts a call across to her son that their community is under siege by herdsmen. The poet’s choice of words is unmistakably indicative of the son’s vile-hatred for the herdsmen who he refers to as “butcher herdsmen.” And heeding the mother’s call, he reels out some counter measures the community will take to confront the menace:

When blood overflows the land
 The youths battle the intruders
 No group has monopoly of slaughtering
 let the attacked shoot at their attackers!
 [...]
 Reinforce the spirited youths of the land
 to roast the herdsmen and their cows! (*The Questioner* 155)

The excerpt above is full of violent metaphors of attack: “blood overflows the land,” “youths battle the intruders,” “monopoly of slaughtering” “shoot at their attackers,” “reinforce the spirited youth,” “to roast the herdsmen....” Such attitude has continuously fuelled the fires of the crises for as soon as they “roast the herdsmen and their cows,” other herdsmen will avenge their death and the circle of killing and destruction continues.

The same thing applies to Richard Inya who reflecting on herdsmen/farmers clashes in a poem entitled “Mass Burial,” gives a panoramic portrayal of the situation where Nigerians are witnessing incessant moments of mass burial occasioned by farmers/herdsmen clashes. The poem begins with a stanza that depicts a scene of numerous deaths that is causing massive sorrowing and weeping.

A rain of nails
Falls on the coffins
Of the fallen
And we are vessels
Sailing on a sea of tears. (*This is not a Poem* 61)

So many imagistic materials are used to objectify the assuaging number of deaths and the accompanying spasm of weeping. From the “rain of nails” that “fall on coffins” to “vessels sailing on a sea of tears” the magnitude of death and mourning is highly escalated. Then the reason for the mourning and weeping is crafted in lines that are effervescently luminous in thoughts and imagery:

Cows are trains
Who stand in their way?
Cows swallow souls
And graze wildly on graveyards. (*This is not a Poem* 62)

The metaphor of cows turning to trains that crush human lives is not only vivid but astonishing; the same thing applies to their transformation into destructive giants that whack human souls. Then the sense of cows grazing “wildly on graveyards” signifies a kind of irreverent destructive frenzy with which the killings are carried out. Cows in this instance is symbolic of their herders who have gone wild and are destroying anything that stands on their way especially farmers who oppose the wanton destruction of their crops by their cattle.

Conclusion

From the discussions so far, it is evident that the spirit of posthuman inhumanity manifested in the form of metaphors of chaos largely pervades most contemporary Nigerian poetic engagements. In such instances, humans are clearly portrayed as destroyers of the lives of other fellow human beings, thus, strengthening the position of post-human analysts that in the modern world, man seems to have been divested of his human ethos. From the artistic representations of the violence that manifests during electioneering and ballot casting to that which periodically erupts among various ethnic nationalities, from the violence orchestrated by terrorists and extremist groups like Boko Haram to those sparked-off by clashes between armed herdsmen and farmers. The portrayal of violent occurrences in recent Nigerian poetic engagements through the deployment of metaphors of force and disorder as discussed in this paper, indicates that humans may have passed the “human era” and are now living in an “after-human”—posthuman times, where most of their thoughts, decision and actions are no longer controlled by sound and morally justifiable judgments. The paper therefore gives new meaning to the understanding of posthumanism by identifying extreme violent acts as veritable negative dimensions of posthuman ethos. It sees those exhibitions of violent machinations as forms of posthuman indignities. Regarding forceful behavioural manifestations as the bane of the modern man, the paper identifies the stark portrayal of posthuman inhumanity by Nigerian poets, through glowing metaphors of chaos, as a warning that humanity may be heading to a state of self-destruct or utter annihilation unless something drastic is done!

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