

WAR METAPHORS IN NIGERIAN PANDEMIC POETRY

Clement Eloghosa ODIA, PhD

*Department of English and Literature,
Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.
clement.odia@uniben.edu*

07034571337

orcid.org/0000-0003-4871-5841

Abstract

*The Covid-19 pandemic has afforded Nigerian pandemic poets the unique opportunity to demonstrate their ingenuity, weaving war metaphors into the tapestry of their poems in order to capture the horror of that period. Although the impact of the pandemic seems to have subsided gradually, the poetic artistry deployed in crafting the poems will not escape scholarly attention, especially the skillful use of metaphors. This essay, analytic and interpretive, examines war metaphors in Nigerian pandemic poetry in order to demonstrate how the poets artistically represent the Covid-19 pandemic and versify the various combatants in the imagined pandemic war. The essay covers the poems of six Nigerian poets selected from *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid-19 Pandemic*. The poets include Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Chidiebere Eniya, Law O. Mefor, Nnenna Vivien Chukwu, Ayodele Kuburat Olaosebikan and Maria Abiola Alege. The textual analytic method is employed while relying on formalist theory to critically interrogate how the war metaphors help to frame the Covid-19 and the war combatants. The essay discovers three participants in the Covid-19 war and concludes that health workers, humanity and the coronavirus are metaphorically constructed as combatants in the envisaged pandemic war in Nigerian pandemic poetry.*

Keywords: War, Metaphors, Combatants, Covid-19, Pandemic and Formalism

I. Introduction

The nexus between creative writing and literary criticism is anchored on the literary tool employed. While the business of creative writers is to represent experiences, literary critics subject them to critical scrutiny and pass judgment on what has been depicted. The Aristotelean postulation that presents literature as an art of representation also demonstrates the medium by which that representation is carried out. It is therefore instructive to note that as efforts are being made to interrogate the art of representation, it will be beneficial to students of poetry to also explore the purpose and methods of representation. In this paper, metaphors are employed as tools for the representation of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigerian poetry. Pandemic poetry writing in Nigeria started with the outbreak of the Covid-19 and its attendant chaos

which it wreaked in the world. Nigerian poets took advantage of the plague to express their various feelings and render their perspectives on the pandemic. Many ideas are captured in the poems but the central element of style which has been deployed has not received the much needed scholarly attention. This situation leaves a critical gap in pandemic studies as it has led to inadequate interpretation of the pandemic poems.

This essay relies on formalist theory to undergird the criticism of selected Nigerian pandemic poems. The stand point of eminent formalists such as Boris Eichenbaum, Victor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson is that the text is the object of study and not the author's biography nor the sociological context of the text. The theory focuses on the way the reader understands and evaluates the text. According to Ann B. Dobie, "Formalism's sustained popularity among readers comes primarily from the fact that it provides them with a way to understand and enjoy a work for its own inherent value as a pure literary art" (33). Dobie's view is that the text's appealing quality is intentionally constructed to draw attention to itself. The form is the rudimentary component of language which continues to sustain readership. In other words, formalism is a text-centric theory. What Dobie means is that the text is a self-existing document. Rather, the text has a life of its own. As such, social issues, religious dogmas, and political treatises do not influence the reader's sense of judgment. This is why the reading of the text is essential to enable the reader derive information based on the working of the textual material.

Tim Gillespie explains that formalism demands "a close, careful analysis often called close reading or text explication" (178). The purpose of this careful and close reading among others is to examine literature: "Looking to unlock its structure, looking for unifying patterns that shape the text and give its parts relevance to the whole and searching for uses of language and ambiguities, ironies and tensions that contribute to the whole effect" (178). The purpose of formalism is therefore to explore the texture, the structure and the several patterns that combine to produce the text. The theory tries to account for the function of its component parts or form as they help tease out meaning. Having explored the formalist theory, it will be appropriate to explain and attempt to define metaphor which is the key element of form in this study.

Metaphor refers to one of the several tropes or figures of speech. Edward P.J. Corbett defines it as "an implied comparison between two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common" (479). That means metaphors often compare two "unlike" things with the hope of establishing their similarities. As for M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, metaphor goes beyond the traditional similarity perspective. Metaphor, in their view, possesses pragmatic, interactive, and cognitive perspectives. Highlighting the cognitive view, they define it as "a deviation for special rhetorical and poetic purposes" (191). This means metaphors are constructed in an unusual way in order to have aesthetic effects on the reader.

Brian Moon explains that metaphor involves the “merging of two elements or ideas, where one is used to modify the meaning of the other” (62). According to Rossi and others, “metaphors are expressions that describe a person or an object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics” (55). They affirm the intrinsic quality in metaphor that makes its meaning to rest on another equally striking element in another entity, person or object. Thus, they perform descriptive function as they help to paint pictures of objects, things and persons.

Mohammed Abdul Khaliq, Rohan Joseph and Junny Rai explain that “metaphors are creative cognitive constructs that are employed in everyday conversation to describe abstract concepts and feelings” (431). Metaphors help to construct description of abstract concepts and contextualize feelings in ways that paint their pictures through diverse images. What stands out from the foregoing perspectives is that metaphors are tools for describing abstract concepts, people, objects and things. They can compare and act as substitutes. The choice of formalism is premised on the need to focus attention on how the poets have employed metaphors to represent the pandemic in the poems. Formalism draws attention to the form of the poems which manifest through metaphors. Therefore, war metaphors are embedded within the form of the poems. It is through formalism that they are better analysed and interpreted.

Several essays have been written to present diverse perspectives on the covid-19 pandemic. A review of related scholarship on the use of war metaphors is necessary. Michael Hanne examines the use of war metaphor and how it helps in providing escape from contracting the covid-19. In this regard, he explains that: “During the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the “war” metaphor, standing for our relationship to covid-19, established itself, like the virus itself almost universally” (88). Hanne’s position on the Covid-19 is valid as it draws connection between humanity and the corona-virus. For Hanne, the war metaphor represents the bond that binds us to covid-19 and that they have universal appeal. As profound as Hanne’s argument may seem, it does not demonstrate the various compositions that represent the combatants for which these war metaphors stand. It does not account for how the war metaphors help to contextualize the efforts put into the supposed war being represented by the metaphors.

Andreas Musolff concentrates on the ironical, sarcastic and satirical use of war and competition metaphors in the context of Covid-19 pandemic. In this connection, Musolff writes that:

The Covid-19 pandemic tempted some governments to promise to wage “war” against it and implement “world-beating” control mechanisms. In view of their limited success, such claims soon came in for massive criticism, which turned their hyperbolic implicatives and figurative framing against them. (76)

Musolff explains that the Covid-19 pandemic inspired governments across the world to find ways of tackling the virus and in the process, end up declaring war against it.

As things have turned, their attempts were severally censured. Although Musolff may have examined the use of war metaphors, it does not show how the metaphors are used to frame the combatants which the war metaphors represent in Nigerian pandemic poems.

Margherita Benzi and Marco Novarese focus on the use of metaphors to convey war against covid-19. These two scholars “consider martial metaphors to be dangerous because of their possible consequences for society” (10). This position is necessitated by the way governments across the globe re-imagined the Covid-19 pandemic as an enemy seeking to vanquish humanity and the way the leaders have purportedly arranged their arsenals to destroy the virus. There was this possibility that the war might not be won. Therein lies the danger. Equally true is that, according to Benzi and Novarese, this perspective “gave prominence to the risk of individuals passively complying with restrictions on individual liberty” (10). This is the real danger as the war metaphors tend to collectivize the public and conscientize them to willingly give up their rights in order to win the “war”. However, this view is correct but it does not dwell on how the poets use them to frame the covid-19 and present the combatants.

Francisca Brencio focuses on language and war metaphors in the covid-19 pandemic. The scholar canvasses the need for universal collaboration in order to defeat the pandemic. “To overcome the global pandemic and its devastating effects, we need solidarity, a value opposite to war terminology” (62). Brencio frowns at the use of war metaphors and terminology as efforts are being galvanized to finding cure to the pandemic. The scholar seems to assume that war metaphors create a siege mindset, inspire fear and drives people into some kind of depression. Brencio suggests in its place, “solidarity”, something different from the war terminology. Solidarity will enhance unity of purpose, togetherness and build humanity. Brencio’s idea is thus different from the one espoused in this essay which is focused on identifying those at combat and how the war metaphor helps to represent the various moods, present humanity and health workers and perception of the virus.

Martin Doring and Brigitte Nerlich who examine the use of metaphors, images and symbols in framing the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, write that: “The “war” of governments, people, and whole societies against the corona-virus is still ongoing and is waged with public health “weapons” such as distancing, isolation, or the wearing of medical masks” (3). Doring and Nerlich construct the idea of war round certain metaphors, images and symbols. For example, the corona-virus and the entire human race are perceived to be in a war. The public health strategies are conceived to be the weapons. The images of “distancing”, “isolation” and “medical masks” are weapons contrived to win the war. Nevertheless, both Doring and Nerlich are contented with deploring various metaphors, images and symbols to frame the corona-virus, they do not reveal the identities of the combatants in the said pandemic war. This essay demonstrates that Nigerian pandemic poets use war metaphors to frame

health workers, humanity and coronavirus as combatants in the envisaged pandemic war.

II. Health Workers as Combatants

The primary concern of this session is to examine ways in which Nigerian poets such as Adimora-Ezeigbo and Eniya use war metaphors to frame health workers as war combatants in their fight against coronavirus. Adimora-Ezeigbo, in “Brave Frontliner”, a poem dedicated to nurses and other health workers fighting Covid-19, explains that:

Undeterred by the tidal wave of death
you throw punches of care to stem its surge.
That carries away the weak and the strong,
you wouldn't retreat though Covid-19 storm rages. (World on the
Brinks, 19)

Underscored in the above stanza is the pervasive image of the tidal wave which is employed to present the large number of death by the coronavirus. Despite the overwhelming scale of death, the health workers are “undeterred” by putting up a big fight. They are said to “throw punches”, but in the context of the poem, they are punches of “care to stem the surge” of death. This is an excellent metaphor. Still deploying war metaphors, the speaker describes these brave fighters (health workers) as soldiers who will never “retreat” in the face of the raging “Covid-19 storm”. Thus, the poet employs three adjectives to celebrate the courage of health workers. These include: “resolve”, “determined” and “undeterred”. These work together to affirm the speaker’s envisioning of relentless and courageous fighters who will never find glory in retreating from a battle:

You dare the plague’s vicious and lethal attack
Rampage that throttles humanity to near extinction.
You insist on providing the best service possible
Under the most harrowing circumstances. (19)

Still presenting health workers as veritable soldiers, the speaker maps their resilience as daring the “vicious and lethal attack” of the coronavirus. Military metaphors abound in the above stanza. The metaphorical expression of the relationship between the health workers and the coronavirus is amplified by the image of assault weapons. The virus is the weapon which unleashes deadly attacks on humanity. The purpose of this rampaging virus, as can be seen from the above stanza, is to wipe out the human race. This idea is forcefully presented through the image of a racing car as evoked by the image of “throttles”. Thus the virus is envisioned as an armoured vehicle mowing down humanity into “extinction”. Despite the menacing speed to eliminate the human world, the health workers fight on by never giving up, “providing the best service possible” in the middle of such “harrowing circumstances”. Thus these health workers are the heroes of the Covid-19 war.

Also in Eniya's poem, "Who are the Heroes?" the poet uses war metaphors to frame health workers as war combatants. The poem parodies J.P Clark's "The Casualties", which catalogues the casualties of the Nigerian civil war. Eniya has used this method to examine the various classes of people who combat the coronavirus, especially the health practitioners. The opening stanza is instructive:

The heroes are not those
Who donated millions and billions
To fight Covid-19
The heroes are those
Who are locked down in their houses
Under the scourge of hunger. (WTB 83)

The entire stanza is predicated on the metaphorical and ironic exuberance to construct the war scenario. The speaker recognizes key actors in the effort to eliminate the Covid-19 pandemic. Two groups of people are identified: the financial donors and the ordinary citizens who complied with Covid-19 safety guidelines and suffer untold hardship. These two are metaphorically compared to "heroes". The donations of donors are supposedly meant to support the efforts of government. In the context of this stanza, the speaker using metaphor sees it as being geared to "fight Covid-19". Thus the Covid-19 pandemic is perceived as a kind of war. Hence, the image of war combat is used and sustained.

The heroes are not Covid-19 task force
The heroes are the doctors and nurses
Battling to save victims. (83)

The above stanza is remarkable for the use of contrast. The speaker proceeds to recognise the work of Covid-19 task force who help to keep people safe and ensure compliance with Covid-19 protocols. For the speaker, "the doctors and nurses" are the authentic heroes who battle Covid-19 to save lives. Again, the image of war plays a key role in this stanza. The doctors and nurses are unequivocally compared to soldiers in the Covid-19 army who battle to save victims of the deadly virus. In the battle for survival, the doctors and nurses are indispensable. Thus by contrasting Covid-19 task force with doctors and nurses, the speaker draws attention to the importance of the latter group in ensuring that lives are saved, and the Covid-19 defeated.

III. Humanity as Combatants

The major preoccupation of this section is centred around the use of war metaphors to depict humanity as war combatants fighting Covid-19 invasion in the world. The poems of two Nigerian poets namely; Mefor and Chukwu are studied. They present the efforts and strategies contrived by humanity, other than health workers, conceived in this essay, as non-health workers, to stop the coronavirus from destroying the human race.

Mefor in the poem, “love in the time of Covid-19” uses war metaphors to present humanity as fighting a kind of war as they combat Covid-19. The poet suggests that solidarity is the weapon humanity needs to vanquish the Covid-19 pandemic:

This is the time to share like none other time
Giving all we have and all will never have
Showing off our shared humanity and strengthening
the tendrils with our infirm shoulders
Daring to live and die together in comradeship
While confronting the inglorious bastard eyeball to eyeball (BTW,
159).

The speaker appears to canvass the idea that if there is any potent weapon needed to defeat the virus it is the generous spirit, of “shared humanity” and “comradeship”. All these epitomize solidarity. Just as soldiers shoot bullets, rockets and missiles to defeat their enemies, humanity is presented as a kind of army which requires solidarity as their own weapon to overcome the coronavirus. Thus running through this poem is the war image. In the stanza above, the speaker recommends “giving all we have” to support those who do not have during the pandemic. This way, the effect of the virus on the world will be minimized. The next is sharing with those who do not have what we have. This is the spirit of generosity. Next is that both acts of giving and sharing affirm and strengthen our shared humanity as well as strengthens our sense of humanity. We are encouraged to dare “to live and die together in comradeship”. This is a military metaphor that promotes the sense of camaraderie which emphasises the feeling of friendliness, goodwill, and familiarity among the people. Implied in this word is generosity, compassion, kindness, benevolence, brotherhood and charity. These ideals are the weapons needed to defeat the Covid-19 pandemic.

In another poem, this time by Chukwu, entitled, “Wedging War on Humanity”, the poet depicts humanity as war combatants.

The image of war resonates in this poem:

In the year 2020
The world awakes conscripted
Slow-motion first characterized its pace
And suddenly the journey turns a rat race. (WTB, 180)

Running through the above stanza is the metaphor of war as represented by the word, “conscripted”. This word implies a forceful enlisting of people into the army. Similarly, the advent of Covid-19 in 2020 forcefully “conscripted” the world into the Covid-19 army in fighting to survive the deadly pandemic. The rate at which the conscription began is metaphorically captured by the poet. The forceful recruitment of people into the combat started gradually, later it became “a rat race”. This metaphor reiterates the threat the plague posed to humanity.

The image of humanity as combatants is further conveyed in the following lines:

The galloping journey hides in its flipping jeer
Panic and pain served in anxiety and bitterness
Loss, wailing and mourning
Limping between spiritual and physical hunger
Covid-19 is a journey of war on humanity. (180)

The image of combat is extended to capture the expression of grief which is associated with the pandemic. Just as wars cause panic, pain, loss, wailing and mourning, so is the pandemic metaphorically conveyed as the harbinger of panic, pain, loss, wailing and mourning. As the speaker has stated, "Covid-19 is a journey of war" which has been waged on humanity. This goes to substantiate the earlier position that the pandemic is a combat. In winning the combat therefore, the people struggle between "spiritual" and "physical hunger". This refers to several attempts to engage spiritual powers to ward off the plague. It also refers to physical efforts initiated to end the pandemic. Still conveying the sense of humanity as combatants, the speaker employs war metaphors to depict the Covid-19 pandemic:

Humanity puts on its armour and girdles
With quarantine,
Social distancing,
Face mask,
Hand gloves,
Running water rinsing her souls,
And other Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs)
That shield man from the world outside him. (180)

The metaphor of war is instructive in the above stanza. As it is in wars, the soldiers or fighters wear "armour" and "girdles" as protective garments. Similarly, the speaker argues that the pandemic war also requires some protective gears. This time, they come in the form of "quarantine", "social distancing", "face mask", "hand gloves" and "running water". They are the items which when utilized, can protect humanity from being wiped out of existence. For humanity to combat coronavirus, they must wear the armour of "quarantine" to keep the entire human race safe. Another armour is "social distancing" to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The aim is to break the contact. Next is the weapon of "Face mask" with which they can keep health workers safe and the rest of the human population alive. They are to wear "hand gloves" so that contact with others will be safe. Every home and offices where human beings live and work are expected to have at their disposal the armour of "Running water" with which to wash their hands. The last armour is the Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs). The above measures are war metaphors skillfully used by the poets to amplify human efforts at combating the spread of the virus and with which they envision humanity as war combatants.

IV. Coronavirus as Combatants

The two previous sections have examined health workers and humanity as combatants. This one proposes to explore coronavirus as combatants. It shall focus on the poems of Olaosebikan and Alege Olaosebikan, in the poem, “This Too Shall Pass” presents Covid-19 as a dreaded reaper in the world at war with humanity:

Behold! It’s the Reaper
The Grim reaper is here!
See the sons of men scampering for safety
every man for his life
The raging waves and stormy seas prostrate
in silence
All welcome the fearsome general,
The Grand commander of the covid-19 forces (WTB, 47)

The poem begins with a biblical allusion to the ubiquitous power of the reaper sent by God to set things right especially to clear the earth of humanity. Covid-19 is that messenger sent down with a dreadful appearance. Its coming has driven fear into the hearts of men who scamper for safety. To amplify the power of Covid-19, the poet employs images of waves and seas which are “raging” and “stormy” respectively. Despite their ferocity, they are said to “prostrate in silence” to the great Covid-19. This explains why the speaker calls coronavirus “the fearsome general” and “The Grand commander of the Covid-19 forces”. This view presupposes that Covid-19 is a military commander coordinating the pandemic war on humanity and that it is the head of “the Covid-19 forces”; in fact, it is “The Grand commander”.

What a force! Irresistible!
Behold our man-made defences turned lifeless guns
against viruses, oh no!
Shall we ever defeat this invisible warrior of
the century?
A priceless question on mortal minds
As we watch defeatedly while she recklessly
wreak havoc,
Souls vanishing daily
Yeah, she feeds the insatiable belly of mother earth
endless graves defying norms. (WTB, 47)

The speaker’s sense of shock and fear is expressed through the opening apostrophe in which the virus is described as an irresistible force waging an unseen war on the world. The “guns” are said to be “lifeless” when used “against viruses”. Also instructive is that Covid-19 is an “invisible warrior” recording a huge success. Through the rhetorical question, the poet asserts that human beings cannot defeat the force of Covid-19. Everywhere, the virus “recklessly wreaks havoc” on the world, while humanity watches “defeatedly”. Consequently, “souls” are said to be “vanishing daily”. In the end, mother earth is said to feed the “insatiable belly of the earth”

as “endless graves” defy “the norms”. The beauty of the above lines cannot be ignored. The use of personification is explicit, as it emphasises the rate at which the virus is killing people. Thus, it has recorded more casualties than any military offensive ever conceived by humanity.

Olaosebikan in another poem, “The Levelling General” presents coronavirus as a combatant in boastful tone. The virus speaks throughout the poem thus:

I clear whom I will
I defy colours, wealth, stature nor age
I am the sudden guests in viral frames,
Infecting every aspect of moral world
Making geniuses fools
And their expertise futile. (WTB, 49)

The exultant voice of the coronavirus is highly instructive. It demonstrates the triumphant nature with which the virus has wreaked great havoc on the world. Deploying the first person voice, the virus declares that it has the sole power to kill any victim. The speaker also employs euphemism to describe power. The words, “clear” and “defy”, convey the sense of killing. What the speaker means by: “I clear whom I will” is that the virus kill very large number of people at the same time. To “clear” is to wipe out of existence. The word, “defy” shows that no one has the capacity to resist the power of coronavirus. Hence, the virus kills people of different races, economic class and age. Also, the poet employs metaphor to present the virus. This time, the virus is compared to “guests” who operate in the shape and power of viruses. These viruses are said to be “infecting every aspect of mortal world”. Their operations have confounded “geniuses” thus making them “fools” and rendering their “expertise futile”. The coronavirus pandemic has assumed the status of global health emergency.

Still rendering the audacious account during the year of Covid, the coronavirus declares thus:

I have sent your warriors into self-imprisonment
They call it isolation
Alas! Behold as hunger beckons your men to
Shelter in her tent
No house to rent
Nor food for the living man! (WTB 50)

The virus has presented itself as a combatant who has sent human “warriors into self-imprisonment which we gladly refer to as “isolation”. According to the virus, “isolation” is a kind of “imprisonment”, this time, prisoners of viral war. The use of personification is heartwarming because the poet presents the pervasive nature of “hunger” which is seen beckoning on the rest of the world to take “shelter in her tent”. Beyond that, the poet treats the subject of economic privation as it occurs during the war. There is no house to rent; neither is there “food for the living men” to eat. In a rather unsparing tone, the speaker declares thus:

Level them I say! Level them all!
 For it is I, in charge-yes, I,
 The Great general of the corona battalion
 The keeper of the viral realm and mother of all diseases
 And I have come to collect all that is due for me (50)

The opening line of the above stanza sums up the mission of the coronavirus. It is to “level” the human population. The word “level”, like “clear” and “defy” is a euphemism for wiping out of existence. It is an order given by “The Great General” to the “Corona battalion”. Here the coronavirus is ordering his battalion to level or completely destroy the human world. The virus explains further that he is in charge of the corona battalion. The poet employs three war metaphors to describe the coronavirus. Firstly, the virus is “The Great General of the corona battalion”. There is an indirect comparison of the virus to a General of a military battalion. In this context, this battalion is that of corona virus. Hence, Covid-19 is a kind of soldier in combat with humanity. Secondly, Covid-19 is the “keeper of the viral realm”. This is a metaphor and it expresses the authority and power of one in charge of a realm. In this poem, Covid-19 is the keeper, but of the viral realm. Thirdly, Covid-19 is compared to “mother of all diseases”. The point being made is that, it is more deadly. Hence, its power is irresistible and uncontrollable. The viral speaker declares that he has “come to collect all that is due for me”. Again, this is a euphemism for killing and destruction. This presents Covid-19 as a combatant who has come to kill and destroy the world.

Revelling in war metaphors, Alege in “warring the space” depicts the hazardous nature of Covid-19 pandemic:

It’s war we’re fighting, “isn’t it so?
 But they brought their wars on us,
 As if it’s our war, yet we know not whence
 This war in our space, waw-waw no be small. (WTB, 165).

Notice how the poet makes a comparison between Covid-19 and war. The opening line draws attention to the sense of fighting a war. The human race is perceived to be engaged in a kind of war. The speaker remarks that this “war” is their war, which they have brought on us. This implies that the Covid-19 disease did not originate in Africa and that it has been brought on Africans and the world in general. The poet seems to suggest that no one knows from where it has sprung, “we know not whence,” even though it is widely believed that the virus emanated from Wuhan, China. The speaker concludes this stanza with the Nigerian pidgin phrase “*waw-waw*” which means ugly. According to the speaker, this Covid-19 “war” or pandemic is ugly as it exposes the unpleasant experiences people had to go through to survive it.

In the preceding two stanzas, Alege makes a historical allusion to the previous two world wars and hints at their destructiveness. The next stanza shifts attention to the Covid-19 war:

This time, con[vid]sion of mixed reagents
Rocket in Wuhan spacecraft
To cough in sneeze the unseen fiend
Across lands, seas and clime
In blind fury that confound
Even those supposedly know
Their ways around evils good (WTB, 166)

The technical beauty of the above stanza among others is in the apt use of coinage or graphological deviation. The opening line of the above stanza contains “con[vid]sion” which is a deviation from the norm “confusion”. It suggests the confusion that has come upon the world as a result of Covid-19 which is a product of a chemical and a laboratory process in the city of Wuhan.

Sliding back to war metaphors, the Covid-19 virus is metaphorically compared to a “Rocket” fired from a Wuhan “spacecraft”. Thus, the Covid-19 virus is a rocket and the Wuhan institute laboratory is a metaphor for spacecraft. Invariably, the war metaphors employed above help to create the picture of a devastating pandemic. To further amplify the power of the virus, the speaker suggests that it has made people to “cough” and “sneeze” this “unseen fiend”. In wars, the enemy is seen but in this context, the Covid-19 is an “unseen fiend”. It carries out its vindictive destruction with “blind fury” which has confounded everyone. In the concluding stanza, the speaker explains:

No jet bombers, no artillery hails,
No ballistic missiles, no nuke,
No amphibious rumpus, no blood spills
Yet coffins deluge the lands
Until cadavers hurry into their homes
With no rites, just to stay safe. (166)

The poetic exquisiteness with which the metaphors of war is employed to convey subtle ideas about Covid-19 pandemic is commendable. Also noted is the instructive power of the parallelism: the sustained negation of strong weaponry for war. This shocking scenario smacks of Covid-19 ubiquitous power. It does not possess jet bombers with which to kill people. It has no artillery to shell its victims like the drop of hails from the sky. This is a great metaphorical construction to evoke the pervasive power of Covid-19 which functions exactly like the artillery. By stating that the Covid-19 has no weapons, the poet is indirectly speaking to its capacity, power and strength. Each weapon mentioned underscores exactly the power of the virus. Hence, they are metaphoric in nature. Firstly, the virus functions like a jet bomber destroying the world with a deadly virus. Just as the fighter jet drops bombs on the battle fields, people drop Covid-19 virus on human bodies thus causing widespread infections. Secondly, the virus operates like ballistic missiles which can travel far and wide. In like manner, the Covid-19 virus spreads across lands and seas, wreaking

havoc on the world. Next, the virus is like the nuclear weapon. It does not spill blood but we see the “deluge” of coffins across the land. This is the power of the virus.

This section has explored the Covid-19 pandemic in the poems of selected Nigerian poets who have used images of war combat to express the poet’s vision of the pandemic era. Through the various images of war combat, we are able to appreciate the poetic artistry and metaphoric ingenuity on display as the poems show the various sites of death and destruction.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this essay has been to examine war metaphors in Nigerian pandemic poetry in order to establish how Covid-19 pandemic is represented. It goes further to explain how military metaphors are used to frame the various war combatants in the poems. Looking at the various perspectives from which the selected poets have portrayed the virus, it is evident that the study identifies three main combatants. The poets present nurses and doctors, who battle in the frontline to resist the spread of the disease as resolute fighters or combatants. Through care for the patients, these health workers help them to fight to survive the pandemic attack. To defeat this viral enemy, human beings are encouraged to adhere strictly to non-pharmaceutical safety guidelines which range from staying at home to avoiding crowded spaces. They are to wash their hands regularly and wear face masks or protective shields. Of critical relevance is the need to show love to others who may be in need. The spirit of comradeship is believed to be a fundamental weapon in the fight against the covid-19 pandemic. The last combatant is the coronavirus. This virus is presented as engaging in a war to wipe out human species. The point being made in this essay is that Covid-19 studies benefit extensively from the use of war metaphors as framing devices in the representation of the pandemic.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M.H. and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Tenth Edition. Wadsworth Cengage, 2021.
- Adimora-Ezeigbo, Akachi. “Brave Frontliner”. *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of covid-19 Pandemic*. Ed. By IkechukwuOtuuEghuta and Nnenna Vivien Chukwu. Cityway Books, 2020: 19-20.
- Alege, Maria Abiola. “Warring the Space”. *World on the Brinks: an Anthology of covid-19 Pandemic*. Cityway Books, 2020: 165-166.
- Benzi, Margherita and Marco Novarese. “Metaphors We Lie by: Our “War” against covid-19”. *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* vol. 44, no. 2, 2022: 1-21 *Dol:10.1007/S40656-022-00501-2*
- Brencio, Francesca. “Mind Your Words. Language and War Metaphors in the Covid-19 pandemic”. *Revista Psicopatologia Fenomenologica Contemporanea*. Vol. 9, no. 2, 2020: 58-73.

- Chukwu, Nnenna Vivien. "Wedging War on Humanity". *World on the Brinks: AN Anthology of covid-19 Pandemic*. Cityway Books, 2020: 180.
- Corbett, Edward P.J. *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. Oxford, 1971.
- Dobie, Anna B. *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. 3rd. ed. Cengage, 2012.
- Doring, Martin and Brigitte Nerlich. "Framing the Coronavirus Pandemic: Metaphors, Images and Symbols" *Metaphor and Symbol*, vol. 37, no. 2, (2020): 71-75.
- Eniya, Chidiedere. "Who are the Heroes?" *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of covid-19 Pandemic*. Ed by IkechukwuOtuuEghuta and Nnenna Vivien Chukwu. Cityway Books, 2020: 83-84.
- Gillespie, Tim. *Doing Literary Criticism: Helping Students Engage with Challenging Texts*. Stenhouse Publishers, 2010.
- Hanne, Michael. "How We Escape Capture by the "War" Metaphor for covid-19." *Metaphor and Symbol*, vol. 37, no. 2, (2022): 88-100.
- Khaliq, Mohammad Abdul, Rohan Joseph and Junny, Rai. "Covid is War and Vaccine is Weapon!" *18th Proceedings of International Conference on Natural Language Processing (ICON) NLP AI*, 2021: 431-438.
- Mefor, O. Law. "Love in the Time of covid-19". *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of covid-19 Pandemic*. Cityway Books, (2020): 159-160.
- Moon, Brian. *Literary Terms: A Practical Glossary*. Chalkface Press, 2021.
- Musolff, Andres. "World-beating". *Pandemic Responses: Ironic, Sarcastic and Satirical Use of War and Competition Metaphors in the Context of covid-19 pandemic*". *Metaphor and Symbol*. Vol. 37, no. 2, (2022): 76-87.
- Olaosebikan, AyodeleKuburat. "This Too Shall Pass". *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of covid-19 Pandemic*. Cityway Books, 2020: 47-48.
- Rossi, Sandra, Andreas Macrcker and Eva Heim. "Metaphors and Related Expressions in Order Adults in the Field of Trauma and Stress-Related Disorders: A Scoping Review" *Metaphor and Symbol*. vol. 38, no. 1, (2023): 50-69.