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Research Article

# **Pandemic Poetry and Interventions in *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid-19 Pandemic: A Postcolonial Reading***

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## **Abstract**

Unarguably, the Covid-19 pandemic has remained a global experience that has altered aspects of life in all spaces. As global citizens adjust to the “new normal” protocols of living, most engagements of critics with literary works on the pandemic have found ecocriticism as a veritable theoretical tool in harnessing mirrored ordeals of the pandemic. However, this paper adopts the postcolonial theory to engage with the pandemic verses in Ikechukwu Otuu Egbuta and Nnenna Vivien Chukwu’s *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid-19 Pandemic*. The paper contextualises the studied text within the evolution of the anthology genre in modern Nigerian poetry and harnesses the critical perspectives on the expediency of poetry as intervening tool in crisis situations. After its rigorous analyses of the selected poems which slant the impacts of the pandemic into universal and domestic domains, the conclusion of the paper harps on the urgency to re-awake humane values for a better universe. However, for Third World nations, where the pandemic exposed vulnerability and dystopias, the urgent call remains the recovery of leadership and institutions which are in the throes of total collapse.

**Keywords:** Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown, new normal, pandemic poetry

## **Introduction**

When the outbreak of Covid 19 pandemic in most nations of the world erupted in 2019, little thought was given to the fact that the ugly experience would disorganize and reset previous orientations of global citizens. Although that was not the first time nations of the world came under common traumatic experiences, the pandemic literally surpassed preceding ordeals, such as the world wars, in terms of its ramified impacts on health and other survival variables such as economy and shelter. Somehow, its ravaging impact also challenged the relevance of the arts to human existence as science took total

control of the normative and survival protocols. But Rogers Asempasah, in “Thinking a Post-coronavirus Africa: Reading Amma Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon in the Era of Covid-19*,” places science and humanities on the scale of relevance when he states,

In the midst of the ongoing fetishization of scientific knowledge and expertise in virology, vaccinology, and immunology, one may be forgiven for saying that literature has nothing to teach us about the urgent protocols of survival like corporeal distancing, lockdown, wearing of masks, handwashing, vaccination, and booster shots... Nonetheless, as an imaginative arena, literature allows us to experience forms of being and sociality that force us to reflect on what is acceptable and what is not, what is ennobling and what is dehumanizing. In fact, part of the enduring power of fiction is that it does not simply alert us to the depths of human depravity or evil; it also shows us the human capacity to transcend catastrophe, evil, and shame... [as we have had a] rich body of fictional works that deploy historical and imagined plagues to explore issues such as the pain and commonness of human suffering, fear, uncertainty, betrayal, greed, love, and resilience in the face of unimaginable suffering. (4)

Although it is unsurprising that the pandemic catalysed literary responses in torrents across the world, critics have raised at least two issues which border on the response of literature to crisis conditions and the sublimity of such responses.

In his “Forward” to *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid -19 Pandemic* (henceforth *WOB*), for instance, Ezechi Onyerionwu, citing Lucien Goldman, highlights the paradox in the interpolation of crisis conditions and artistic creation by asserting that “Periods of crisis and deep social transformation are particularly favourable to the birth of great works of art and literature because of the multiplicity of problems and experiences that they bring to men and of the great widening of affective and intellectual horizons that they provoke” (v). This submission contrasts with that of Ernest Emenyonu (105) who, concerned with the imaginative quality of the literature produced on the Nigerian Civil War, in the early 1970’s, say:

In the present circumstances, the Nigerian writers on the [civil] war must allow a reasonable period of time to lapse before they can objectively write about the war, no longer as active combatants in the conflict, but as writers who bring their imaginative vision to bear on the important events in the history of their people. (*WOB*, vii- viii)

A contraction of the positions of Onyerionwu and Emenyonu reveal the concern for urgency, relevance and currency in relation to quality of art. However, the lacuna in the latter’s submission is his suggestion that surrogates creativity to time which carries with it consequences that could render creativity obtuse, inchoate or irrelevant.

The resolution is in the fact that it is the art that draws quality to itself as critical evaluations, while ‘filtering’ respective works, naturally ‘canonise’ the sublime. It appears, however, that for poetry, the nexus between literary work and currency is tacit as Isidore Diala claims,

the use of the topical in literature does not only locate a work in time and place, its gestures towards the timeless notwithstanding; it equally raises basic questions about the production of literature and its reception as it does about the literary forms, their powers, and their limits. Given the characteristic density of his/her art, for example, the poet seems uniquely placed to respond to topical issues with a comparative promptness that normally eludes the novelist and the dramatist whose appropriations of the same experience are typically hindered by the labyrinth of greater details. The enduring tradition of publishing poetry in the newspaper certainly sets in relief the art’s characteristic compactness and

underscores the affinity it shares with the print media for a thirst for the topical. (210-11)

Although an overview of Nigerian literature reveals that it was Elechi Amadi that first referred to pandemic, faintly, in his novel *Great Ponds* (1970), poetry writers in Nigeria have now surpassed other genres on the subject. For instance, there are few outings for the screen such as Moses Inwang's *Lockdown* (2021) and a one-track album titled *Coronavirus* (2020) by Ebenezer Obey. However, in the array of verses composed by Nigerian poets on the pandemic, we have Tanure Ojaide's *Narrow Escapes. A Poetic Diary of the Coronavirus Pandemic* (2021), Remi Raji-Oyelade's *Wanderer Cantos* (2021) and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Broken Bodies, Damaged Souls and Other Poems* (2022).

Apart from these books of poems by the named individuals, anthologised works also take a unique place joining the list of globalised anthologies on the subject such as Rebecca Rijdsdijk's *365 Days of Covid: A Poetry Anthology* (2021); we have a multi-lingual poetry anthology on the pandemic by Isma'il Bala and Khalid Imam's *Corona Blues: A Bilingual Anthology of Poetry* and the edited anthology by Ikechukwu Otuu Egbuta and Nnenna Vivien Chukwu, *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid-19 Pandemic* (2020) (henceforth *WOB*), which is the subject of this article. The justification for the choice of *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid-19 Pandemic* in this study rests on the fact that the anthology globalises the responses of Nigerian poets to the pandemic by having in its content compositions from other nationalities across the world.

### **Anthologies and Pandemic Poetry in Nigeria in Perspectives**

Unarguably, the contact with the West had exposed African poets to non-themed anthologies such as *An Anthology of Longer Poems* (1941) and *A Pageant of Longer Poems* (1959). However, in the early 1960s, when modern poetry started becoming visible in Africa, coming from the trajectory of the West, non-themed anthologies were in the forefront. The anthologies, which compiled poetry lines of diverse themes, style and ideologies by African nationalities include *Modern Poetry from Africa* (1963), *A Book of African Verse* (1964), *Poems of Black Africa* (1975), *West African Verse* (1975), *A Selection of African Poetry* (1976), *New Poets of West Africa* (1995) and *The New African Poetry: An Anthology* (1999).

In Nigeria, although Harry Garuba's *Voices from the Fringe: An ANA Anthology of New Nigerian Poetry* (1988) continues that tradition of compiling non-themed anthologies, his effort was unique because he only compiled verses by his fellow compatriots. But what appeared to be a significant turning point in the compilation of themed anthologies in Nigeria was in 2010 when Odia Ofeimun edited *Lagos of the Poets*, a compilation of poetry lines about the city of Lagos, in Nigeria. This tradition of compiling themed verses by Nigerian poets got a different colouration that involves Nigerian writers in the diaspora with Jumoke Verissimo and James Yeku's *Sorosoke: An #Endsars Anthology* (2022). Beyond the domestic, the compilation of themed issues has, however, gone global with lines by Nigerian poets compiled along with those of other global citizens on themed anthologies on terrorism in Ada Aharoni's *Anti-Terror and Peace: IFLAC Anthology*, for instance, and on Covid-19 pandemic as seen in *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid-19 Pandemic* which has 139 poems on the pandemic rendered by 68 poets across the world. The editors of our studied text capture the contents of the anthology in "Dedication" by revealing that

[the] anthology is dedicated to the well over one million persons whose lights were put off partly by the coronavirus outbreak and partly by its accompanying pandemic. For those who died as a result of contracting the coronavirus...those

who escaped from the claws of coronavirus. The very ones who sincerely tested positive at some point and had to battle gallantly between near-death-experience and have risen to a second life... friends and families separated into halves by the interstate and global lock downs... (ii-iv)

However, Al-Jasim and others approximate the typologies of pandemic poetry into three broad categories by asserting that:

Some poems about pandemics are gloomy, lamenting the fate of the helpless victims who have lost their health, friends, and freedom of movement. The fatal character and dynamics of the Coronavirus have been described in other pandemic poetry. Still, other poets illustrate how the epidemic [has] altered human lifestyles [and] recast traditional relationships with the natural world. (98)

While our studied text reflects the listed categories, another perspective on the pandemic is concerned with the effectiveness of poetry as a therapeutic tool. Rachid Acim, citing Gillie Bolton's reliance on the experience of health workers, horns the claim that poetry heals "patients suffering from anxiety, clinical depression, bereavement, terminal illnesses, post-traumatic stress and eating disorders" (69).

Similarly, Robert Carroll in a study that focused on the victims of infirmities and traumas suggests that recourse to the writing of poetry can serve as recuperative panacea. In the same vein, Hovey et al. also argue that the efficacy of writing and reading poetry assists people living with chronic pain to express themselves. Other critics, such as Livermore et al. and Stephanie Tobia also submit that poetry has health benefits for victims of infirmities and other social crises irrespective of space and age. With specific reference to the pandemic, Daneshwar, Sharma is also in agreement with this view that harps on the therapeutic value of poetry. However, it is in doubt whether the proponents of this view are in tune with reality because it is hard to see how an unconscious patient under ventilators and intensive care can respond to poetry. The use of poetry by medical personnel and caregivers in quarantine wards is also a mirage because of the regimentation and protocols that regulate activities in the wards. This reasoning validates Jeroen Dera's verdict which points at the inefficacy of poetry in the times of covid -19:

Corona poems have relatively little attraction for readers of poetry. The number of respondents with a very negative attitude toward corona poetry is much larger than the number of respondents with an explicitly positive attitude. However, the most frequently mentioned reason why readers of poetry have a negative attitude toward corona poetry, seems to be independent from the poetry itself. That is, the most frequently mentioned line of argumentation is escapist in nature... to escape from reality – one currently dominated by corona – is so profound that readers of poetry do not want to read poems on the topic. Another dominant pattern of argumentation is concerned with the extent to which corona poetry successfully reflects on the pandemic, and argues that poems written in response to the corona crisis are insufficiently excitative or do not manage to provide an original perspective on the topic. (12-13)

This perspective is in tandem with the reality because even for the uninfected in the vicinity of the ward, a disinterest with poetry is likely as anxiety of seeing the patient survive the attack is mostly prioritised and gets all the attention above writing or reading poetry, or listening to poetry tunes.

### **Pandemic Poetry and the Postcolonial Perspective**

As seen in Al-Jasim and others already cited, the ecocritical perspective seems most appealing to critics in the engagements with works on pandemic poetry. This has taken diverse shades such as what Clement Eloghosa Odia and Ugonma Uba Kalu –

Bazuaye call “ecosemiotics” in their study of selected poets from Nigeria and Cameroon whose verses are collated in *World on the Brinks*.

However, the ecocritical tool is limited in the sense that it obfuscates the salient domestic issues that compounded the pandemic crisis in third world nations such as Nigeria. In his essay, “Postcolonial Urbanisation and Prose Fiction in Africa”, Gbemisola Adeoti iterates the scope of the postcolonial theory thus,

Postcolonialism as a theory of literature examines literary texts and their social background from the perspective of their representation of the colonial experience and how they can come up with innovative ways of understanding the march of history and their new roles in it. The term refers to all nations that the experienced European domination on account of slavery and colonialism... (267)

However, Biodun Jeyifo, in his postcolonial thesis that ramifies literary engagement with politics and social traumas in Nigeria, expands and problematises postcolonial theorisation:

If the focus of postcolonial studies did not exactly shift from the Third World after this pact, it certainly became bispecular (some would say cross-eyed), its critical gaze simultaneously turned toward Western poststructuralists and postmodernist intellectual currents and the writers and writings of the developing world. Indeed, nothing marks the bi-specularity more than the fact that the three most visible postcolonial theorists, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, are as much ‘Europeanists’ as they are ‘Third Worldists’... [because] they came into high, global visibility not on the basis of works on Third World writers, but on account of powerful engagements of Western poststructuralist figures, principally Michel Foucault (Said), Jacques Derrida (Spivak) and Jacques Lacan (Bhabha). (5-6)

While this submission justifies the relevance of the postcolonial theory to this inquiry, the issues of hybridity, cultural appropriation, orientalism, politics of representation, resistance and decolonization, identity, history and memory make postcolonial inquiries more complex but also transcends Adeoti’s simplification.

## Results and Discussions

### *Space, Collective Siege and Common Experience in WOB*

It is not in doubt that the poet’s in *World on the Brinks*... are all equivocal about the origin of the pandemic and its rapid spread to all spaces in the world. Ade Adejumo, a victim of the virus, in “Corona is here” not only highlights the global boundaries of the pandemic as covering “Milan to Monrovia.../Wuhan to Wales.../ Paris/ To... Pretoria” (3), he describes the pandemic as “A lunatic tale/ Corrosive like the acid rain/ From the wonder skies of Wuhan/ China’s gift to the helpless globe” (4). The virus took full advantage of the unreadiness of humanity to prosecute what Nnenna Vivien Chukwu calls a “Wedging War on Humanity.” In the ‘war’, the world is reversed to its onset. Kayode Iwayemi in “Shall I the Express you unblamed?” relays how the pandemic period reincarnates the primordial deluge scene:

Then world is formless  
Filled with darkness  
And the plague rages  
Among all ages-  
Free-looking but depressed is our best  
How best to survive is our biggest test? (155)

Apparently, the crisis of survival here has replaced the abundance that subsisted in the primordial time. The virus aggressively proceeds on its agenda to reverse and reset the universe, as seen in “When Corona Comes Calling” (1). Expectedly, the virus provokes negative metaphors which reveal the ominous tendencies of its onslaught. In Ikechukwu Otuu Egbuta’s “Impudent Harvester” (141-2), the “Covid-19 pandemic” is not only called an “Impudent harvester” but also referred to as “Penal and malignant harvester!” who has caused “an enormous collapse of humanity.”

The virus, which has an “incubation period of fourteen days” before it begins to wreak havoc in the victim’s body, is regarded as “mankind’s enemy from the Asian city of Wuhan” (182). After its incubation period, Chinnaya O. Ifi, in “The Ambush”, associates the next phase of attack with “Joint pain, headache, cough/ Fever and difficulty in breathing” (89). The virus is said to have “thorns as crown” (171), its forays are like “The Inferno” (119-120) that exterminates without caution (119-120) while its sting, which is “Deadlier...than the bomb of Hitler” (126) has capacity that neutralises spiritual immunities and defences (131). Ayodele Kuburat Olaosebikan’s “The Levelling General” personifies virus calling it “The levelling general” that attacks vital body organs. The virus is “Grim-faced, heartless with fangs-/ Venom of pains/ Wreak havoc in bones and marrows-/ Lungs subdued/ The unwanted guest taking the choicest seat” (49). However, Ekaete George, in “Contagion” dramatises its contraction and deadly impact thus:

They say for days  
You swim the nasal corridors  
Poring, digging slaying  
Leaving in your wake no victors.

Grim traveler advances the sinuses  
To a motel down the pharyngeal city  
Touring the nooks and crannies  
Gifting it not a penny of pity.

You come along with fluid  
Pausing at the air sacs with pus  
Here at the gateway to the heart you settle  
Waiting for death in mucus.

Here is where they inhale  
Or you exhale  
Tired lungs counter attacking of caving  
Infested, living or dying or braving. (117)

Justifiably, the virus gets diverse labels that align its origin with Wuhan in verses such as Chinelu Vincent Okoro’s “The Wuhan Tyrant” (90) and Balogun Kehinde’s “Wuhan Weird War”. But the valid dislike for the virus coincides with that of its origin and triggers expressions of defiance, cynicism and calls for restitution.

For instance, David Iro, in “Great Daughter of Wuhan” (109), expresses mockery and disdain while castigating the destructive nature of the virus. The same features resonate in Deborah Uzoma’s “Every Day” but in a defiant tone:

Great daughter of Wuhan,  
A brewed Coward  
Aiming to cow the world  
Beating the world up, side, down, front and backward

Crawling, yet speedily devastating the land  
Squeezing away life while we dog-bark

...

Rejoice not in your strength  
Brewed Coward! You have got no sting. (110)

In another intervention, Anyanwu Sixtus Chinaka's "Wuhan" (30-1) refers to the city of Wuhan as "heartless" for afflicting "the world with a dreadful curse [that] has claimed lives of both old and young without cause and lends to suggestion of making propitiatory rites and other spiritual interventions to stave off the virus or "reduce [the] dreaded pandemic" (31).

What necessitates this reference to "spiritual interventions" is the admittance of helplessness but Deborah Uzoma, noticing that the "drumbeats" of the virus has "worn out medic (s)" in "Wuhan 2019", repeatedly calls for penanced restitution:

Wuhan, in 2019 came forth an 'excitement'  
Instead of glory, you made unsellable fame  
That ravaged the entire frame  
Wuhan ought to apologise. (113)

In verses, such as Anyanwu Sixtus Chinaka's "To this Dreaded Virus" (33) and Sola Ogunbayo's "Handwashing Pontius Pilate" which describes the virus as "The sneezes of Death in a bottle of cologne/ The coughs of fallen angels.../ Belzebubs in nose masks/ ...Broken monody from Lucifer" (215), spirituality or religion is seen as panacea to the pandemic. Ogunbayo's poem, in fact, is peaked in the refrain: "Thanking the Cross for crossing the curses!" in apparent reference to the passion of Christ and the appropriation of the blood he shed in the doctrine of the Judeo-Christian faith. The relevant lines which rephrased this antidote reads:

Hippocrates with new syringe:  
Blended from the bare broken bleeding Body  
Kidding test –kits kick away.  
Hippocrates with new syrup:  
The wonderful Wine that wanes our whines,  
No aids from foreign Hades. (215)

But this claim is controverted in Adebajo Adeagbo's "Ode to the Visitor Spirit" which proclaim the powerlessness of spirituality to arrest the "bestial... malevolent spirit of the unstoppable floodgates of droughty epidemics" (6). Although all scientific, spiritual and domestic solutions were mesmerized at its initial outbreak, it was medical science that provided a safety nest in the invention of preventive vaccines.

Unfortunately, the invention sparks racial recrimination in Alfred Fatuase "Who says Madagascar?" and compounds the condition of global confusion as expressed in Adebajo Adeagbo's "Vaccines":

Be it our desolate world in throes of rabid assailing foul airs.  
Desperate to be rid of its intemperate fouled airs.  
Nature's streak of problems dared created.  
But shall it be in the informed solutions  
Or in the formed solutions? (5)

The vaccine solution in Beverly Chima Enyeribe's "Unmask Me" (69), Angus Emeka's "Silence" (24) and Chinyere Otuu Egbuta's "Our Collective Humanity" goes with protective and curative health protocols dispensed in a "litany of conditions... [such as] Hand-washing,/ Sanitizing,/ Physical distancing,/... Masking (91). Sandra Nnabuike Nwagboso in "Times Like This" also itemises other regimentations:

Wear mask (s), wear gloves, wash hands rigorously

Sanitize hands frequently, stay in, social distance,  
Self- isolate and quarantine, WFH,  
Intermittent curfews, lockdowns, lockups.  
In MDS times. (204)

For some, however, the “MDS”, [Must do for safety], is a combination of the conventional and the unconventional as seen in Ariyo Ahmad’s “The Virus”:

We were told to keep ourselves safe by  
Sanitizing our hands regularly and  
Keeping our skull fastened to the rope of prayers, day and night  
For the world has become a silent soul  
Dying gradually in the sacred heart of men. (39)

Home grown trado-medical solution is also prescribed as remedy in Barth Akpa’s “A Dance in the Mask” (61) and Marinus Samon Yong’s “Ancestral Herbs.”

Specifically, Yong sees “fluids” from “Roots and backs and grass” boiled in “pots of clay” as perfect combative medicinal aid against the virus. He goes further by saying:

The cure in in our dense forests  
Hanging on leaves and potent backs  
Deep in the depths with mangrove roots  
And green grasses of our lush savannah.  
The western cacophony of windy brouhaha  
Marching on our airwaves with imperialist boots  
And tearing our tympanum with hollow barks  
Defy the potency of our ancestral herbs. (173)

In other engagements with solution to the invasion seen as “The Seductress” and a “dreadful Jezebel from Hell! (66), humanity and the overall attitude of global citizens come to the fore. Sopuruchi Blessed Frank’s “The Sudden Discovery” observes that “common humanity... In the quest of self-fulfilment / Has lost the very essence of her dignity”. (218). But Beverly Chima Enyeribe’s “To Heal our Sick World” gets into details asserting the nexus between humanity, healing and the pandemic:

The cure for covid 19 is to cover the orifices  
To mask the world  
To wash vestiges  
To purge the bloated beliefs  
To purify our thoughts and actions  
Which acts so pure and real,  
Then the sores can be  
And our dear world be renewed. (72)

This same thought resonates in Anirban Roy’s “Dear Humanity” where, in admonishing humanity, the poet says:

Dear Humanity, this is the beginning g of a ling fight.  
And we need to put in all our unselfish might.  
Come let’s be one world, one great people;  
One immense heart with a benign ripple. (27)

The morality in the preservation of humanity by acts that prioritise the sanctity of human lives and existence are anchored on the philosophy of vanity and ephemerality of life in Umar Yogiza Jr’s “The Language of Death”:

Grave reveals our true identity  
Naked our cruelty imprisoned by  
The drunkenness and hunger of wealth seeking

Mourning on our door with rag sack and famished  
Standing on placid testament of lost  
Commanding blindfolded history with  
Broken wings of seduced theatre. (227)

This call for the resuscitation of humanist values is refracted in Ariyo Ahmad's "Benefits of Covid-19" (42) and Ayodele Kuburat Olaosebikan's "Mother Corona" with the latter saying: "we have all etched into our hearts/ Our differences are irrelevant... [because it is] only love [that] conquers!" (45).

Overall, the ominous impacts of the pandemic discernible in the studied anthology are universal and the domestic. One of the verses that introduces the universal slant is Omolola Francis's "The Fall" which criticises the danger of science and its corollary. The irony here is that science, in its effort to improve or save humanity makes humanity its victim:

Covid from Wuhan has taken the world hostage,  
Daily claiming its victims in thousands  
Elegy of the loss of our [sic] master plan  
Arts- celebration of obscene  
Crave for rights and freedom dwarfed us thus  
Degeneration of a lawless being. (190)

The dislocation of routines follows on a global scale as relayed in the displacement of "nation's" ideologies and economies mirrored in Rema T. Das's "The Contagion" (195-6). This condition is presented as unprecedented in Maria Abiola Alege's "Warring the Space" which likens the attack to a menace greater than previous world wars. Ironically, though she uses "Chemical and massive [weapons] in destruction" superintended the carnage in those wars, the mystery about the pandemic is that:

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,... (166)

The consequence furthers in Kakoli Debnath's "The Lost Spring" where "The streets [have become] silent graveyards/ They sing coffins and cypresses- [while] Everything's the same, yet everything changed/ Anxiety and stress. They live in our homes/ Rent-free!" (149). It is understandable that Bolade Olukotun in "Covid- 19 can't be Timid don't be Stupid" alerts to the reality of the virus and warns against negligence and rationalisations propped up by religious indoctrination, common sense or carelessness, for example.

In poems such as Comfort Nyati's "A Puzzle Instance" (103), Adjei Agyei-Baah's "Corona Chronicles: Six Sneryu" (11), Akachi Adimora- Ezeigbo's "Song of A Caged Bird" (22) and Alfred Fatuase's "Just Answer Your Call" the poets agree that social distancing and the closure of public spaces during the lockdown fertilised hunger, idleness and loneliness. The dilemma in "Face Hunger Inside of Corona Outside" (73-74) is that the vulnerability, uneasiness and terror associated with the outside crept into homes.

Interestingly, in Rema T. Das's "Freedom in Lockdown" (198-9), the decongestion of prisons and detention facilities through the granting of "An Interim" bail to detained persons becomes fortuitous as the lockdown had turned all homes and spaces of freedom into prison. For Deepa Sehrawat, in "Save Me" (116), the confinement only exacerbated strife, squabbles and domestic violence which were avoidable in homes

before the lockdown. Just like Ariyo Ahmad's "Staying Safe at Home", Adebajo Adeagbo in "Family Against" demonstrates how the "artificial unity" facilitated by the lockdown becomes a burden rather than a solution:

Soon, the enemy within springs up;  
Stomach rebels, churns in hunger pangs!  
The depleting granary and emptying purse  
Nagging and nagging us in the face,... (8)

Olatunbosun David's allusion in "The Siege is with us" (188) reminds us of a time in Israel when the enemies blocked the entrance to Samaria leading to cut in food supplies to the nation. Like the symbolism in Samaria, tension in the poem is replicated in the infection of top government officials by the virus and the ubiquitous cancellation of hitherto scheduled social rites and engagements.

Surprisingly, hallowed religious sites also come under lock as seen in Ogah Darlington's "Corona! The Commander-in-Chief".

You shut down Mecca pilgrimage  
That you can pillage  
Jerusalem pilgrimage  
At your stake we question God's potency,  
To give accolades to man's idiocy  
Sacrificing religion,  
In order to embrace your regulations.

You possess us in the evil spirit's legions. (183)

The heretic use of "legions" possessing men in the last line lampoons "Mecca" and "Jerusalem", pilgrimage sites visited annually by votaries of Islam and Christianity. The overall contradictions, in Adrian Alsobihy's "Covid-19 Weird Thought", are such that although "The air is pure but/ Wearing masks is mandatory./ Roads are empty/But it is impossible/To go on long drive./ People have clean hands/ But there is a ban on shaking hands./ Friends have time to / Sit together/ but they cannot get together. The cook inside you is crazy,/ But you cannot call anyone to lunch and dinner./ The heart longs for the office /But the weekend does not seem to end./Those who have money/ Have no way to spend it. Those who don't have money/ Have no way to earn it. There is enough time on hand / But, you can't fulfil your dreams. /The culprit is all around/ But, cannot be seen". (12-13)

In another perspective, the class and race dimensions to the pandemic have universal and domestic implications that inspire interest. We have Coco Kiju in "The Virus" who makes a case for the poor and the vulnerable. Her justification for the call is that in dispensing medical aids it is "The rich [that are] getting all the relief and/ The poor being left to die in disbelief" (101). This connects to Mary Charmain Tshabalala's "The Massacre" which affirm that "No one came to know of Covid nineteen/ Yet knew so much of racism; hate envy and discrimination" (177). Like Bassey Anthony Godwin's "The Interview" (64- 65), which sees the virus as dispensing justice by killing known oppressors, Okoli Stephen Nonso's "Hangmen also Dies" (185), holds that the pandemic is a chastisement on the political class described as "hangmen" who have serially suffocated the poor but have now met their Waterloo. This goes further in Anyanwu Sixtus Chinaka's "Nemesis" with a charge of vengeance against the pandemic:

Oh! Nemesis!  
Where is thy sting?  
Will you watch us why (sic) we eat bricks?  
We are not born paupers  
We are only deprived of our rights

And turn our land to be a forbidden kingdom  
Where only the rich dwells  
And the poor are being casted out like fishes! (35)

Notwithstanding, these rationalisations are diffused in Bassey Anthony Godwin's "The August Visitor" (67) with the poet harping on the fact that the virus does not discriminate nor choose its victims using parochial standards of class or race.

### ***Homegroans in Homeland and Pandemic Tales in WOB***

The domestication of the pandemic experience in the studied poems exposes the undercurrent postcolonial traumas in many third world nations, especially in Nigeria. One of the poems that exemplifies direct reference to the Nigerian homeland, in respect of the pandemic, is Chimeziri Charity Ogbedeto's "Lost Silence". The poet says:

This springy virus,  
Spider-like  
Spreads from Wuhan  
And to the world over, a novel  
Covid nineteen, then one-nine  
To my country comes  
With my black race mingles  
To all tales of vanities  
Of life's essence lost. (87)

However, the sadistic twist that fingers neo-colonialism for the woes in third world nations is seen in Kayode Iwayemi's "The lost Rein" where the poet sees the virus invasion on western nations as a comeuppance:

They made us a cage  
To rot and remain with  
Pictures of hell that can never be retained by them.  
They call the cage a stage.

They sure know we can't complain,  
Just our last breath to retain.  
Alas! Here comes a marauding predator  
That they themselves fall a prey.

Now they are eating from the pot of socio-economic injustice  
That has been practised in our nation's working industry.  
They cannot balloon to the white man. (153)

Referring to western nations as "The land of racism", Chinyere Otuu Egbuta's "Abroad" parodies the return of his countrymen from abroad with a disdain that sees the returnee compatriots as potential carriers of the virus. On the surface, "quarantine", refers to one of the travel protocols in place during the lockdown but it also relates with how travellers from abroad were ostracised because, unlike what obtained, the returnees "Became dreaded / Avoided like leprosy... like ...plagues" (96).

These sentiments are, however, overshadowed in the objective assessments of the Nigerian situation presented by some of the poets who call out leadership failure and its consequences. While citizens of other nations only had to engage with the general impact of the lockdown, Azih Paul Tochukwu recalls in "Stay At Home" that the Nigerian citizens may "Stay at home and feel protected,/ While the nation's treasury is looted outside,/" (51). The indices of leadership failure, which predate the crisis period is rejuvenated by Clement Eloghosa Odia in "This is 2020". This manifests in poor health

facilities, among others. In the wave of the pandemic, “Hospitals [became] overwhelmed with patients/ Mask wearing/ Ventilators [are] in short supply”, [despite]... “New health centres erected/ To receive COVID-19 patients/ Death grows in endless number/ Medicines inadequate/ Personal protective equipment insufficient/ Nurses and doctors [are] overwhelmed” (100). Usang Okpa Usang also joins with a lament in “The Weeping Kountry” where leadership failure and corruption have led to the institutionalisation of suffering. The guilty are the leaders described as “rankles Generals” whose mismanagement of the nation has turned it into a “weeping kountry [that is] sinking in mock parade” (229).

David Iro, in “Other Face of Coronavirus,” juxtaposes the leadership crisis with the monumental infrastructural deficit, decay and hopelessness that have enveloped the nation. With the ravaging onslaught of the “CHINESE VIRUS” the nation is exposed as having:

NO HOSPITAL, no light, no roads, no water  
No wages, no job, no security, no unity, no peace  
No hope, no love, no value, no vision, no mission  
No destiny, no future, no common enemy, no common friend  
No honesty, no integrity, no equity, no justice

Nothing to celebrate as people of common amalgamation of 1914. (106-7)

The pathetic situation is revealed further in Chidiere Enyia’s “Covid- 19” where humanity has been submerged by crass politics and opportunism. This is because, instead of saving lives at the period, “Covid 19/ [becomes] A season of displaying charity with hypocrisy/ Where politicians and pen robbers loot/ Common wealth in disguise of patriotism” (79). The pandemic, in Clement Eloghosa Odia’s account in “The Vileness in Us” (97-8) increased man’s inhumanity to man because “price of food items hit the roof”, soldiers, enforcing the stay at home order, “clamped down” or “kill [ed] hapless citizens”. Worst of all, government reneged in its promise to “Assist the vulnerable” as its officials diverted funds dedicated to cushion the impact of the lockdown on poor citizens into private pockets.

In the long list of compositions that look forward to life after the covid by expressing hope and survival, we have Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika’s “The Earth is at Peace Again” (137-8), Michael Onaiwu’s “Oh! Covid-19” (178), Olatunbosun David’s “This Hard Time Surely Will Pass” (186-7), Jimoh Quadrat’s “Just a Twinkling of an Eye” (147), Iquo Diana Abasi’s “A Short While Hence” (144- 145) and Iro Israel Oluka’s “A Tale of Tragedy” (146). Others include, Deepa Sehrawat’s “Hope” (114), Ayodele Kuburat Olaosebikan’s “This Too Shall Pass” (47), Azih Paul Tochukwu’s “We’ll Survive Covid-19” (55), Alfred Fatuase’s “Just Asking” (16) and Beverly Chima Enyeribe’s “When this pandemic is Over” (70). However, the distinction can be clearly drawn between these poets and those who isolate heroes and villains while the pandemic lasted. Attention here centres on Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika’s “Song of a Survivor” (135-6), Clement Eloghosa Odia’s “Heroes” (99), Chidiere Enyia’s “Who are the Heroes?”, Akachi Adimora- Ezeigbo’s “Brave Frontliner” (19-20) and “Escape from the Crocodile’s Jaw” (21). These poets ascribe heroism to survivors and scientists, “Who invented vaccines and ventilators/ who/ Clubbed viruses by washing our hands/ (99), and medics who showed bravery and dedication to saving lives during the siege. A clear distinction is, however, drawn between heroes and villains of the crisis by Chidiere Enyia in “Who Are the Heroes?” The heroes and villains are actually those “Who donated millions and billions/ To fight COVID-19... [those] ...locked down in their houses/ Under the scourge of hunger” (83), ordinary helpless citizens who bore the brunt and medical personnel in the line of duty while the villains are military men who acted as

“task force,” hypocrites or politicians “Who stole [the people’s] mandate” (83) and “representathieves” (84). The critical point here, on the negative side, is the abuse of power by the Nigerian leaders which manifests in uncivility, travesty of the trust and sacred privilege of holding political office.

### Conclusion

The engagement with the themed subject of pandemic in this article has drawn out diverse but globalised responses of isolated poets to the ordeal. While the global impacts of the pandemic are clear to see through the effects of the lockdown and the menaces of the virus, the challenge of survival is compounded in third world nations such as Nigeria by the failure in leadership and its attendant consequences. While attribution to error in nature or science is rendered as primary cause of the plague, the interconnection between issues such as race and class justify the postcolonial dimensions to the discussion. The fields of science and medicine have prescribed their antidotes and protocols which remain as safety procedures. However, the art has also maintained its relevance by not only identifying the common and diverse impacts of the pandemic but also with its prescription of a universal antidote which calls on global citizens to revive humane values that have long been abandoned. Beyond this, the intervention of the art is far-reaching and domesticated especially in the mirrored condition of third world nations, such as Nigeria, where leadership remains as survival threat in situations of domestic or global crises.

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