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# Minority Voices in Nigerian Civil-War Literature

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**ABSTRACT**
There are always divergent viewpoints in the interrogation of historical materials with regards to literary productions. This notion may derive essentially from the Urhobo proverb that 'the enjoyment one gets from a great festival is often determined by the homestead one visits'; not downplaying the purpose and expectation of the person attending the festival. Although war and other conflicts that pitched people against themselves and /or institutions may serve as a leitmotif for creative works, the portraiture of such experiences, both physical and psychological, may differ from the viewpoints of the writers especially those from either side of the war divide. The Nigerian Civil-War of 1967 to 1970, no doubt, has produced more literary works and memoirs than any other socio-political upheavals since Nigerian attainment of political independence from the British in 1960. Many of the literary expressions of the Nigerian Civil War explore various themes and horrors of the war from different perspective, some from the viewpoints of the victims (Biafran, Igbo) and others from the angle of the perceived victors (the Federal Government). Scholars of Nigerian Civil-War narratives have also examined the literary productions that derive from the war from the above perspective even though their position may only establish the universal truth that constitute the aesthetic fulcrum of the Nigerian war literature. Little attention has been paid to the minority voices whose manner of engagement is different from the body of works that derive from the established canon of the war narratives. This essay, therefore, examines the minority voices in the works of writers who, because of their ethnic affiliation in the Nigerian polity, were not active participants in the war but are caught up in the web of the conflagration that defined it. It adopts the postcolonial literary theory to describe the condition of the marginalised minorities within a supercentre of hegemonic forces. It exposes the authors' emotions and sympathies on the ideologies of the war and also foregrounds the inherent metaphors, traumatic images and existential appurtenances on which the minority groups in Nigeria sought out their existence in the midst of the war.

**Keywords:** *Minority Voices, Nigeria, Civil-War narratives, Nigerian Literature.*

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## INTRODUCTION

If an artist is anything he is a human being with heightened sensibilities; he must be aware of the faintest nuances of injustice in human relations. The African writer cannot therefore be unaware of, or indifferent to, the monumental injustice which his people suffer [1]

The above statement is a fitting prologue to the indices that constitute the discourse of the Nigerian civil war, 51 years after, as recreated by writers donning the gab of 'minority' in the Nigerian creative firmament.

The literature of every epoch bears testimonies to the appurtenances of that epoch. The writer, often times, source materials for his creative enterprise from the pool of events – whether major or minor as it might be – to advance his sensibilities about such periods as they concern man in a society that is always fraught with wars, oppression, exploitation, deprivation, poverty and mindless killings. Depending on the precinct from which a writer views the world or draws his inspiration, there must be an underlying goal; either to uphold artistic truth or to distort it to suit certain perceived caprices. Europe and America, for instance, produced a significant body of literature to justify their involvement in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade of the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ centuries. Colonialism, that succeeded it, is another case in point. Thus, from the myriads of materials before the artist, he has the liberty to his choice; what material to use, the one to discard – the overall goal of his enterprise being the driving force of his art. This choice, Osundare [2] believes, is "intensely influenced by aspiration, [and] the social-ideological goal of the artistic reality". Gboyega Kolawole and Sule Egya support this view when they affirm that the writer, "in spite of his/her individual assertions, understands that he/she primarily belongs to his community and his/her art is in the service of that community" (139).

It goes without saying, therefore, that in all the works that may have been churned out to represent the body of Nigerian war literature, none can be said to represent the universal truth that constitute the fulcrum of the War. Hence, this literature has variously been labelled under such rubrics as "Federal Voices…", "Biafran Voices…" [3] and now this

present work, "Minority Voices…" This summation is underlined, essentially, in all literatures that derive materials from history; history being a continuum of the past, the present and to a large extent, the paradoxes of the future. Ikenna Kamalu [4] avers that, "a work of art makes a statement about certain epochs in the people's history, and tries to negotiate a dialogue between their past, their present and their future" (60).Thus, no one writer can claim to represent the authentic version of history in creative literature. Ola Balogun's [5] statement about the unreliability of history to universal truth may be relevant here. He says:

the fiction that history can be written from an impartial point of view has long outlived its usefulness. Today even children are aware that any work of history reflects the specific point of view of its author and is inevitably influenced by his cultural and intellectual background, and more so by his social relation to the events discussed (vi).

Chinyere Uwahunanya [6] supports this point when he contends that whenever historical materials are used in literature, "various levels of finesse are achieved, because of the various degrees of distortion which betray the sympathies of the author and point to which side of the warring parties he identified with" (5). Or what Wole Soyinka [7] would call the "trajectory of selectiveness, suppression and distortion" (32). The truth is, the "writer not only chooses his subject, he also chooses his vision; and perhaps, his audience, the human target of that vision" [2].

Does this means that history should be jettisoned in the works of art? My answer is no! History cannot be discountenanced in literature. In fact, literature best represents history in all its accoutrements. A writer will, more often than not, engage and interrogate history in a manner that the reader can appreciate the minutest details of the events he recreates in his works. History and literature are therefore 'co-joined twins' which escaped the surgeon's knife! According to James Tar Tsaaior [8], the burden history has placed on the writer's imaginative and creative oeuvre is cumbersome, indeed. But it is a responsibility that cannot be abdicated, and writers have admirably become champions of this cause. This is in an attempt to map and remap the political and cultural boundaries of nationhood by interrogating them as a strategy for national re-invention and resolving the paradox in which African nations have been enmeshed (17).

Achebe [1] expresses this point lucidly when he declares that: "…no matter how emancipated a man may wish to appear or anxious to please by his largeness of heart he cannot make history simply go away". According to him, not "even a brilliant writer could hope to do that" (11).

The events of the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 left an indelible mark in the minds of all who experienced it, either as participants or observers. It has also left traumatic scars on many, that 51 years after, scholars and critics of African literature are still grappling with the extent of artistic truths that reside in the body of works that derive materials from the war. Of course, the volumes of literary and historical works bearing the banner of the war's the matics provide an important source of information about Nigeria and her people as well as open up a significant frontier into the assessment of the mental and social state of her people. This assertion, we would understand better, if we accept the fact that literature deals with people and society in the creative minds of the writer, especially in periods of crisis. Lucien Goldmann [9] affirms that "periods of crisis… are particularly favourable to the birth of great works of art and of literature because of the multiplicity of problems and experiences that they bring to men and of the great widening of effective and intellectual horizons that they provoke" (50). This idea is also well supported by Emmanuel Obiechina [10] when he notes that "out of every serious crisis in the life of a people, there comes a deepening insight into the true nature of man and of human society" (vi).

**Minority Voices and the Conceptualisation of Postcolonial Theory**

Post colonialism as a literary discourse interrogates the inherent conflict that underlies the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser from a social, political, historical and cultural perspective. It accounts for the artistic spaces for the periphery or subaltern, whose culture, history and socio-political ideologies have been suppressed by the centre (West) through constant repressive stereotypes of 'superiority' against 'inferiority' in order to give voice to the periphery/oppressed. To this end, postcolonial literary theory underscores the "rejection of the 'master narrative' of Western imperialism – in which the colonial 'other' is not only subordinated and marginalised, but in effect deleted as a cultural agency – and its replacement by a counter-narrative in which the colonial cultures fight their way back into a world history written by Europeans" [11]. As an instrument of textual examination, it deploys the rejection and reconstruction technique in the analysis of the history, culture, literature and forms of dialogue peculiar to the former colonies of Europe.

In the context of this essay, however, post colonialism adumbrates the strategy the marginalised group adopts to retrieve and recover all lost political, social and cultural histories that have been misrepresented by hegemonic forces as part of self-preservation and self-identity. It constitutes the articulated binaries between the dominant and dominated within the fabrics of social engagement, artistic creations that privilege the hegemonic bloc over the subaltern. In the Nigeria setting, the major ethnic groups of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo dominate the minority ones in what James

Tsaaior would call "dominant centres within the periphery" (20). Under this superstructure, the minority groups are seen as appendages and are subsumed into any of the three major ethnic groups depending on cultural affinity or political proximity. Post colonialism in this context, therefore, is a rejection of the unequal distribution of knowledge and cultural/creative infrastructures that place the minorities within a particular geographical location at the bottom of the scheme of things. This is in consonance with Homi Bhabha estimation when he argues that postcolonial discourse "bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority, within the modern world order" (171).

The literary works from the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria therefore the matize postcolonial stereotypes such as oppression, violence, as well as social, political and cultural alienations which constitute the conundrum on which much of their history have been denigrated by the ruling ideologies. Theirs is a literary engagement which in the words of Tsaaior, is "imbued with the potentials of counter-hegemony and the capacity of contesting other meanings that seek to exercise epistemic violence and dominant over it" (14). This work thus re-examines selected literary texts from the subaltern minorities in Nigeria from the position of subdued existence to that of 'self-retrieval and self-renewal". According to Tsaaior, this process of self-retrieval and self-renewal is symbolically significant. Firstly, it represents an acknowledgement of a loss, lack or limitation, and the determination to embark on a journey to recover or remedy the lack. Secondly, it calls for the re-articulation and re-affirmation of cultural verities that can galvanise the embattled society on the path of self-knowledge and self-discovery as a basis for the re-vindication of its self-identity (11-12).

In many of the critical works on the Nigerian civil war literature, the discourse has always been on the role played by participants either in the Federal or Biafran side. Many of the critics hinged their thesis on these two divide in what Nwahunaya [12] would call "the work of a "Federal' or 'Biafran voice" (10). In all of these, little mention is made to the minority people who were caught up in the web of the conflagration that constitute the battle theatre of the war and whose economic resources were used by both sides (Federal and Biafra) to prosecute the needless war. As Nwahunanya confirms, in "the novels, plays, poems as well as the memoirs, the authors present how Nigerians (whether on the Federal and Biafran side during the war) saw the whole imbroglio" (12). Others who even show some effort to comment on the works of minority writers see them as uncommitted works whose writers were unwilling to take serious side with humanity in the period of crisis. Samuel O. Assein [13], for instance, looks at works of some minority writers as not engaging enough to be recorded as part of works in Nigerian war literature canon. According to him, There were…some Nigerian writers like J.P. Clark who were not drawn into any noticeable involvement, political or otherwise, during the decade of our national crises. Clark did not have the natural inclination (such as Soyinka's); nor was he induced by force of circumstance (as in the case of Achebe or Okigbo), although he has since published some of the most topical poems, about the crises. The difference between Clark's form of commitment and that of Soyinka, Achebe and others who took sides during the crises lies in the general tenor of Clark's poetry, as well as his attitude in dealing with the events of the period (106).

Clark, being a writer from a minority ethnic group in Nigeria, is not taken seriously because he did not take part fully in the war! As shall be shown later in this essay, Clark's poetry on the Nigerian civil war not only foregrounds the human and material wastage that constitute the war, but highlights the power play, corruption and political recklessness that necessitated the war. It is against this backdrop that Landon Beyer [14] declares that:

> While the ability of works of art to develop alternative perceptions and insights can be partly seen in their capacity to deepen our participation in social events, they do something that goes beyond such deepened participation as well. In providing perspectives that result in our seeing things in a new way, works of art help develop alternative worldviews that change what we see and value and virtually provide us with new previously unseen 'world' (118).

It should be well observed here that it is only during and after the Nigerian Civil War that Achebe and many other so called 'committed' writers changed their earlier artistic stance on the redemptive mission of African literature to a confrontational one, which many recent treaties have christened the duty of a committed writer. Asein substantiates this point clearly when he notes that Achebe later position in his writings, reveal a different Achebe: different from the Achebe who in 1964 urged a restoration of the past and a gradual encounter with the present; different from the Achebe who, to my mind, did not fully appreciate the pre-occupation of South African writers with the injustices of the apartheid system (112).

The point being made here is that, overtime, African writers, apart from using their works to redirect society to the path of progress, have responded to societal issues to the degree and magnitude of its effect on them and their immediate affiliations. Thus, the level of commitment that a South African writer would demonstrate against the forces of injustice, exploitation, dispossession and racial discrimination in his work may be clearly different from that of a Nigerian or a Ghanaian writer. In the same vein, the level of commitment by writers from either Biafran or Federal side who were directly involved in the conflagration that constitute the fulcrum of the Nigerian civil war will, essentially, be different from those of minority groups whose only involvement was because their lands, water ways, and crude oil resources

were needed by centrifugal forces who never sought their opinions before embarking on a war. It should also be made known that before the war, Okigbo had in an interview with Whitelaw Marjory [15] dismissed with contempt the idea of a literature that is committed to a cause. According to him, […] the writer in Africa doesn't have any function. That is, personally I can only say what I conceive as my own function. I have no function as a writer; I think I merely express myself, and the public can use these things for anything they like […] I don't, in fact, think that it is necessary for the writer to assume a particular function as the messiah or anything like that, as an individual he could assume this sort of role, but I don't think that the fact that he's a writer should entitle him to assume a particular role as an educator. If he wants to educate people he should write texts books. If he wants to propound a certain ideology he should write political tracts (33).

This was Christopher Okigbo, one of the brilliant Nigerian poets before the war in which he was fully involved, not only as a writer but also as a participant, a role that claimed his life. To use the words of Asein, the war crises "overtook him and like many other writers, he was overwhelmed by the gravity of the Nigerian situation" (105).

In his study of literary works that represent the federal voices in the Nigerian civil war, Onyemaechi Udumukwu selected four writers: Festus Ijayi, Isidore Okpewho, Ken Saro-Wiwa and Elechi Amadi. According to him, these writers in "their individual attempts to castigate the forces that precipitated the war, …are challenging not just the civil war but the forces which have negated the realization of a united Nigerian nation" (90). It should be well stated here that the four writers so arbitrarily selected by Udumukwu cannot in any way write to represent a federal voice for the single fact that the writers are all from the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria whose opinion were never solicited in all the orgies; before, during and after the war. They only write as committed artists who must respond to humanistic stimuli that constitute the universal dictum of a true artist in what Osundare would call "positive art" [2]. They write as an unrecognised third voice, a minority voice, to speak truth and reality to the consciences of all, under whose feet humanity was murdered in the name of a civil war. Therefore, for Udumukwu to associate them with the federal government that oppressively used their land, waterways, human and natural resources to prosecute an inglorious war is most uncharitable. These are some of the misrepresentation that have bedevilled the critical discourse of the Nigerian civil war literature over the years.

This misrepresentation is not unconnected with the general misconception in Nigeria that everyone from the North is Hausa/Fulani, everyone from the West, Yoruba and everyone from the East, Ibos. Thus, since all Easterners were Ibos and by extension, Biafrans, the rest of the country and all who refuse to support the Biafran cause is for the Federal Government. As literary and cultural scholars, therefore, we should not be caught up in the web of lumping every ethnic groups or languages in the three, well set out conundrum of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo that have over the years held the country on its knees.

It should be well adumbrated that apart from the three homologous, so called 'major' ethnic groups in Nigeria, there are countless minority groups scattered across the North, West and the East. Because they are 'small' in the Nigeria context, they are often emasculated by the hegemonic posture of the major ethnic groups. It is to these minority ethnic groups that Ken Saro Wiwa, Isidore Okpewho, Festus Iyayi and Elechi Amadi as well as many other writers belonged. It is only when the feelings and sensibilities of these minority groups are interrogated vis-à-vis the events that necessitated the pogrom, and the eventual Nigerian civil war, that their writings can be well understood. Thus, in the body of his essay, Udumukwu gives substantial evidences on the ethnic disparity in Nigeria that necessitated writers from the minority groups like Ken Saro-Wiwa and others, to write the way they did. He tells us that:

This point will become clearer when we remember that apart from the English language, Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa are officially adopted as the official and therefore national languages in Nigeria. At Abuja, the federal capital territory, news on the television and radio are cast in these focus languages. On the surface, of course, there does not seem to be anything wrong. But language is also a source of power, an instrument of domination. This implies that the over two hundred local languages and ethnic groups are excluded from power. Soro-Wawa's project as a writer is to reintroduce these other ethnic groups, to clear a space for these over two hundred ethnic groups in Nigeria" (92).

Studies have shown that language is a major political tool used by hegemonic groups to suppress the interest of minorities. Ikenna Kamalu [4] informs us that "politics, ideology and language in social context are interconnected" (58). According to him, the political class, especially in third world countries like Nigeria, "uses language to communicate its ideology, access power, and sustain hegemonic interest" (58). Truth is, the minority writers of Nigeria who draw creative materials from the Nigerian civil war, represent neither the Federal nor Biafran voice but that of humanity, from whose fountain the voiceless minorities of the world sought redemption. They deployed their works, not to serve the caprices of any Federal government or a breakaway Biafra, but on the services of mankind and to foreground the futility of the Nigerian civil war. They are the voice of the lion in the anecdotal jungle of Achebe who until they "produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify the hunter" [16].

As committed writers, they imbue in their works universal vignettes that are not only meant to "explain the world; [but]…should change it" [17]. For they believe that their works can help to trigger the necessary change that will make the society to learn "from the sparks generated" by them, and that a new world might emerge from "the fire which illuminates the paths to change" [2]. As Odumukwu notes later in his essay, in a self-contradictory manner, the minority writers in their works, "exonerate neither the Federal troops nor the Biafran soldiers" (103).

The social, economic and political events preceding the Nigerian civil war, we must understand, pitched the three major ethnic groups in the country against themselves; each trying to grab the soul of the country at the federal level without any considerable national inclination. The urge for political supremacy by the major ethnic groups in Nigeria at the time bears testimony to the uneven and cultural disparity involved in the contest for political, economic and social authority within the fabric of the Nigerian state in what Chinweizu [18] would call "the lure of enriching plunder […] to explore, assault, loot, occupy, rule and exploit the rest […]" of the country (3). Balogun's [5] statement in this regard is quite revealing. He tells us that the contest for power by the Nigerian post-independence politicians at the time was, primarily a contest for economic survival as a group, the struggle developed into a naked confrontation in which the rival groups were less willing to respect the outward forms of restraint and conventional chivalry associated with the Western Europe capitalist practice of democracy, on which Nigerian political structure had been modelled (15).

In all of these quests for survival, the interest of the minority ethnic groups in the country was never considered. It should be well stated here, also, that at this stage in the country's history, crude oil had been discovered in commercial quantity in 1956 at Oloibiri, a minority Ijaw community in the then Eastern region of the country and present day Bayelsa state and later Afiesere in 1959 also a minority Urhobo community in the then Midwestern region of the country and present day Delta State. Crude oil, at the time, was one of the major commercial commodities in the international market. The interest of the major ethnic group, therefore, was to seek power at the national level and take absolute control over the crude oil resources of the minority peoples of the Niger Delta region of the country. Thus history and politics shall play essential roles in our discussion in this work. As Tsaaior puts it, "in its very historical derivation and constitution, politics is the essential and governing character of postcolonial cultures. In the same way, politics defines and gives energy to the post-colonial text" (9). This view is also well supported by Dennis Walder [19] when he contends that the political dimension of postcolonial text is necessary for "celebrating the neglected or the marginalised, bringing with it a particular politics, history and geography" (60). As shall be analysed with some of the selected texts later in this essay, the Nigerian civil war was fought, lost and won with the resources of the minority peoples of the Niger Delta region of the country whose place in this same country have not been well defined 51 years after the war.

**Analysis and Discussion**

The literary texts examined in this section engage the manifestation of history and the aggregation of remote and immediate causes of events that adumbrate the war. Also, the literature of the Nigerian civil war will only reveal its true embodiment when considered against the socio-historical conditions that birthed it. For we believe that the events recreated in many of the literatures that bear testimonies to the war are complex reactions of individuals, especially as it concerns human relationships in the Nigerian context. In many of the works of minority writers about the civil war, the war is represented as needless, wasteful and avoidable. The writers, painted in their works, gory portraits of the war experience in their domain and the effects it has on the psyche of their people, their economy and their environment. In fact, it is a writing of a people who Edward Said [20] refers to as those "who had been excluded from the group but who were now fighting for a place in it" (xxvi).

When read against the above rubrics, therefore, J.P. Clark's poetry collection, *Casualties* and Ken Saro-Wiwa's novel, *Sozaboy*, become a metaphor of the experiential existence of the minority peoples in the war theatres of the Nigerian civil war. They serve as indictment on the Nigerian trajectory of power-play between corrupt hegemonic groups in contest to dispossess the minority groups of their God-given resources. In other words, the minority writings are reconstructed to give the people a voice and to situate their predicaments in the Nigerian state in its proper perspective.

In J.P. Clark's *Casualties* for instance, we are confronted by a gamut of horrific images, denunciating metaphors as well as the depiction of the Nigerian civil war as a national tragedy that could have been avoided. In *Casualties*, the hegemonic powers are prefigured in a darkening light muted by their lust for power, corruption and political recklessness. The collection is a critique of the Nigerian state in the periods before, during and after the war. In the poem "The Usurpation", Clark graphically presents the political decadence in Nigeria in the periods before the Nigerian civil war. The military who had usurped the place of the thieving civilians had no vision of their own. Instead of improving the lots of the populace, they continued in the flagrant political rascality and corrupt practices that their civilian predecessors were accused of. Balogun's statement in this regard is quite revealing. He noted that the major ethnic groups at the time, "addressed their strength mainly to the task of sharing out the meagre 'national cake' that could be eked out of Nigeria's economy, instead of seeking to stimulate industrial growth in the country and create new opportunities for the energies of the nation to fill out into" (15). They are the usurpers who wanted their share of the

'national cake' and not the redemption of the masses. The poet tells us that instead of the usurpers to improve the lot of the people, they are only strengthened by the elitist structure where they hold nocturnal meetings to defraud the country.

Caucuses at night, caucuses by day,
With envoys, alien and local,
Coming and going, in and out
Of the strong room. What briefs
In their cases? The state,
Like a snake severed of its head,
Lies threshing in blood, and
Unless a graft at once is found,
The bird will flee the tree (61).

The poet warns the military-politicians to be careful else "The bird will flee the tree". Symbolically, the tree represents the turbulent country, Nigeria while the bird foregrounds the agitated Biafran group. This is an ominous signal but because of their estrangement from the populace they never heeded the poet's warning. The result is the wasteful war. The poet therefore questions the political elite in another poem, "The Locust Hunt" thus: "…So a royal bull was slain/With all the egrets on his hump/So dog ate dog in a hunt" (76). The image of the locust underscores the political manoeuvring between the major ethnic groups in the country who are in hungry quest for power. Just as a swarm of locust would destroy the farmer's entire crop, so also, the Nigerian thieving politicians and the military power-grabbers have come to destroy the entire country. The anecdote adumbrates the coup and counter coup in which known-friends became enemy overnight. They are the dog that eats dog. "…dog ate dog in a hunt". It is against this backdrop that James Tsaaior's [8] thesis on the Nigerian state becomes relevant. He states that: "Nigeria as a narrative, is jeremiad and has failed to achieve coherence because it has been woven with corrupt tapestries" (19).

Furthermore, in the poem, "Dirge", Clark laments the recklessness and horrors of the Nigerian Civil War and asks:

Show me a house where nobody has died
Death is what you cannot undo
Yet a son is killed and a daughter is given
Out of one seed springs the tree
Must the forest fall with it? (82).

This poem adumbrates the waste that constitutes the fulcrum of the war. Because of the underlying hatred between the major ethnic groups in the war divide (Federal versus Biafra), the war was fought in a ruthless propensity. The human carnage of the war, according to historians was monumental. Hence the poet asks: "show me a house where nobody has died". The 'house' being referred to here also includes those of the minorities. In fact, the minority were the worse hit in the senselessness that constitutes the Nigerian civil war. The minorities were victims both on the side of the Federal troops and the Biafran soldiers. They were treated as irrelevant objects and their land and resources confiscated at will. Kole Omotosho [21] reports a conversation that transpired between Lt. Col. Odumegu Ojukwu, the leader of the breakaway Biafran region and his war commander, Brigadier Victor Banjo in his book, *Just Before Dawn* thus:

Victor: "We must not forget the feelings of the minorities… They are of importance in the way this whole thing will turn out.
Ojukwu: "Don't talk to me about minorities". Ojukwu said waving aside the issue… (287).

This is the degree to which the minorities were held with contempt in the midst of the war. Their plight was never a thing of consideration for the hegemonic forces that use the land and resources for the prosecution of a needless war. Besides, it is in the midst of the mindless war that Gen. Yakubu Gowon and Gen. Odumegu Ojukwu, the leaders of the Federal government and the breakaway Biafra, married their wives. Hence the poet tells us: "Yet a son is killed and a daughter is given" (L.3). Thus, the writers from the minority ethnic groups whose people and environment constantly fell to the hands of either the Federal and Biafran troops in the orgies of the war saw it as a duty to represent their people's predicaments from a humanistic lens. Their people were not only oppressed, exploited, dispossessed, and killed by the hegemonic forces in the country, their entire human and natural resources were lost to the major ethnic groups. As writers, therefore, it is their responsibility to chart a redemptive cause for the upliftment of their people, society and humanity.

The title poem, "Casualties" not only foregrounds the Nigerian tragedy that results from the failure of the major ethnic groups to harness the diversity of the country but articulates a major statement that underscores the fate of the minority groups:

Who had no say in the war but were affected by it.
The casualties are not only those who started
A fire and now cannot put it out. Thousands
Are burning that had no say in the matter. (91).

As shown in the excerpt above, Clark's "The Casualties", describes the poet's torn emotions regarding the events of the war where the minority peoples of the country whose opinions were never sought before the war was started also became victims. They are the 'thousands' who burn in a 'matter' they 'had no say' (L. 13-14). The language used in this poem, though simple, is elevated with strong appeal to the emotions of all. There is a gradual build-up of the event of horror and national agony in a way that the reader becomes aware of the fate of the minority peoples in the entire conflagration of the war. They are "the stay-at-home unsettled" (L.37) whose "wares" (L.39) were stolen in the cause of the war by the marauding Federal and Biafran forces who became "fearful every day the owners may return" (L.39). To the minority writers, therefore, the Nigerian civil war was a battle between the major ethnic titans whose major aim is to plunder the wealth of the minority ethnic groups who they had already emasculated with their greed.

Similar minority position is well explicated in Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*. The novel which revolves around its major character, Sozaboy, is deployed to authenticate the ideological binaries between the hegemonic super-structures in Nigeria, represented by the Nigerian troops and the Biafran soldiers against the powerless and voiceless minorities who are seen as mere appendages of the major ethnic blocs in the country.

Early in the novel, the reader is introduced to the ignorance of the minority on the causes of the war. Neither the Nigerian government nor the Biafran authorities request their stance on the need for the war; they are, thus, victims whose lands become the fertile theatre of the war.

We people cannot understand plenty what was happening. But the radio and other people were talking of how people were dying. And plenty people were returning to their village. From far far places. We motor people begin to make plenty money. Plenty trouble, plenty money. And my master was prouding. Making *yanga* for all the people, all the time. (3).

The above scenario adumbrates the place of the minority people in the overall configuration of the country. They are cut off from everything that makes for progress in a country in which they contribute over 90% of its national earnings. They are only needed as tools to massage the egos of the major ethnic players in the country's political landscape. Saro-Wiwa clearly informs the reader that Sozaboy and the entire people of Dukana are unaware of the calamity that was already brewing in the country at the time. Hence, they only think of the crisis on the monetary perspective:

….because all those people in Dukana do not know anything. Dukana is far away from any better place in the world. You must go far in motor before you can get to Pitakwa. All those houses in the town are made of mud. There is no good road or drinking water. Even the school is not fine and no hospital or anything. The people in Dukana are fishermen and farmers. Radio sef they no get. How can they know what is happening? Even myself who travel every day to Pitakwa, township with plenty brick house and running water and electric, I cannot understand what is happening well well, how much less all these simple people tapping palm wine and making fisherman, planting yam and cassava in Dukana? (4-5).

Saro-Wiwa reconstructs this scenario early in the novel to place in proper perspective, the precarious condition of the minority peoples in Nigeria before the war. They were in the lowest ebb of existence, cut off from every decent amenity that a society should have. They have no good road, no good drinking water, no decent school for their children and no hospital. In fact, nothing! In this regard, Saro-Wiwa uses his major character, Sozaboy, and the horrific challenges he and the people of Dukana went through in the cause of the war, to reconstruct the effect of the war in the psyche of the minority peoples of the Nigeria. To this end, Sozaboy's predicament and that of the entire people of Dukana represent those of the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. They are cut off from civilisation. Sozaboy tells us: "….because all those people in Dukana do not know anything. Dukana is far away from any better place in the world" (4). This is the point from which a reading of Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* becomes relevant to minority discourse in Nigeria civil literature. The minority people of the Niger Delta are disregarded because they are not in the helms of affairs in the country; they have no voice of their own, yet they are drawn into a war that will have no effect in the lives.

Furthermore, the reader observes that at the warfront, Sozaboy does not even know who the enemy is or why the war is being fought in the first place. Like many minority people that were conscripted into the war, he was confused as to why he was fighting. He confirms this point when he laments thus:

I come begin see as I dey think for that swamp that day that true true I do not know why we are fighting the war. The Chief Commander General have not told us why we are fighting. No. Tan Papa did not tell us why we are fighting. The soza captain did not tell us why we must go inside the pit. I just carry gun, fight, go inside pit because they tell me to carry gun, fight, go inside pit; right turn, left turn, about turn, udad arms, run, no run, stand still, chop, piss, shit. Everything they tell me, I must do, no question (114).

The more sozaboy gets into the inner recesses of the battlefield, the more he gets confused about the entire physiognomy of the war. The rationale about the war seems baseless. Who is the enemy? What has he done that makes him the enemy? What is the role of Manmuswak in the overall theatrics of the war? How come he is working for both the enemy and the people? He robs and exploits the helpless and vulnerable groups who happen to find themselves in the fringes of the war. These are troubling questions that haunt the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria during the war. The fact that all through the war Sozaboy never fires a shot despite his total involvement in it, only underlines the point that the minority peoples of Nigeria were never part of the Nigerian civil war.

Furthermore, Manmuswak is specially deployed by the author to foreground the various shades of hypocrisy, corruption, hatred, greed and existential contradictions which constitute the daily affairs of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, before, during and after the war. Hence in the novel, Manmuswak was true to type; he is depraved, corrupt, garrulous, greedy and wasteful. He cares less of the overall outcome of the war. He is solely interested in what he can get as spoils from the situation:

Immediately, I saw that it is Manmuswak. Yes, it is Manmuswak. It is Manmuswak that I have seen open the door the first time; it is Manmuswak that I have taken something from that soza and allowed him to go away and it is Manmuswak that is beating my hand down and asking me to don't be stupid. Wonders will never end. Wonders will never end. I think you remember that the first time I saw this Manmuswak is at the African Upwine Bar when he was chopping stockfish and drinking palmy and telling that his friend the short man that he can fight any war if they tell him to fight it. Then the next time he was with enemy at Iwoama giving us drink and cigar before the bomb begin to fall. And the next time he was chooking me injection in that school hospital and using me to make driver of land rover. And now this Manmuswak is again with our own sozas and no longer with enemy sozas. Or *abi*na which side the man dey now? At first I could not believe my eyes because I cannot understand how this Manmuswak can be fighting on two sides of the same war. Is it possible? (166).

Manmuswak thus represents two sides of the same coin, the Federal troops and the Biafran soldiers. Because the minority are less important in the hegemonic struggles of the major ethnic groups in the country, they were molested, raped, killed, exploited and dispossessed of all that belonged to them. Duzia who witnessed the war from the home-front gives a balanced appraisal of the two groups at war whose actions and inactions against the minority people of Dukana and indeed the minority groups in Nigeria were technically the same, devoid of human feelings. Duzia narrates the atrocities of the Biafran soldiers and Nigerian troops thus:

They used to enter the houses in the night and take away the yams. They ask us to go to the swamp and cut the mangrove because the enemy sozas are hiding there. Oh Sozaboy, juju, smallpox, your brothers, your fathers, your mothers and your wife suffered more than I can tell you (132).

One day, the sozas begin to put all their guns in lorry. Then they asked all remaining people in Dukana to enter the lorry […] in the evening, the other sozas, the enemy arrived. Bom saw them running about in Dukana doing the same thing that the other sozas used to do. Cutting the plantains and bananas and digging yams. Killing the goats and hen (134).

This brings Sozaboy to the final conclusion that the war is not for anything but a desire to claim all that belongs to the minority people of Nigeria. He says:

As you know, I call all of them sozas now because I have seen that they are all two and two pence. I will not allow anybody to tell me that this is enemy and the other one is not enemy. They are all doing the same thing and as Manmuswak and Tan Papa used to say, "war is war" (139).

At this point, Manmuswak has turn his full circle of all that represent the senselessness of the war as well as the oppressive tendencies of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria against the minority peoples of the Niger Delta who were used as tools in the war. His trickster nature has fully been developed.

Besides, the author uses the image of the salt to foreground the significant place the minority groups occupy in Nigeria. Yet they are too oppressed to understand their place in the overall scheme of things in the country. Porson is salt

in the soup? I begin to turn this thing for my mind and after some time I begin to understand. Because if salt is not inside soup, then it cannot be soup at all. Nobody can fit to chop it. Therefore, that salt is very important to everyone. To the soup and to the people who will chop the soup too. Then the thick man asked: 'Suppose that salt no get salt inside? Will it be salt? It cannot be salt. Oh yes, it cannot be salt. That is what the man was saying. I 'gree with am. Awright, if na we be the salt, and we no get salt inside our salt wey be ourselves, can we be ourselves? (42).

The image of the salt is very significant both in the text and in our analysis of the existential contradictions that constitute the lots of the minority groups in Nigeria. For the people of the oil rich Niger Delta, their situation is very precarious. Their oil resource is the salt of Nigeria and the people of the Niger Delta are not allowed to claim ownership or have access to what belongs to them. To Saro-Wiwa, therefore, the minority people of Nigeria must take responsibility of their place as the salt of the country. If they, either by omission or commission, lose that responsibility of being the salt, they will be useless. The burden of losing one's resources to a stranger, an oppressor is so enormous that Sozaboy had to ruminate on the idea of losing one's salt over and over again. This situation was well analysed by Balogun when he explains that both the Federal and Biafran governments went into the war because of the minority people's oil resources (salt). He comments thus:

From the start, it was clear that it was mainly from oil revenues that the foreign exchange needed for arms purchase could be obtained by both sides. The question then became – who would succeed in forcing the international oil companies to pay revenue for the oil deposits in the Eastern States? Most of Nigeria's oil was in the Rivers State, which was under Ojukwu's control at the time of secession. Gulf Oil, an American concern, continued to pay royalties to the Federal government, but the reaction of Shell-BP, the major oil company operating in the area, to the situation was both ingenious and profoundly ambiguous (81).

He notes further that, after Sitting on the fence for as long as was feasible, Shell-BP made a token payment of a quarter of a million pounds to Ojukwu early in July, but kept the bulk of outstanding royalties in a blocked bank account, keeping alive both Federal and Biafran hopes of eventually obtaining the money. When sorely pressed by threats of hostile action by the Ojukwu government, Shell-BP promptly arranged for its Managing Director, Mr Stanley Grey, to visit Biafra and be 'kidnapped' and held to ransom' by the Ojukwu regime, whereupon it paid a ransom in foreign exchange to effect his release. Who could accuse Shell-BP of siding with the secessionist? As soon as the tide of battle swung against the secessionist side, Shell-BP promptly declared its allegiance to the Federal government and paid up all its outstanding royalties, at the same time taking care to leave a 'small window' open on the Biafran side by underhand token contributions to Biafra's cause (81).

This situation becomes worrisome when considered against the backdrop of the minority peoples whose interests were not put into consideration in all of these manoeuvring. Thus by the time the war ended in 1970, the minority people of the Niger Delta have been totally dispossessed of their crude oil and gas resources and displaced by the Federal government of Nigeria. Besides, the death of Sozaboy's pretty wife and mother, represent the death of all (crude oil and gas resources) that are dear to the minority peoples of the south. This is the tragedy of the minorities that the writers recreate in their works that derive materials from the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970.

## CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, therefore, it is clear that the entire human wastage, suffering, pains and dehumanisation that come to bear with the rituals of the Nigerian civil war, are merely for economic and political gains for the Federal government, a disparaging loss to the Biafran troops and a total dispossession of the minority peoples of Nigeria. To the minority writers, therefore, the war was a senseless and wasteful one. It has no bearing in the sustenance of the unity of the country but a war of superiority battle of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria in which the northern Hausa/Fulani oligarchy won. Sozaboy is thus deployed by the author to assume the voice of the voiceless; a spoke person sort of for the minority peoples of Nigeria whose resources both human and natural was used in the prosecution of the war. Sazoboy laments the senseless waste of human resources thus: "And how can we know what those people did? Sometimes they are just innocent people like myself and now they have already dead because of nonsense war" (169). Saro-Wiwa [22] foregrounds this point succinctly when he tells us in his authorial note in *On a Darkling Plain* that his "account shows [what] the world and posterity have to know [:] the real victims of that war were the Eastern minorities who were in a no-win situation. They are the oppressed in Nigeria.

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