

LAMENT AS SOCIAL AND PERSONAL PROTEST IN CLEMENT CHUKWUKA  
IDEGWU'S *THE PROCRUSTEAN CREED AND OTHER POEMS*

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**Abstract**

This paper examines lament as both a personal and social mode of protest in Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's *The Procrustean Creed and Other Poems*. Drawing primarily on Marxist literary theory and supported by insights from trauma studies, the study explores how the poet's persona articulates emotional betrayal, political disillusionment and sustained persecution within a corrupt socio-political environment. The poems reveal how private anguish, particularly experiences of love betrayal and psychological trauma, is inseparable from broader critiques of bad governance, moral decadence and human cruelty. Through close textual analysis, the paper demonstrates that lament in Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poetry functions not merely as an expression of grief but as a resistant discourse that challenges oppressive power structures and exposes social injustice. The study further argues that the persistent tone of lament transforms the poet's voice into a site of ideological confrontation, where personal suffering becomes a metaphor for collective distress. By situating Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poetry within the tradition of protest literature, this paper contributes to existing scholarship on African poetic discourse and underscores the enduring relevance of lament as a tool for socio-political engagement. This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach.

**Keywords:** Lament, Protest, Betrayal, Distress, Disillusionment

**Introduction**

Poetry in African literary tradition has long functioned as a powerful medium for articulating personal anguish and collective resistance. Far from being a purely aesthetic exercise, African poetry frequently engages with social realities such as political oppression, moral decay and existential disillusionment. As Chinua Achebe famously observes, African writers often see themselves as "teachers" whose task is to interrogate society and expose contradictions (1975: 42-45). Within this tradition, lament emerges not merely as an expression of sorrow but as a deliberate strategy of protest against systems that generate suffering.

Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's *The Procrustean Creed and Other Poems* is situated within this protest-oriented poetic lineage. The collection presents a deeply wounded poetic persona whose voice oscillates between betrayal, particularly in matters of love, and broader socio-political disillusionment marked by bad governance, persecution and human cruelty. The poems reveal a world in which private pain is inseparable from public injustice, suggesting that individual suffering is often a symptom of structural failure. The intersection of the personal and the political aligns with Terry Eagleton's assertion that literature is "deeply bound up with the historical conditions that produce it" (1976: 4).

Lament as deployed in Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poetry functions as both emotional release and ideological resistance. Traditionally associated with grief and loss, lament in this context transcends mourning to become a critical response to oppression. According to Ngugiwa Thiong'o, literature that confronts injustice performs the vital tasks of "restoring the human voice to history" (1981: xiii-xxx). Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poetic voice performs this restorative function by speaking against betrayal, corruption and calculated acts of evil that threaten both individual dignity and communal well-being.

Moreover, the recurrent sense of persecution and conspiracy in this poetry collection reflects the psychological toll of living under morally bankrupt leadership. Such representations resonate with trauma-oriented readings of literature, where repeated expressions of pain signal unresolved psychological and social wounds. Cathy Caruth notes that trauma is often marked by its "repetitive and insistent" return in narrative expression (1996: 7). In Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poems, this repetition highlights how personal trauma is continually reinforced by hostile social conditions.

This study, therefore, examines lament as a dual force-personal and social-through which Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poetic persona negotiates betrayal, oppression and moral decay. Adopting Marxist literary theory as its primary framework and drawing selectively on trauma studies, the paper argues that lament in *The Procrustean Creed and Other Poems* operates as a form of protest literature that exposes power imbalances and challenges hegemonic structures. By reading this poetry collection as a site where private grief converges with public resistance, this paper contributes to larger discussions on African protest poetry and affirms the enduring relevance of lament as a mode of socio-political engagement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded primarily in Marxist literary theory, with selective insights from trauma studies, in order to account for the interrelationship between personal suffering and socio-political protest in Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's *The Procrustean Creed and Other Poems*. These

frameworks jointly illuminate how lament operates not only as an emotional response to betrayal and persecution but also as an ideological criticism of oppressive social structures.

Marxist literary theory views literature as a product of material and historical conditions, shaped by power relations within society. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels argue that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas”, suggesting that cultural production often reflects dominant power structures (1970: 67 – 70). Within this framework, literature becomes a site of struggle where marginalized voices can resist ideological domination. Poetry, in particular, offers a condensed and emotive form through which dissent can be articulated against injustice, corruption and exploitation.

Building on this foundation, Terry Eagleton emphasizes that Marxist criticism is not merely concerned with class but with “the ways in which literary texts are bound up with the social relations and ideological conflicts of their time” (1976: 6). In *The Procrustean Creed and Other Poems*, the persona’s repeated lament exposes the contradictions of a society marked by failed leadership, moral decay and systemic cruelty. The poet’s grief is therefore not private in isolation. It reflects what Georg Lukacs describes as the “totality” of social experience, where individual fate mirrors collective conditions (1983:15). Lament, in this sense, functions as a form of ideological unmasking, revealing how personal betrayal and persecution are symptoms of broader socio-political dysfunction.

Raymond Williams’ concept of “structures of feeling” further strengthens this analysis, Raymond Williams explains that literature often captures lived experiences that are not yet fully articulated within dominant ideology, describing them as “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt” (1977: 132). Clement Chukwuka Idegwu’s poetry embodies such structures of feeling through its intense emotional language, translating social disillusionment into a shared affective experience. The persistent tone of sorrow, fear and outrage becomes a collective emotional register through which readers apprehend the consequences of bad governance and human wickedness.

To comprehend the socio-political emphasis on Marxist criticism, this study also draws on trauma theory, particularly in its attention to betrayal, psychological distress and the repetition of pain.

Cathy Caruth defines trauma as an experience that “returns to haunt the survivor later on”, often through recurring images and narratives (1996: 4). The repetitive lamentation in Clement Chukwuka Idegwu’s poems-especially the fixation on betrayal, conspiracy and persecution- can be read as a poetic manifestation of unresolved trauma. These personal wounds are continually reactivated by hostile social environments, reinforcing the link between individual psychology and political reality.

Dominic La Capra further distinguishes between acting out and working through trauma, noting that literature can function as a space where traumatic experiences are symbolically confronted (2001: 22 – 25). In this context, Clement Chukwuka Idegwu’s poetry represents an attempt to “work through” trauma by transforming pain into protest. Lament thus becomes both a survival mechanism and a political act, enabling the persona to resist silencing and assert moral agency within an unjust system.

By combining Marxist literary theory with trauma studies, this paper adopts an integrated framework that accounts for both structural oppression and psychological injury. This approach allows for a nuanced reading of *The Procrustean Creed and Other Poems* as protest literature in which personal anguish is inseparable from social critique. Lament emerges not as passive sorrow but as an active mode of resistance – one that exposes power, confronts evil and affirms the enduring role of poetry in socio-political engagement.

### **Literature Review**

Critical scholarship on African poetry has increasingly foregrounded its role as a vehicle for social commentary and protest, reflecting not only personal emotion but also wider socio-political realities. This critical turn moves beyond readings that treat African poetry as purely introspective or aesthetic, observing instead how poets engage with issues such as governance corruption, oppression and collective suffering. For instance, studies in post-colonial rhetoric of protest reveal that African poetic traditions frequently challenge the status quo, enrolling literature as a site of resistance against political and social injustice. In an emerging perspective on post-colonial African poetry, protest is characterised as a strategic opposition to both colonial imperatives and post-independence failures, with poetic texts articulating dissent against power structures and inequality.

Aligned with this view, research on Nigerian literature underscores how poetry fuses social commentary with artistic expression. Abayomi Awelewa and Rosemary O. Awelewa argue that Nigerian poets such as J.P. Clark and Wole Soyinka deploy imagery, symbolism and rhetoric to encapsulate realities of governance deficits, corruption and injustice, making poetry an effective medium for probing and critiquing socio-political dynamics. This scholarship supports the idea that poetry can function as a collective voice of protest, extrapolating societal challenges and mobilizing the consciousness of readers.

The emphasis on protest poetry in African contexts also finds resonance in broader comparative studies of African literary engagement with oppression. Scholars note that many African poets—including those from Uganda, Nigeria and Southern Africa – use poetic form to denounce oppression and advocate for resistance. For example, Susan Nalugwa Kiguli’s *The African Saga* includes a section titled “Poems of Protest, signaling the intentional inclusion of dissent voices

that articulate to both individual and communal struggles. Similarly, research on Southern African poets demonstrates how personal suffering and marginalization are expressed through literary protest. In one study, it was shown that poets who had endured socio-economic and political exclusion wrote to challenge injustice, bringing to light both individual and collective grievances as acts of resistance.

These scholarly trends indicate that African poetry is not only reactive but strategically engaged with its sociopolitical environment. Where early criticism might have tended to compartmentalize African literature into discrete aesthetic categories, more recent scholarship highlights how poets merge personal emotion with public criticism to constitute a poetic of resistance and agency. Indeed, protest in poetry often encompasses lament as a form of expressive resistance—a notion that also emerges in trans-historical poetry studies. Literary analysis of lament poetry more broadly suggests that lament can make muted voices “audible”, serving as a medium for collective memory and social awareness. This functions not merely as an outcry but as a pedagogical and political expression that can amplify marginalized perspectives.

Despite this growing body of work, existing literature has tended to focus on canonical poets or well-established movements such as anti-colonial or post-apartheid protest. Less attention has been paid to poets like Clement Chukwuka Idegwu, whose literary work intertwines personal betrayal, existential lament and evaluation of bad governance. The need to examine how individual pain intersects with systemic social issues, particularly in contemporary African poetry, thus remains an important area for further inquiry. By situating *The Procrustean Creed and other Poems* within these scholarly conversations, this research contributes to expanding understandings of how lament functions as both personal protest and socio-political commentary.

### **From Personal Sorrow to Social Critique: Lament as a Form of Protest**

Clement Chukwuka Idegwu’s persona laments the betrayal of an ex-lover, creating a vivid emotional landscape that combines personal grief with moral reflection. Through first-person narrative, the reader experiences the depth of the personal anguish:

A VALENTINE WITHOUT A VAL

My love, the only of my existence, my love you truly know about.

If I am harshly plucked off like a gentle bud from a parent plant, for loving you.

Or you anger me in the spirit world.

Rather than live to love a loveless world ... (3).

Recurring images of “love” and “world” function as metaphor for both emotional desolation and ethical disillusionment. The poet employs plaintive diction and repetition.

Ree men ... ber?

Our holy dreams in which we succinctly lived tomorrow

Our joint aspirations and plans  
Plans for the upkeep of our kids  
The hairstyles you planned for junior to be name after you  
Our lovely family in our lovely car  
Our secrets and our moments of secret dealings  
The sweet baths we had together  
Our love-making and moments of secrecies  
Forget not our unbroken promises  
Promises never to be broken like China Ware were it not for your family and the  
unholy conspiracy.  
Will we allow biological lineage to break  
Our unbroken promises-our genuine love? (4).

The poet persona mimics the circular, obsessive nature of grief, which aligns with Cathy Caruth's discussion of trauma as a delayed and repetitive experience (1996: 4). This personal sorrow is not purely private. By exposing betrayal and loss, Clement Chukwuka Idegwu illustrates universal human vulnerability, which resonates beyond the individual and sets the stage for social criticism.

The lament functions as a space for grappling with identity, trust and moral integrity. Clement Chukwuka Idegwu explores the poet persona's ethical conscience, reflecting on personal choices and societal pressures. The poet uses literary techniques, direct addresses to absent figures, to probe oppressive tendencies in the society:

#### JUNKETING

Some are forever fooled  
And clapped for, inglorious rottenness  
A woman at 40, yet single  
And society glories in her adult spinsterhood.  
Poverty extravaganza  
Exploitation Jamboree  
Billionaires in crates for exportation deportation  
Human Right Activist hanged  
Social critics to death trekked protestingly  
Others gaoled at Gashu  
Popular Mandate annulled  
The People's Choice exterminated  
Press gagged  
Apartheid South African Nigerianized  
Liberated Mandela's S.A. Nigerians dictators discussed  
Paul vowed mandate restored marriage contracted

But the mandate released in corpse (6).

This poem demonstrates that private lament can double as introspective ethical examination, consistent with Dominick LaCapra's observation that trauma in literature often involves working through emotional and moral dilemmas (2001: 22).

The poet frequently extends his lament to condemn social realities. In poems such as Topsy-turvy, The Campus, U and I and The Procrustean Creed, the poet exposes corruption, mismanagement and exploitation, showing how structural failings amplify personal suffering:

#### TOPSYTURVY

..... Injustice has been wrought upon me  
And the olive branch in me imprisoned .....  
Yet at the corridors of power, lay an abysmal display of powers.....  
Those there whether opportunists or inheritors  
Their ingenuity put all the contestants  
Power! Oh thou gentle sweet killer  
When will thy kingdom come to an end?  
Remember those to be ruined are first made mad  
Through madness those you just made mad are ruined  
Men. Thou are cockroaches (8).

#### THE CAMPUS

..... A lot in agonies disallowed  
Unending the struggle  
Sweet-bitter the struggle .....  
Ours is rotten tomatoes extravaganza .....  
I've been maimed by ignorant academic overlords (13 – 14).

#### U AND I

..... Oh ye gods  
Will the Messiah ever come  
To tell Pharaoh "Let my people go?"  
To safely lead us through our Red Sea  
To create a commonwealth of nations  
Where all in unity live  
No social strata? (16).

#### THE PROCRUSTEAN CREED

Extremists  
Coined anti-government  
Saboteurs  
Arrested

Charged  
Gaoled  
People's mandate annulled  
Life President by fiat (20).

Allegorical language-depicting leaders as “extremists” or “Pharoah”-conveys both moral and political condemnation. Terry Eagleton notes literature often reveals the ideological tensions and material conditions of its time (1976: 6). Here, lament functions as both personal frustration and moral-political critique.

The poet also depicts malicious acts and conspiracies, portraying a world filled with envy, manipulation and moral decay. References to plundering of African resources by irresponsible rulers and elite transform individual lament into social commentary, highlighting how personal suffering often mirrors societal corruption:

..... THE PROCRUSTEAN CREED

Green 504

Yellow Aeroplane

White, a whole avenue of mansions

Red pathfinders best model

Pinic: Unnecessary further studies overseas

Union Leaders 500,000 dollars plus free flight

Countries of your choice

Yet about 90 million miserably starved.

Settlement settlemental

Government of settlement by settlement (21).

..... THE DITCHED DAME

Pity her?

Does pity exist?

Doesn't pity, pity pity?

Her, Africa wasted

Many bridegrooms shun in her bloom

Admired all for their pockets

That glistening Gold

She got it on her in-between (32).

Georg Lukacs emphasizes that the fate of the individual can reflect broader social totality (1983: 15), which is evident in Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's integration of personal and societal betrayal.

Clement Chukwuka Idegwu universalises suffering in *The Procrustean Creed and Other Poems*, making lament a vehicle for empathy and social awareness by expanding the personal voice to

communal experience, the poet situates private grief within a wider ethical and societal context. Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" help explain how poetry can capture emotions not fully represented in society (1977: 132).

The poet integrates private sorrow with social criticism, showing that lament can protest indirectly. The recurring motif of betrayal-romantic, ethical and social serves as a metaphor for corruption and moral failure. Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's literary work illustrates how individual grievances often reflect systemic injustice, turning private lament into a form of resistance.

Stylistically, the poems employ repetition, rhetorical questions and parallelism to emphasize protest. Lines like:

..... Does his ear ate raw  
Karma's visitation  
When power powerless powder turned  
He yawned for help like Anini which days numbered  
Constituencyless Nigerian leaderless leaders  
Whither thou goeth?  
At a crossroad we are  
Macabre dance our second self  
Except people's will honoured (22)

Lament also serves a didactic purpose, educating readers about resilience, morality and social justice. By documenting both personal betrayal and societal wrongdoing, Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poetry embodies Chinua Achebe's vision of the African writer as a "teacher" who restores ethical consciousness and challenges injustice (1988: 42-45). The poems thus operate on multiple levels: as emotional expression, social critique and moral pedagogy.

## Conclusion

This study has examined *The Procrustean Creed and Other Poems* as a poetic site where personal sorrow and social critique converge through lament. By reading Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poetry through the lens of Marxist literary theory, with supportive insights from trauma studies, the paper has demonstrated that lament in the collection transcends private grief to become an instrument of protest against betrayal, bad governance, persecution and moral decay. The poet's persistent voice of sorrow is thus not a sign of resignation but a conscious response to both emotional and structural injustice.

The analysis reveals that Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poetic persona transforms experiences of romantic betrayal and psychological distress into a broader commentary on societal dysfunction.

Personal pain is shown to mirror collective suffering, suggesting that individual trauma is inseparable from the socio-political conditions that produce it. Through vivid imagery, repetition, rhetorical questioning and confessional tone, the poems articulate a sustained critique of corrupt leadership and human cruelty, exposing the ethical failures that underline social oppression.

Furthermore, the study establishes lament as a dynamic and productive literary mode. Rather than functioning solely as an expression of despair, lament in Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poetry operates as a moral and ideological challenge to hegemonic power. It gives voice to the marginalized, confronts injustice and invites readers and the masses to reflect critically on their social realities. In this sense, the poet's literary work aligns with the broader tradition of African protest poetry, where artistic expression serves both aesthetic and socio-political purposes.

By foregrounding lament as a form of personal and social protest, this research contributes to existing scholarship on contemporary African poetry and expands critical understanding of how emotional expression can function as resistance. The paper ultimately affirms the enduring relevance of poetry as a medium for articulating suffering, challenging injustice and negotiating the complex relationship between the individual and society. Future studies may extend this inquiry by comparing Clement Chukwuka Idegwu's poetics of lament with those of other African poets or by exploring lament as a mode of protest across different literary genres and cultural contexts.

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