

A STYLO-LINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION OF INSECURITY IN IDRIS AMALI'S *TEARS OF DESERT WAR*

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Abstract

There are studies on the causes of and remedies to the menace of insecurity in Nigeria from sociological, political, economic, religious and cultural points of view. However, there is inadequate information on linguistic analysis of literary texts that have been used to describe insecurity. This study examines the linguistic indices selected by Idris Amali to recount insecurity in his poem *Tears of desert war*. The paper adopts an eclectic or integrative approach for analysis. Findings show that, at the graphological level, capitalization is used for some common nouns to depict their esteemed value. The question mark and the comma are omitted in some places in the poem to reiterate the haste with which the poet pens down the narrative and to foreshadow the dejection the account produces in the bard. Simple diction comprehensible to the average reader marks the piece. Besides, some personal pronouns are deployed to reiterate the authenticity of the narrative, to identify the poet with the natives of the region and to depict the adoration of some agricultural yields of certain places in Maiduguri. Tropes used to lace the poem add to the elevation and aesthetics of the language of the work. The historic present is used to establish the immediacy and actuality of the narrative while sparse use of the past tense points to the historicity of the desert war and indicates the time of the commencement of the war. Furthermore, the use of the phrase, clause and simple sentence to recount the desert war entrenches brevity of the language of

poetry. The paper posits two forms of insecurity in the poem namely Boko Haram insurgency and banditry, while the executors of the war are Boko Haram insurgents and bandits. The aftermaths of the desert war are decimation of humans, economic animals and farm yields; homelessness, abandonment of farming and animal husbandry, looting and unending tears.

Keywords: insecurity, *Tears of desert war*, book haram, brigandage, decimation

Introduction

Peace is a necessary prerequisite for the thriving of individuals and the development of a nation. An individual or a nation cannot actualize their full potentials where there is truncation and or absence of peace. Nigeria has not realized her potentialities economically, politically, socially and otherwise consequent upon her leadership and security challenge. Ineffective leadership has been an undoing of Nigeria, which in turn, has impacted negatively on other spheres of the nation's national life. Inefficient and ineffective leadership has accounted for all the woes befalling this country, insecurity inclusive. In the past, all and sundry could go to any nook and cranny of the country without fear or molestation, be it day or night. However, in the present, free movement of people, goods and services is being hampered and curtailed due to insecurity bedevilling the country. Nigerian peoples are becoming suspicious and skeptical of one another. Of course, in a multicultural and multi-linguistic society like Nigeria, people are bound to uphold differing worldviews, practices and convictions; bad governance and poor leadership, however, have not helped the situation. The political elite holds critical issues of national interest with levity, hence the deteriorating and aggravating development of many all-important matters – insecurity inclusive. Nigeria is presently grappling with insecurity owing to the lackadaisical attitude of the leadership on

the matter. The earliest form of insecurity prevalent was communal fracas over land and borders, followed by herders-farmers' conflicts. Religious crises of the 1980s to the 2000s also added to the insecurity impasse in the nation. Boko Haram insurgency which originated in Maiduguri axis in the early 2000s before diffusing to the North-eastern part of the country, from where the menace "crept" to some other parts of Nigeria, is still lingering. Militancy of the Niger Delta lends credence to the insecurity challenge until the then President Musa Yar'Adua granted amnesty to the militants, which resulted in serenity in the region. Added to the forms of insecurity mentioned above is banditry bred in some parts of North-west Nigeria a few years ago; it has also "swum" to all the regions of the country; the mayhem is still in vogue till now (2022). Abduction for ransom started in the Niger Delta during the militancy of the region: the catastrophe has spread to every part of the country and the menace is ongoing at the present. Abduction for ritual killing – initiated in the South-east and South-west of the country - is being practiced unabated. These forms of insecurity, to which no lasting solution has been proffered, are eroding the confidence of average Nigerians in their political leadership.

Due to the overwhelming widespread of insecurity in the nation, Nigerians have not ceased discussing the mayhem in all spheres of life with the objective of curtailing and overcoming the challenge. Discussions on same pervade the media, religious centres, academia, to mention but a few. Academics from various disciplines – sciences, social sciences and humanities – contribute their quota in different fora such as conferences, workshops, seminars and in research - so as to unravel the fuel of the challenge, as well as to find a permanent solution to the monster. This paper is set to elucidate the linguistic features Idris Amali has chosen to recount insecurity in his poem, *Tears of desert war*, and

to unmask the executors, as well as the impact of the war in Maiduguri and its surrounding towns and villages – the cradle of Boko Haram sect.

Intellectual Antecedents in Insecurity in Nigeria

There have been studies on insecurity in Nigeria. For example, Salawu (2010) considers ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. He identifies oppression, allegation of neglect, domination, victimization, nepotism and bigotry, as well as bad governance as part of the causes of conflicts in the nation. The study proposes conflict prevention as a major solution to conflicts. According to the paper, conflict prevention can be achieved through (i) “the provision of adequate and effective security in each state that should be able to respond promptly to any insurgence of ethno-religious crisis anywhere at any time” (p.351); (ii) strengthening of existing Public Complaint Bureau; and that, (iii) “government should be pluralistic, representative, and just in their treatment of Nigerian citizens” (p.352).

Udoh (2012) studies political, religious and cultural implications of insecurity in Nigeria. The paper enumerates porous borders, proliferation of arms and ammunition, illegal armed groups, oil bunkering, labour activism, militancy, unemployment, religious fanaticism/extremism and ethnic violence as some of the causes of insecurity in the country. The study submits that political instability, discontent with the national political system, desecration of religious/worship centres, the spread of fake faiths and unwholesome religious practices, ethnic prejudice and distrust are among the implications of insecurity in the country. It is recommended that job creation, provision of effective legal framework, dispensation of justice, provision of the basic needs of the citizenry, appropriate use of intelligence network, strengthening of the economy, caution in the use of force

and good governance are pertinent in curtailing insecurity in Nigeria.

Adegbami (2013) examines insecurity as a threat to human existence and economic development in Nigeria. The study itemizes political/power shift, bad leadership, unemployment, job racketeering, poverty, poor infrastructure, high level of illiteracy, social dislocation, breakdown of social values, ineffectiveness and inefficiency in security agents as the causes of insecurity in the country. On the other hand, loss of human and material resources, fear, collapse and destruction of health care system, displacement, deprivation of basic needs, inadequate supply of raw materials to industries, destruction of business facilities, and reduction in the production of petroleum have been listed in the study as the implications of insecurity in the nation. The paper suggests inter-ethnic dialogue as the remedy for Nigeria's insecurity.

Omede and Omede's (2015) study deals with terrorism as a major source of insecurity in Nigeria. The paper recommends inculcation of moral education, values and religious education as the means of overcoming insecurity.

Ndubuisi-Okolo and Aniguogu's (2015) study looks at the implications of insecurity on industrialization and sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper enumerates political quagmire, leadership/power tussle, poverty, weak security system, governance failure, among many others, as the causes of insecurity in this nation. Hence, the research study suggests abolition of bribery and corruption, entrenchment of justice, employment creation, overhaul of security apparatus, as well as good governance as some of the ways to get rid of insecurity in Nigeria.

Alagbe and Adigun (2016) have examined Boko Haram insurgency in Idris Amali's poem, *Pounding Gwange (Maiduguri) to rubbles* from a linguistic perspective. The study posits that fear,

frustration, arson and death, are the thematic concerns of the poem, while rhetorical devices such as metaphor, amplification, personification, euphemism, onomatopoeia and hyperbole, among others, are deployed by the poet “to serve as palliative measures to establish and cement the aesthetical value of the piece as well as make the perusal more appealing” (p.97).

Zubairu (2020) considers the causes of the rising insecurity to be poverty, joblessness, elite exploitation of ethnic and religious differences, corruption, weak security system, porous border, marginalization and inequalities, poor leadership, and bad governance. To eradicate insecurity in the country, the paper suggests community policing, vibrant economy, improvement in security apparatus, improved standard of living, ban on political thuggery, and good governance as prime remedies. Apart from Alagbe and Adigun’s study, most known studies on insecurity are from sociological, economic, political, religious and cultural perspectives; there is inadequate information on insecurity based on text analysis. This present study aims at analyzing insecurity in Amali’s poem, *Tears of desert war*, a poem in and the title of the 2020 poetry collection of the poet. The paper considers the linguistic indices the poet-persona has selected in recounting insecurity in the poem.

Research Methodology/Theoretical Consideration

Content analysis of Idris Amali’s *Tears of desert war* serves as the corpus for this study. The features considered are randomly selected from the text while various linguistic tools are used for analysis. The theoretical consideration deployed for this study is eclectic or integrative approach. Eclectic approach is an admixture of methods and theories used for analysis especially for a study comprising multi-various levels of description. This approach is relevant to the present study in that the investigation covers layers or domains of language description which a tool or

theory may be incapable of handling. Systemic functional linguistics which deals with the functional use of language in a text or discourse is deployed in this study to unravel the functional use of punctuation marks and some pronominals in the poem. Classical grammar is used in this investigation to analyze some salient syntactic features considered in the poem. Not only that, a critical look at the lexical choice of the poet is crucial to the understanding of the executors and the impact of the desert war. Elocution, a division of rhetoric, is found useful in studying the tropes the poet employs to entrench the aesthetics of the narrative, consequently, making the reading of the poem a delightful exercise despite the tragic account it narrates.

A Synopsis of the Poem

Amali's Tears of desert war is a one hundred and thirty-six-line poem; it is further divided into eight sections. Apart from section three (with three stanzas) and seven (having only one stanza), the remaining sections comprise two stanzas each. In the first section, the poet debunks the claim of the political elite for being in control of the desert war by stating that the reader/citizenry should believe only “on the spot live report” of “the vigilante group that went to war” and “faced the war bare handed” (lines 1-4). He also extols “Gamboru Ngala noted land of cows . . . rich in animal husbandry” (lines 11-13), but is abandoned by the army consequent upon obsolete weapons, hence, the place is overrun in the desert war. In the second section, the poet lauds Dikwa for its outstanding quality of rice “[t]hat feeds the mouth of the rich and poor” (line 25); however, the economic produce is decimated in the infernos ignited by the bandits: this great loss culminates in a harvest of tears of desert war (line 37). The poet, moreover, praises Kalabalge, Pulka, Gulumba and Kumshe, noted for unequalled yields in *igbingbli* lily corn, sorghum and millet in section three of the poem. Conversely, the “endless war of

brigandage” (line 54) terminates the production of these treasured farm yields. Section four captures the admiration of “Marte new or old the home of wheat *la-ama*” (lines 56 & 57) where “thousands of harvesters with thousands of sickles” (line 61) bring in bumper harvest with the aid of local musicians entertaining them, and thus boost their morale for increased productivity while harvesting. Notwithstanding, the production as well as the harvest with its pomp is halted by “homemade saboteurs” (line 68) who bring “fires of war” that “engulf fields” (line 70) in the area, thereby, “springing tears of desert war.” (line 71)

The fifth section recounts “Kawuri and Soye homes of Beans and Millet” where “. . . men and huge bulls in their thousands [e]agerly ploughing black soil of great harvest” (line 72-74) and which “[d]eliver their hopefuls year in and year out to satisfy [t]heir teaming millions across the land and beyond the sea” (lines 80 & 81). Nonetheless, “invaders came as locust to devour the fields” (line 83), resulting in a harvest of tears of war (line 84). Banki and Gulumba, held in high esteem for the production of cattle, guinea corn, millet and rice, are highly adored in section six of the poem. Nevertheless, Banki is deserted by herders due to the invasion of the place by the invaders who overrun the area, “leaving behind a harvest of tears of Lamentations” (line 103). Gwoza, renowned for her “quality beans, millet and maize” (line 112) is not spared in that her farm yields are also engulfed in Boko Haram infernos (line 117), according to the seventh section of the poem. The first stanza of section eight gives account of the attack of Sabon Gari (Hyembula), Liman, Kara, Gulak, Michika and Bazza, where cocoa yams, maize, sugar cane, rice, groundnut and millet are massively grown. The second stanza of section eight - the last stanza of the poem - reveals the poet calling on others in the places affected by the war to come together, and along with him, put to

words the contents of their heavy and sorrowful hearts without giving in to despondency while “awaiting hopeful days of messiah of our dreams” (line 135). Amali ends the poem by giving a ray of hope on the emergence of a messiah – a divine or human agent of deliverance who will actualize their dreams and aspirations.

Analysis, Discussion and Findings

Graphological Features in the Poem

The graphological devices considered in this study are capitalization and punctuation marks.

(i) Capitalization

Capitalization is an orthographic feature of capturing a word, some words or a text or part of a text in capital letters. Capitalization is worthy of mentioning in the poem. The commencement of each line is done in the capital letter, whether the line is introduced by a content or function/grammatical word. This shows the primacy the poet attaches to each line of the poem as being crucial and contributory to the overall message of the poetic piece. It is worthy of note to state that the poet uses the capital letter to introduce some common nouns as if they are proper nouns; such words are agricultural products highly prized in some environs of Maiduguri. Though the capitalization is a deviation from the norm, this is done to buttress their surpassing value in those locations compared with the same products of other places in the same area. Note the cases of such capitalization in the poem.

Kawuri and Soye homes of Beans and Millet (line 72)

Banki and Gulumba of Cattle, Gunea [sic] Corn, Millet, Rice fame (line 85)

I pride my eyes with great farmers whose bent backs

Against humiliating Suns spring huge produce of;

Cocoa Yams, Maize, Sugar Cane, Rice, Groundnut and Millet (lines 122-124)

(Underline for emphasis is ours)

The poet uses the capital letter for the introduction of these agricultural products of the afore-mentioned places as if they are proper nouns to reiterate their “superiority” over the same products of other places. Via the capital letters, the poet shows his adoration for these yields from Kawuri, Soye, Banki, Gulumba, Sabon Gari, Liman Kara and Gulak.

Another unconventional deployment of the capital letter and unusual pluralization is found in line 123 of the poem which says:

Against humiliating Suns spring huge produce of; (line 123)

The capital letter is employed to introduce “Suns” as if it is a proper noun. This is to depict the great intensity of the sun in Sabon Gari, Liman Kara and Gulak, yet, the places have not failed to produce bumper harvest in Cocoa Yam, Maize, Sugar Cane, Rice, Groundnut and Millet. The pluralization of sun to have “Suns” is also worthy of attention. The poet pluralizes sun as if there are many of them, but in essence, he means the scorching nature of sun in the area. As such, the capitalization and pluralization of “sun” implies the acute intensity of the sun in that axis.

Omission of Punctuation Marks

Punctuation marks are symbols used in a written discourse to facilitate meaning. Without them, a written text loses its structure and semantic force. It is customary to affix a question mark to an interrogative statement in a written text – this is conformity to the norm. Conversely, a stylistic index that marks *Tears of desert war* is the omission of the question mark in all the cases of rhetorical question in the poem. Though a deviation from the norm, the omission of the punctuation mark foregrounds the haste with which the bard pens down his thoughts while documenting the narrative of the desert war, without skipping any useful information. Note a few instances where the question mark is not affixed to the rhetorical questions in the poem.

Gamboru Ngala where are thy cows (line 19)

Dikwa where are thy rice Dikwa (line 36)

Kalabalge where are thy tons of grain (line 50)

Kawuri and Soye where are thy lushful greens of hopes (line 82)

In addition, the omission of the punctuation mark (question mark in rhetorical questions) reveals the mood of the poet in that he is not elated, excited and impressed with the information he is documenting; the narrative springs “tears of desert war.”

It is equally important to state that Amali also omits the comma where required in the poem due to the dejection the account produces in him, he testifies of this severally in the poem as exemplified below.

I shed tears as I watch your rich fields in flames (line 26)

As we harvest only tears of desert war. (line 37& 84)

The disheartening scenario he recounts negatively affects his mood, hence, the omission of the necessary punctuation marks in the poem. Examples of omission of the comma are the following:

Gamboru and Ngala noted land of cows (linell)

Dikwa where are thy fields of hope (line 28)

Marte new or old where are thy *la-ama* (line 66)

Kawuri and Soye homes of Beans and Millet (line 72)

In line eleven (11), a comma is required after “Ngala” for the line to read: “Gamboru and Ngala, noted land of cows”. A comma is ellipted after “Dikwa” in line 28. Furthermore, a comma is needed after “Marte” and immediately before “where” in line 66 in that “new or old” which follows “Marte” is an interrupting expression and post-modifier for the item (Marte). On the other hand, line 72 should have a comma inserted after “Soye” for the line to read: Kawuri and Soye, homes of Beans and Millet.

It is also worthy of note to state that the full-stop is sparse in the poem. *Tears of desert war* has one hundred and thirty-six lines, the full-stop appears only twelve times (in lines 35, 37, 49,

55, 64, 65, 71, 84, 95, 104, 118 and 125). The scantiness of the full-stop could be attributed to the mood of the bard, unpalatability of the scenario being painted and the haste with which the poet pens the narrative.

Diction in *Tears of Desert War*

In *Tears of desert war*, Amali expresses himself in simple diction. The lexical entry of the poem is comprehensible to the average reader in that the poet uses every day and familiar words and terms. He uses lexical items from various contexts such as agriculture, military, music, trade, and the media. Lexical items relating to agriculture are used to describe economic boom enjoyed in Maiduguri and its suburbs prior to the outbreak of the desert war. The excerpts below are a few lines expressing the economic buoyancy and prosperity experienced in the area prior to the war.

Gamboru Ngala noted land of cows
At the fringe bustling in cows
Rich in animal husbandry
That feed the nations (lines 11-14)
Dikwa the home of rice
That eats up Chinese rice in desert fires
That feeds the mouth of the rich and poor (lines 23-25)
Kawuri and Soyé homes of Beans and Millet
I see men and huge bulls in their thousands
Eagerly ploughing black soil of great harvest

...

Deliver their hopefuls year in and year out to satisfy

Their teaming millions across the land and beyond the sea (lines 72-81)

Lexical stock associated with the military is utilized to lament and decry the deterioration observed in the military to the extent of abandoning the desert war due to lack of required modern equipment. Though Nigerian military is revered for gallantry in

foreign operations, it flees from its internal operation for its “antiquated infantry brigade” (line 17) with which it confronts the desert war.

Items relating to religion express the helplessness of the citizenry in the face of the desert war. As the military abandons the war due to lack of sophisticated weapons, the executors of the desert war have a field day decimating humans, economic animals and farm yields, as well as “sacking and looting everywhere for a spoil” (line 102); the citizenry has no option but to “turn to gods of war to ward off eminent war” (line 110) “awaiting hopeful days of messiah of our dreams” (line 135). Sequel to the failure of the public functionaries to win the desert war, Amali reiterates religion as the last resort of the masses for succour in the midst of the war.

Lexemes of music express the fanfare, excitement and elation that mark harvest seasons thus:

The drummers and algaita blowers overwhelming fields
As joyous harvesters work and sickles clamour
For the hopeful neck of *la-ama*. (lines 62-64)

Impliedly, music boosts the morale of the harvesters while harvesting *la-ama* in Maiduguri and its environs.

The Use of Some Personal Pronouns

Amali’s deployment of personal pronouns in the poem is significant. Among the personal pronominals the poet uses are “I, me, we, our, you, your, thy, they and their”. Notwithstanding, only a few of them that are considered germane to our discourse are referred to in the lines below. The pronoun “they” is used twice in the poem. The pronominal is used to introduce the poem in line one: “They say they are in control”. “They” as used in that line is a cataphor for “those from glass houses” (line 7). Through the cataphoric reference, Amali debunks the reports of public functionaries who claim to be in charge of the happenings in the

war-torn zone, but in reality, they are not only far from the war arena, they abide in and never leave their “glass houses.” Hence, their reports are unreliable – they are a mere propaganda. Thus, the first stanza is, among other things, a denunciation of the hypocrisy, dishonesty, falsehood and propaganda of the political class who gives bogus information and hope to the masses, whereas they do nothing worthwhile to secure and improve the lot of the general populace; rather their notoriety for “broken promises” (line 8) is unequalled.

The second use of the pronoun (they) is found in the rhetorical question of line 116: “where are they”. “They” in this instance is an anaphora for “... tons upon tons of farm yields” of the preceding line (line 115). Line 117 provides a clue to what becomes of the farm yields – they are “[e]ngulfed in BH infernos” (line 117). Linking the use of “they” in line one and that of one hundred and sixteen together shows that there is decimation of farm yields in the desert war by Boko Haram (BH) insurgents because the government is not in control of security as they claim in stanza one.

Amali deploys the first person pronouns – I, me, we, our – to establish and reiterate the authenticity of the narrative. The use of the pronominal “me” is observed in line 2 of the poem: “But let me give you on the spot live reports”. His reports are genuine and veracious since they come from “the vigilante group that went to war” and “[f]aced the war bare handed” (lines 3&4).

In reality, the poet has lived in Maiduguri for upward of two decades, as such, he is accustomed to the terrain, and has a first-hand information of the farm yields of the city as well as its surrounding towns and villages. Thus, he testifies of the industriousness of the farm hands and the fertility of the soil of those places through the pronoun “I”. See the following examples:

I watch thousands of acradges of *la-ama* fields (line 58)

I see thousands of harvesters with thousands of sickles (line 61)
I see men and huge bulls in their thousands
Eagerly ploughing black soil of great harvest (lines 73-74)
Gwoza I think of the rock rich soil of Gwoza (line 111)

From this end, his testimony along with the first-hand reports from the vigilante group entrenches the veracity of his account. Amali does not hide his feelings when he sees the decimation of the cherished agricultural products: he also captures this in the first personal pronoun thus: “I shed tears as I watch your rich fields in flames” (line 26)

Having lived in Maiduguri for a long period of time and seen the place as his home, the poet cannot but identify with the natives of the ancient city and the environs when the desert war breaks out, hence, the use of the first plural pronouns “we” and “our” in *Tears of desert war*. Observe the deployment of the pronouns in the poetic piece.

As we harvest only tears of desert war (line 37)
We turn to gods of war to ward off eminent war (line 110)
To be war captives of stiff faced men of our neighbour (line 18)
Our vast land has been lost (line 132)
Awaiting hopeful days of messiah of our dreams (line 135)

Another pronominal worthy of mentioning is the middle English “thy.” The use of the pronoun is no more in vogue in contemporary texts and in inter-personal relationships except for special purposes or retention of ancient but cherished texts. As such, the bard uses the pronominal for a special purpose in the poem – to express his adoration for the agricultural products of certain places in Maiduguri axis. Some cases of the use of the pronoun are the following:

Dikwa where are thy fields of hope (line 28)
Kalabalge where are thy tons of grains (line 50)
Kawuri and Soye where are thy lushful greens of hopes (line 82)

Amali deploys “thy” to show his esteemed value for the farm products of the identified places.

Tropes in the Poem

Another linguistic index that marks the diction of Amali in the poem is tropes. The poet’s use of tropes adds to the elevation and aesthetics of the language of the narrative. The prominent ones the poet deploys to adorn the work are simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, alliteration, apostrophe, synecdoche, oxymoron, rhetorical question and amplification. Note a few instances of each one thus:

Simile

Like bees on nectar they never give up (line 5)

Like *igbingbli* lily corn (line 40)

As the invaders like wild tornadoes ... (line 101)

Metaphor

Our hopes are drowned (line 21)

And persistent hot bath of heat waves (line 46)

For fires of war engulf fields (line 70)

Personification

That fear no intrigues of the sun (line 45)

As sorghum and millet bring forth their quadruplets (line 48)

Spreading their arms across horizons (lines 58-59)

Hyperbole

Faced the war bare handed (line 4)

With thousand lines engraved on their black faces (line 32)

And drowned in deep pools of tears of desert war (line 118)

Alliteration

From the vigilante group that went to war (line 3)

. . . rich fields in flames (line 26)

As the booming brewing industries boom (line 52)

Apostrophe

I shed tears as I watch your rich fields in flames (line 26)

Banki as you have refugee camps and mass graves as your homes
(line 96)

Where lie refugee camps of your million cows (line 97)

Synecdoche

That feeds the mouth of the rich and poor (line 25)

That feed the million tongues of the east and west (line 51)

The thick black faces that till the soil to feed the land (line 113)

Oxymoron

. . . of the east and west (line 51)

Marte both new and old (line 56)

In green and brown grasses of wet and dry (line 88)

Rhetorical Question

Gamboru where are thy cows (line 19)

Dikwa where are thy fields of hope (line 28)

Kalabalg where are thy tons of grains (line 50)

Amplification

Amplification implies the repetition of a lexical item or an expression mainly for emphasis. The expressions “tears of desert war” (lines 10, 22, 37, 55, 65, 71, 95, 118, 125) and “where are thy” (cows/fields of hope/rice Dikwa/tons of grains/*la-ma*/lushful greens of hopes - lines 19, 28, 36, 50, 66, 82) frequently dot the poem to show the devastation, helplessness, decimation and sorrow the war rolls out to the citizenry. Not only that, the pronominal “thy” is repeated to buttress the value of the economic animals and farm yields decimated or carted away in the war.

Syntactic Features

This section deals with the prominent syntactic features the poet uses in the poem.

(i) Tense

A notable syntactic feature observable in *Tears of desert war* is that the poet expresses himself principally in the historic present. The historic present is the utilization of the simple present

tense for recounting or referring to a past event so as to emphasize its immediacy and actuality. The deployment of the syntactic feature is apt in that the insecurity to which reference is made in the poem commenced in the nearest past, it is still ongoing in the area and other places. Hence, the use of the tense has a tremendous effect on the reader in that they can still interact with the reality of the desert war. In other words, the impact of the war is still being felt by all and sundry in the area; others outside the region, through the news media, are kept abreast of the happenings in the axis. Note a few extracts of the historic present in the poem.

They say they are in control
But let me give you on the spot live reports (lines 1-2)
Dikwa the home of rice
That eats up Chinese rice in desert fires
That feeds the mouth of the rich and the poor
I shed tears as I watch your rich fields in flames (lines 23-26)
I see thousands of harvesters with thousands of sickles (line 61)
As we harvest only tears of war. (line 84)

In addition, the sparse use of the past tense is not without its significance – to establish the historicity of the desert war and the time of its commencement. Via the past tense, Amali situates the time of the inception of the desert war – sometime in the nearest past. Furthermore, the past tense is deployed to showcase the gallantry of the vigilante group in the war, and the decimating impact of the executors of the war. The few lines below are cases of the use of the past tense in the poem.

From the vigilante group that went to war
Faced the war bare handed (lines 3-4)
As invaders came as locust to devour the fields (line 83)
As the invaders like wild tornadoes swept Banki (line 101)
Engulfed in BH infernos (line 117)

(ii) Syntactic Structure

A close examination of the lines of the poem shows that the poet-persona expresses himself in three structural units of phrase, clause and sentence. The sentence is the highest level of analysis on the grammatical rank scale, followed by the clause, then the phrase. The word follows the phrase while the morpheme comes last. Hence, the phrase is found at the third level whether the units are arranged in the descending or ascending order on the rank scale. Based on classical grammar, a phrase is a word or a group of words which lacks its own subject and predicate and does not make a full sense. A phrase has to be part of a sentence or free clause to convey its signification. Different phrasal types obtainable in English are noun phrase, verb phrase, prepositional phrase, adjectival phrase and adverbial phrase (Leech 2006:86). Amali preponderates *Tears of desert war* with phrases. He wittingly chooses the phrase to conform to the norm of brevity which characterizes the language of poetry (Alagbe 2021:175). A recurring phrasal pattern that overwhelmingly dots the poem above other phrasal types is the prepositional phrase (a phrase that begins with a preposition and ends in a noun/pronoun/noun phrase). A prepositional phrase, it should be noted, functions either as an adverbial or adjectival. The poet also uses noun phrase, as well as adjectival phrase in his presentation. Each phrase type deployed by the poet is exemplified below.

Prepositional Phrase

- Of urban broken promises (line 8)
- In the heart of the sun of fire and hate (line 39)
- Amidst tears of desert war (line 65)
- In green and brown grasses of wet and dry (line 88)

Noun Phrase

- And strong fibrous faces (line 29)
- The home of wheat *la-ama* (line 57)

And the tall millet of Kawuri and Soye (line 78)

The teaming millions across the land and beyond the sea (line 81)

Adjectival Phrase

Rich in animal husbandry (line 13)

Proud of quality beans, millet and maize (line 112)

Clause is yet another syntactic structure the poet utilizes in developing his thoughts in the poem (though not in the same frequency as the phrase). Worthy of note is to state that the bard opts for subordinate clauses in the narrative. The bound clauses Amali selects are adjectival and adverbial. While adjectival clauses are modifiers/qualifiers of pronouns/nouns/noun phrases/noun clauses, adverbial clauses are modifiers of verbs, (at times) adjectives and other adverbs. In the one hand, adjectival clauses are often introduced by relative clause markers viz “who, which, whose, whom, that when, why, where.” On the other hand, adverbial clauses are introduced by subordinating conjunctions such as “when, since, if, before, after, while, though, although, unless, until, as, as if, as though” etc. In the poem under study, the poet introduces his adjectival clauses with “that” as seen in the following examples:

That feed the nation (line 14)

That humiliate cows of other far seas (line 20)

That watch and tender these fields (line 30)

That put to shame over treated made in American wheat (line 67)

“That feeds the nation” qualifies “animal husbandry” of line 13; “that humiliate cows of the far seas” is the modifier of the noun phrase “thy cows” mentioned in line 19; “that watch and tender these fields” is the qualifier for “strong fibrous faces” of the preceding line (line 29) while “that put to shame over treated made in American wheat” (line 67) also modifies “thy *la-ama*” of line 66 – a noun phrase.

For the introduction of the selected adverbial clauses, Amali uses “as” for majority of the clauses while “when” and “while” are used once respectively. Examples of adverbial clauses in the poem are:

As our hopes are drowned (line 21)

As farmers smile in the fields of great harvest (line 91)

When horses of war are prepared for war (line 108)

While earth shaking war of the desert persists (line 131)

The sentence is another grammatical unit found in *Tears of desert war*. A sentence, based on school grammar, is a word or group of words with a subject and a predicate that conveys a full sense. Orthographically, a sentence “starts with a capital letter and ends in a full-stop, a question mark or an exclamation mark” (Adedimeji & Alabi 2003:54). Notwithstanding, the latter definition of the sentence is not taken into cognizance in this study since writers do flout this – omission of necessary punctuation marks – to achieve some stylistic end just as Amali has done in this poem. By function, a sentence is either declarative, imperative, interrogative or exclamatory. Sentence types, based on their internal structure, are simple, complex, compound, compound-complex, multiple, and multiple-complex sentences. In the poem under consideration, Amali’s sentences perform two functions – declarative and interrogative. A few cases are the following:

Declarative Sentence

The jubilant field owners lay their sickles of hope. (line 49)

And food is in abundance for the rich and poor (line 86)

Let’s gather and venture painful words and actions of the hearts (line 126)

Our vast land has been lost (line 132)

Interrogative Sentence

Dikwa where are thy fields of hope (line 28)

Dikwa where are thy rice Dikwa (line 36)

Kawuri and Soyee where are thy lushful greens of hopes (line 82)

Where are they (line 116)

A keen look at the structural constituent of Amali's sentences shows that the simple sentence dominates other sentence types in the development of the poem. Note cases of the sentence in the poem.

Cows in hundreds of thousands graze leisurely (line 87)

I see men and huge bulls in their thousands (line 73)

And abodes of Michika and Bazza echo vibrantly (line 120)

Amali's deployment of the simple sentence is apt in that it is in tandem with brevity which is a main feature of the language of poetry. Thus, the syntactic units (phrase, clause and simple sentence) Amali uses helps in entrenching the brevity of his expressions.

Executors of the Desert War

The poet uses some terms to unearth the forces and faces behind the desert war meted against Maiduguri and its surrounding towns and villages. The terms are "book haram" (line 9) or "BH" (line 117), brigandage (lines 27 & 54), "homemade saboteurs" (line 68), "our neighbours" (line 18) and "invaders" (lines 83 & 101). The poet does not capture "book haram" in italic or inverted commas to indicate the foreignness of the term to the English language since the term and the activities of the group are well known to Nigerians and the world at large. The acronym "BH" is also commonly used for the sect in the social media and other informal texts in Nigerian parlance, hence, the deployment of same in the poem. Book Haram group or sect, according to Alagbe and Adigun (2016:92-93),

was founded by one Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, in the year 2002. ... The operation of the sect is that of insurgency cum guerilla force whose surge of attacks was fuelled since 2009 owing to the extra

judicial killing of its founder (in the same year) while in police custody. ... Also, the sect overran and captured several towns and villages in the North-eastern Nigeria (their stronghold) and established Islamic caliphate before such places were recently recaptured by combined military forces. Such places include Gwoza, Bama, Baga, Michika, Dikwa, Malam Fatouri and Damasak.

Thus, Boko Haram insurgents are a class of the executors of the desert war. In the poem, these insurgents are dreaded for their decimating operations and infernos (lines 9 & 117) in Gwoza, among others.

Another group that partakes in the execution of the desert war is outlaws cum bandits which Amali captures as brigandage (lines 27 & 54). They are liable for setting ablaze Dikwa's rich fields of rice "that feeds the mouth of the rich and poor" (line 26) and Kalabalge's "tons of grains that feed the million tongues of the east and west" (lines 50-51).

The poet, moreover, identifies "the invaders" (lines 83 & 101) as another group of folk involved in the desert war. The group is referred to as "invaders" in that their activities are at variance with the typical natives and residents of the area – they decimate human beings and agricultural products, hence, truncating the peaceful co-existence and economic buoyancy and prosperity of the axis, turning once-a-peaceful environment to refugee camps and mass graves (line 96).

"Homemade saboteurs" (line 68) also take part in the execution of the desert war at Marte, old and new (lines 56 & 66) – an area noted for quality and unequalled rich wheat. The "fires of war" (line 70) ignited by this set of warriors cause "men and women to abandon their *la-ama* fields" (line 69).

Amali's use of "our neighbours" (line 18) as being among the executors of the desert war is quite significant. The group could be natives or residents whose absorption of alien ideology suddenly makes them to turn against their fellow neighbours and, consequently partake in the war. They help in the annihilation of their fellow humans (whom they are used to and familiar with), economic animals and farm yields they benefit from. Impliedly, their assimilation of wrong and alien ideology turns them against their neighbours, hence, their involvement in the decimation of same. To this end, "our neighbours" and "homemade saboteurs" could be the same set of people.

From the thoughts above, it can be inferred that the executors of the desert war are no aliens – they are "our neighbours", outlaws, "homemade saboteurs" (Boko Haram insurgents) who have been indoctrinated with some ideological facts, and are disgruntled with some situations and issues in the nation, and thus turn against their fellow natives and nationals in the desert war. Amali draws an inference to this position in *Pounding Gwange (Maiduguri) to Rubbles* when he asserts that:

In Maiduguri
We watch the intriguing rebirth
Of Biafran wars of fratricidal wars
Hoisted on Maiduguri (p.63).

Nigeria/Biafran war took place between Northern/western brothers against their eastern counterparts; similarly, the desert war is another fratricidal war hoisted on Maiduguri and the environs by disgruntled fellow brothers.

From the discussion on the executors of the desert war, it is obvious that the insecurity challenge pointed out in *Tears of desert war* has two forms – insurgency by the Boko Haram sect and banditry by outlaws/bandits. The two groups are the invaders and "our neighbours" who truncate the peace and economic

buoyancy of Maiduguri region, and thereby making the area a “den” of death, ruins and displacement, therefore, “springing tears of desert war.” (line 71)

Impact of the Desert War

Activities of Boko Haram and brigandage, it should be noted, have not left the region of Maiduguri the same. The area in particular and Nigeria in general is still grappling and battling with the consequences of insurgency and banditry. A few of them gleaned from the poem are decimation of humans, economic animals and farm yields; homelessness/displacement; abandonment of farming and animal husbandry; looting and despondency – all these culminate in unending tears.

Amali succinctly brings to the fore that decimation of human and animal lives in conjunction with farm yields is an aftermath of the desert war. Decimation of humans is unequivocally captured in line 96 of the poem where the poet recounts: “Banki as you have refugee camps and mass graves as your homes”. Loss of lives is so numerous that the dead are buried in “mass graves.” The same thing is reflected in *Pounding Gwange (Maiduguri) to Rubbles* thus:

The music of guns, death salute us (line 41)
As only rumours of death tolls and arson (line 52)
As our brothers, gun totting
Lie wasted (lines 63-64)

Death in droves usually attends to the battle/war executed by Boko Haram insurgents.

Economic animals like cows also perish in their numbers in the desert war. Kawuri and Soye where “huge bulls in their thousands [e]agerly ploughing black soil of great harvest” (lines 73-74) are overrun when “invaders came as locust to devour the fields” (line 83); consequently, those animals were lost in droves. Banki and Gulumba where “cows in hundreds of thousands graze leisurely”

(line 87) also lose these animals when Banki is swept for the invaders are “sacking and looting everywhere for a spoil” (line 102).

Not only that, decimation of agricultural products marks the war. In Dikwa, rich rice farms are set ablaze (line 26); invaders devour farm fields in Kawuri and Soye (line 83); “invaders like wild tornadoes swept Banki” (line 102); “tons upon tons of farm yields” are “[e]ngulfed in BH infernos” at Gwoza (lines 115-117). Having decimated farm yields and economic animals, the desert war is responsible for grounding the economy of Maiduguri region. Decimation, therefore, is an aftermath of the desert war.

Homelessness cum displacement also marks the desert war. The poet presents this when he asserts:

Banki as you have refugee camps and mass graves as your homes (line 96)

Whenever people lose their homes to insurgency and banditry, they find shelter at refugee camps in various places where they are at the mercy of nature, philanthropists and donor agencies for survival (since their means of livelihood has been destroyed). In sum, the war displaces people from their native homes to resort to refugee camps.

The desert war causes abandonment of farming and animal husbandry. Owing to mass destruction of human lives and economic assets in Maiduguri region, “men and women in fear abandon their fields” (line 67); they discontinue the production of farm products and rearing of economic animals. Amali notes that:

... herds men painfully herd away from their herds

Abandoning their sacred duty in agony (lines 98-99)

Farmers and herders who have no alternative means of livelihood have to abandon their occupation consequent upon insurgency and banditry; they are rendered economically impotent by the desert war. In the poem, the bard pointedly cites Marte and Banki as

instances of abandonment of farming and animal production – the two places, in turn, are a representation of other communities in the region.

The desert war, in addition, results in despondency and fear. Decimation of economic animals and farm products (lines 21 & 26), abandonment of fields without any knowledge of the time the war will come to an end result in hopelessness in the inhabitants of Maiduguri and the environs. Line 69 (earlier mentioned) captures fear as the reason why people abandon their fields.

The climax of the desert war is that it generates unending tears in the masses. When the remaining living populace ponders on the failure of the government (in handling insurgency/banditry), death in droves, economic ruins, fear instilled by the war, their helplessness and hopelessness in the desert war; they shed ceaseless tears. In other words, the woes, tragedies and calamities brought by the war spring unending tears in the citizenry.

Conclusion

This study has established that Nigeria is contending with insecurity at the moment. The paper, specifically, has discussed insecurity challenge in Idris Amali's poem, *Tears of desert war*. The study focuses on the linguistic indices the poet employs to give account of the desert war. The theoretical consideration utilized for analysis is the eclectic or integrative approach due to the multi-various layers of description involved in the study. It is discovered that at the graphological level, the poet uses the capital letter to introduce each line of the poem which is in conformity to the norm. The capital letter is also used to introduce some agricultural yields of some places in Maiduguri axis (as though they are proper nouns) to show their esteemed quality and the adoration of the poet for the products of the places. Also, there is

omission of some punctuation marks – the question mark and the comma – to depict the haste with which the poem is documented, as well as the mood (of dejection) of the poet.

At the level of diction, the language of the poem is simple, familiar and comprehensible to the average reader. Amali uses first person pronouns to identify with the natives of Maiduguri in the desert war, while the middle English pronominal “thy” is utilized to laud the quality of some farm yields of certain places in the region. Besides, the poet uses tropes to enhance the elevation and aesthetics of the language of the work.

Findings also show at the syntactic level that there is a combination of the historic present and the past tense in the piece; this is to establish the immediacy, actuality and the historicity of the narrative. Not only that, the deployment of the phrase, clause and the simple sentence helps in entrenching brevity of expression which is normative of the language of poetry. The study also finds out that the nature of insecurity in the poem is that of insurgency and banditry while the executors of the war are Boko Haram sect and bandits. The paper submits that the desert war impacts negatively on the citizenry as it results in decimation of humans, economic animals as well as farm yields; homelessness/displacement, abandonment of farming and rearing of economic animals, looting, fear, despondency and unending tears. The poet concludes the poem by giving a ray of hope via the emergence of messiah – a divine or human agent of deliverance – who will actualize the dreams of the commoners.

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