

*Full Length Research Paper*

# War, violence and language in Ken Saro-Wiwa's Sozaboy

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**This essay is based on Ken Saro-Wiwa's novel, titled *Sozaboy*. Apart from using this novel to interpret and locate the history and politics of Nigeria within a particular period, the essay tried to look at the 1967 - 1970 Nigeria's civil war as fictionalized by Ken Saro-Wiwa, the nature of the language and implications on the English language in Nigeria. It also attempted an understanding of the moral and political consequences of war on humanity in general and the special effect of the Nigerian civil war on the minority areas within the Biafran enclave in particular as epitomized by *Dukana*, the setting of *Sozaboy*. The essay concluded that the novel itself was a bold attempt at experimentation with language, considering the fact that it was written in what the author himself described as "rotten" English.**

**Key words:** *Dukana*, Nigerian pidgin, civil war, *Sozaboy*, refugee camp.

## INTRODUCTION

...a nation is an amalgam of critical decisions made at crucial forks in the road. A nation is a choice. It chooses itself at fateful forks in the road by turning left or right, by giving up something or taking something-and in the giving up and the taking, in the deciding and not deciding, the nation becomes. And even afterwards, the people and the nation are defined by the fork, and the decision that was made there, as well as the decision that was not made engraves itself into things, into institutions, nerves, muscles, tendons, and the first decision requires a second decision and the second decision requires a third, and it goes on and on until one day people wake up and discover that they are mad and corrupt and divided, and that they built war and hate and blood into the very air they breathe (Lerone Bennett Jr. in "The Road not taken", August 1970 issue of *Ebony Magazine*, Chicago and quoted in Kole Omotoso, *Just Before Dawn* (1988:viii).

As Larson (2001) and Oloruntoba-Oju (1998) have correctly asserted, Saro-Wiwa's novel, *Sozaboy* is based on the writer's horrifying experiences during the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970). The disagreement between two Colonels in the Nigerian army, Yakubu Gowon and Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu as to the direction the country should go after the brutal murder of General J. T.

U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, Nigeria's first Military Head of State, in 1966 by Northern soldiers led by the then Major Theophilus Danjuma, plunged the country into a civil war with destabilising consequences for all. The civil war has thrown up an avalanche of historical and creative works with various perspectives. Indeed, Nigeria's burgeoning civil war literature has attracted a lot of interest among scholars world-wide. Writes like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Festus Iyayi, Isidore Okpewho, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwakpa, Ifeanyi Aniebo, Alex Madiebo, etc, have written a lot on the subject.

In the author's note, Saro-Wiwa admitted that he saw from close quarters young soldiers in Bonny (Rivers State) where he was civilian administrator during the war. He was of the opinion that his earlier short story titled "High Life" published in 1969 and *Sozaboy* (1985):

"were the result of my fascination with the adaptability of the English Language and of my closely observing the speech and other writings of a certain segment of Nigerian society... *Sozaboy's* language is what I call 'rotten English', a mixture of Nigerian pidgin, broken English and occasional flashes of good, even idiomatic English" (Author's Note).

Given that war itself is a lawless and disorderly exercise,

Sozaboy's language is disordered, dislocated and discordant. The language of the novel reflects the lawless and chaotic environment in which Mene, the Sozaboy and his people find themselves. In this essay, an attempt will be made to look at the civil war as fictionalized by Saro-Wiwa, the nature of the language and implications on the English language in Nigeria. It will also attempt an understanding of the moral and political consequences of war on humanity in general and the special effect of the Nigerian civil war on the minority areas within the Biafran enclave in particular, as epitomized by Dukana, the setting of Sozaboy. The essay adopts a sociological-cum Linguistic analysis. This kind of methodology allows for a free and unhindered sociological interpretation of the novel.

## DISCOURSE ON LANGUAGE

Language provides the terms by which a reality may be constituted; it provides the means for the knowledge of the world in every material particular. Its system of values—"its suppositions, its geography, its concept of history, of difference, its myriad gradations of distinction-becomes the system upon which social, economic and political discourses are grounded" (Ashcroft et al., 2001). It is a means through which all human beings communicate with one another. It may be verbal or non-verbal and it is designed to carry messages that are assumed to be interpretable or understood by both the sender and receiver. In this context, it is assumed that there must be some common areas of interest between both the sender of message and the receiver in the communication chain.

Language performs social functions any time it is put in human interactions. In fact, Schiffirin (1987) has argued that the actions that language accomplishes are an integral part of interactional contexts in which what one person does is treated as a basis for what another does. Usually, language responds to, and reflects, the context in which it is produced. The socio-political, cultural, cognitive and physical contexts, the surrounding environments more often than not, dictate the messages and style of written works of art.

There are certain kinds of purpose that are possible because of our sheer human activities: activities that border on our desires for food, shelter, rest, social interaction, education, commerce, political engagement, etc. These activities require a lot of verbalization. In Burke's language, these processes are called "symbolicity" (Burke, 1966). According to him, if you say something, or read something, or write something, or think something, or hear something being said, etc; the grammar, syntax, ideas, meanings connected with such operations would be in the realm of "symbolicity". In other words, we are the kind of "animal" that approaches everything through modes of thought developed by the use of a system of symbols that has become acceptable to a community of

speakers. This ability to develop and transmit conventions and institutions is what I have described elsewhere as ideology (Uwasomba, 2007).

In Derridan Deconstruction, language is temporal because of its metaphysical nature, while Lacanian psychoanalytical theory holds that language inhabits the individual, just the same way society inhabits the individual—there is no subject independent of language since it is through it that we become social and reach out to others. For Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the most eloquent and indeed emotional critic in the discourse on language in African literature, drawing from Hegel (1975) and Sartre (1957), language is the most significant weapon of a community's movement from the state of being-in-itself to a state of being-for-itself. This conception of language runs through most of Ngugi's works especially his book, *Decolonising the Mind*.

Language remains one of the most potent sites for the expression of an individual's identity. It is also one of the strongest tools for the definition of the self, its consciousness as well as awareness of the perimeters of its own vision, that of its community, and of the world. Since it does not exist in a vacuum, it is always contextualized and situated within a given socio-cultural setting or community.

What the foregoing analysis about language demonstrates is that it is a major means of human communication. Because of the central role language plays in human interaction, many of its definitions centre on communication. And as Okon (1970:89) has articulated, language is "needed for all forms of communication, whether pleasant or unpleasant, political, moral, social, religious, poetic, intellectual or emotional". One of the most subtle influences of the power of language is the means by which it provides, through the function of naming. This is because, to name the world is to "understand" it, to know it and to have control over it.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

English is the official language in Nigeria and it serves as the second language (L2) of most of its Nigerian users. English has become an instrument of linguistic accommodation in Nigeria as it is used to ensure communication between people of diverse ethnic and socio-cultural groups within the country. It is the language of instruction and participation at the national and international levels which require proficiency in the language, even if the skills required differ according to the functions the user is called upon to perform. As noted by Nketim-Rex (2006) "a good command of the English language is still a factor that, more often than not, propels Nigerians into the higher levels of both the social and political circles in Nigerian society" or even within the international system. According to Kachru (1995), since the introduction of English language into the Nigerian multilingual context,

the language has developed into a clime of uses, ranging from Nigerian Pidgin to educated Nigerian English. The language has developed through the education system. It is taught as a subject and used as a medium of instruction. It is also used for such purposes as letter writing, literature writing and its discussion, in parliaments, in communication between the government and the people, in the church and other religious centres, in the courts, in the media and even at homes among family members and friends. Given the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of the country, English language of all sorts of varieties has become a very important tool of social, economic, cultural and religious interactions among Nigerians. It has become localised or “nativised” in the Nigerian environment.

As Bamgbose (1995) has noted, the English Language in the Nigerian environment is a second language with a distinctive Nigerian flavour. “Just as English has influenced Nigerian languages, so also have these languages influenced English” (Bamgbose, 1995: 11). The nativisation of English in Nigeria is not limited to the usual features of transfer of phonological, lexical syntactic and semantic patterns of Nigerian language into English. It is also concerned with the creative development of English, including the evolution of distinctively Nigerian usages, attitudes, coinages and other pragmatic uses of the language. This observation about English language in Nigeria coheres with Dadzie’s (1986) view to the effect that the English language is no longer the property of the English people given the fact that anywhere the language has taken root by whatever means, it has shown remarkable reliance in handling ideas and concepts alien to the way in which meaning is expressed in the English structural system.

According to Mohammed (1995), English occupies a unique place in Nigerian education because of its significant role and status in national life. In his words:

English is sociolinguistically important in Nigeria, in spite of its colonial origin, having become, over the years, both the language of official business, and a vital link language between the various ethnic groups in the country. It is also *pedagogically* significant as the language of instruction in virtually the entire school system (Mohammed 1990: 133).

This national importance has made it a useful tool so much so that even those who argue against its use find themselves deploying it in their discourses.

### SOZABOY AS A PRODUCT OF WAR

We have indicated in our introductory paragraphs that Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *Sozaboy* is a product of the war that the ruling elites in the Nigerian army and their civilian and international counterparts pushed the then relatively new

independent Nigeria into. Like any other war, Nigeria’s civil war produced needless devastation of humanity which affected old and young people, the rich and the poor and all the other strata of society. There were killings on both sides of the conflict for the three years that the war lasted. The minority areas in the eastern part of the country which were within the Biafran enclave felt that they were not fully briefed by the military and political entrepreneurs who were leading the Biafran cause. It should be noted that there had been fears of the minorities during and after colonialism about their place in the Nigerian Federation. These fears appeared genuine considering the nature of the forces that had been at play in the politics of Nigeria. The fears of the minorities had been articulately presented before the Willink’s Commission which was set up on the eve of independence in 1958. In fact, in July 1967, ten years after Sir Henry Willink submitted his report, Nigeria was plunged into civil war following the inability of the dominant political and economic elites in the various regions to agree on a system of rules that would guide the way to administer Nigeria. As Okonta (2008) has argued, the war which pitted the Igbo and the Eastern Region against the rest of the federation further widened the arena of moral debate among the minorities, as they sought to make meaning of the conflict and to determine which side would best serve their interest as a distinct group in Nigeria.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, an Ogoni, engaged these issues in most of his writings and his politics as can be seen in works such as “On A Darkling plain; Similia: Essays on Anomic Nigeria; The Ogoni Nation Today and Tomorrow; Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy; Ogoni: Moment of Truth, etc”. *Sozaboy*, a novel written in broken English and a mixture of pidgin is set in fictive Dukana which comprises nine villages. According to the narrator, Mene, who himself is the *Sozaboy*, a new military regime has come into power in the country and everybody appears happy with the new development:

...the new government of Soza and police has come. Everybody was saying that everything will be good in Dukana because of new government. They were saying that Kotuma ashbottom from Bori cannot take bribe from people in Dukana again. They were saying too that all those policemen who used to chop big bribe from people who get case will not chop again (P. 1).

Dukana is portrayed as not only undeveloped but lacking in basic infrastructure without good roads and pipe-borne water. The people have not experienced good governance in their lives and their expectation with the new regime flounders as trouble has erupted in the land with many people returning to Dukana.

This information about the war is communicated to the Dukanans by Chief Birabee, who has asked men and women of Dukana to pay three and one Shillings respec-

tively for the upkeep of the returnees. As an apprentice driver the narrator goes to Pitakwa (Port-Harcourt) often with his master and during one of his trips he realises that the war has become very intense. As the war becomes very hard, the people experience hardship further as ordinary but important food items such as salt become very scarce. The challenges thrown to Mene by people, including Agnes who later becomes his wife push him into joining the army in spite of the protestations of his loving mother.

In the war front, Mene is confronted with the bestiality and violence associated with war; the gruesome killings and such other dastardly acts against man by man. The bombs are thrown in their (Mene's) camp with ruthless and reckless abandon. He commented:

After the plane has disappeared, then I got up from where I was hiding. Oh Jesus Christ son of God, the thing way I see my mouth no fit talk am. Oh God our father way dey for up, why you make man wicked like this to his own brother?... I can never never forget what I saw that morning.

All our camp don broke down well well. Everywhere was full of pit and pit and pit. And inside one pit, you will see the head of soza, and in another pit, the leg of soza. Everywhere, so so human flesh in small small pieces! Finger, nail, hair, *prick, blockus*. Oh, I just begin cry like woman. Oh, foolish man who send me make I go join soza? (p. 111).

He then realises that fighting a war is a very serious affair. With this destabilization, he decides to go back to his mother and his wife, Agnes who he has been missing since he joined the army.

In his attempt to avoid being part of the bestialities of the war as a soldier, he decides to run away but is captured by enemies' soldiers where refugees are kept. He is made a driver, but unknown to his superiors, he drives to Dukana only to find out that the whole town has been devastated. Even Duzia and Bom, who are hiding under a tarpaulin, do not believe that he is "their own sozaboy" for they thought he had died. He is informed of how enemies' soldiers had ransacked the town, raping women and committing all sorts of atrocities. Duzia informs him that another soldier has taken his wife, Agnes.

Mene, out of frustration, goes back to Pitakwa, looking for his mother and his wife from one refugee camp to the other. Again, as he moves from one refugee camp to the other he is confronted with the decrepit environments in which people are kept. He is asked to go to Urua, one of the refugee camps. In Urua, he complains again about the war:

True true, this Urua is not just camp. It is new town, new dirty town born by the foolish war. And as him

papa be stupid man, I know that Urua will also be stupid but you cannot just see that it is stupid town until you have lived in it for some time. Just as you will not know that war is foolish until you have fought inside it for some time and suffered as I have suffered in this foolish war that have separated me from my wife and my mama (P. 150).

He continues to lament about this war in particular and war in general:

True true these men were not looking like the people that I have known before. If you see how all their eyes have gone inside their head, and all their hair have become palm oil colour and they have dirty dirty rag shirt and all their bones are shaking inside their body, I am telling you, if you see all these things, and you think about them very well, you will know at once that *war is a very bad and stupid game* (P. 151) (*Emphasis mine*).

In the search for his mother and his wife, he runs into Pastor Barika and Chief Baribee (his kinsmen). The duo of Barika and Baribee implicate him saying that he is an enemy soldier. He is taken away like a goat tied to the Land-rover and deposited into a prison where prisoners are being tortured and killed. He and three other prisoners escape because Manmustwak's bullets have been exhausted as he is shooting the prisoners. Mene goes back to Dukana only to see that the whole town is deserted. He cannot find his mother's house because it has become rubble. Everybody runs from him and he could not understand this until he comes across Duzia, who is hiding in the church. Duzia discloses to him that people think he is a ghost who has come to torment the living over the death of his mother and his wife. Duzia advises him to run away before he is killed by the people to stop the disease that is ravaging Dukana since they returned after the war.

From the plot of this novel, the reader is made to see an attempt by Saro-Wiwa to show the psychobiological and physical effects of the civil war on Mene and his people. Mene and the people of Dukana, represent the Ogoni who have according to Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni activists been subjected to the status of "subjects" and exploited by the majority ethnic groups in Nigeria, oil multinationals and the Nigerian state itself.

As far back as 1968, shortly after he was appointed administrator for Bonny by the Federal government of Nigeria, Saro-wiwa had in a pamphlet titled *The Ogoni Nation Today and Tomorrow* written that revenue from oil obtained from Ogoniland since 1958 had benefited only the Igbo who controlled the Eastern Nigerian government. The tone of the novel shows clearly that the writer was vehemently opposed to the war. With the war Dukana becomes a ghost of its former self and Mene whose aspirations to become one of the respected

drivers in Dukana become shattered. This same fate confronts other citizens of Dukana as most of them are either killed or maimed. Concluding the narration, Mene reports:

And as I was going, I was just thinking how the war have spoiled my town Dukana, uselessed many people, killed many others, killed my mama and my wife, Agnes, my beautiful young wife with J. J. C. and now it have made me like person wey get leprosy because I have no town again (P. 181).

### “WAR IS WAR. ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN”

This otherwise circular statement captures the foolishness and bestiality of war. In most cases it is the innocent that suffer especially young men and women who are forcefully recruited to fight wars that they do not know anything about. In the whole history of mankind, war has been seen as very devastating and anti-human. It was with a view to stopping the scourge of war(s) that the great powers of the world decided to establish the United Nations at the end of the Second World War in 1945. War also inflicts violence on people with its collateral damage. The impact of this violence can be brutal, physical or psychological, emotional or mental or economic or cultural. This is because in times of war, the control over the primitive instinctual forces is loosened.

No doubt, Mene and his people suffer because of the nature of the war. Dukana is in ruins at the end of the war. A pandemic disease erupts in Dukana, but the illiteracy of the people makes them to think that the cause was from the gods. All the hopes and aspirations of the people become unrealised. Mene's ambition to become a professional driver and a loving husband is scuttled.

As the war is going on with its consequences for both the soldiers at the war front and the civilians who are not fighting, there is usually a class that makes profit from the whole exercise. This class constitutes those who sell arms and ammunition to both sides of the war mongers, those who exploit the people and corner the resources from anti-war humanitarian agencies. Chief Birabee and Pastor Barika belong to this group. These people, because of their position in society are expected to provide leadership and promote the interest of the poor. But in reality they oppress the poor and appropriate their meagre resources. They even go to the extent of taking bribe from volunteers who want to join the army willingly in defence of their fatherland. Mene hints to the fact that people pay money to Okpara before they are recruited into the army. It should be recalled that even before the war got to Dukana, Chief Birabi had been exploiting the people by charging war levies and stealing part of the proceeds. Mene reports this matter thus:

... He said every man must bring three shillings

and every woman one shilling. With that money, government will be happy and everything will be awright... I can see that they do not understand what Chief Birabee has said. All they are thinking is how they will pay the three and one shilling. Many people do not like it. They think it is Chief Birabee and his friends who will chop all the money. The women too begin to complain and grumble. They were cursing Chief Birabee. “Stupid Chief. Stupid tief. When they cannot find something to eat, they begin to move around the town looking for small tax to collect. Stupid tiefs” (pp. 8-9).

### WAR AND LANGUAGE IN SOZABOY

A story is a particular writer's way of saying how we can make sense of human experience. Fiction-serious fiction, at least-is grounded in experience and has a significant relation to the world of actuality. The plausibility of fiction is what is known as verisimilitude. According to Warren (1971) the truth of fiction involves such matters as the consistency, comprehensibility of character; the motivation and credibility of action; and the acceptability of the total meaning of the work. In *Sozaboy*, the writer creates a character who relates the period before, during and after the war. The interesting thing about Mene is that in spite of his little education he is able to give a comprehensive account of his society and the circumstances at play. His level of education and state of his dislocated consciousness can be seen in the language he employs to narrate his story. There is the expression of a mood of despair and utter hopelessness in the account of the novel.

Saro-Wiwa's “rotten” English as seen in the novel is a bold attempt at experimentation with language. Unlike the unconscious mixture characteristic of the historical precursor of this type of English, *Sozaboy's* broken English is a deliberate choice intended to depict character or to reflect the dastardly war and the disorderly state of the setting of the novel. This bold attempt at language experimentation brings to the fore violence in all its manifestations. The language expresses the underlying sense of chaos that governs the environment of war and madness which is clearly depicted in the novel. And as Oloruntoba-Oju (1998) has pointed out, in *Sozaboy*, we have a mixture of pidgin, grammatical English, ungrammatical English and English in translation. For Oloruntoba-Oju the line between the categories “pidgin” and “ungrammatical English” is notoriously thin (Oloruntoba-Oju, 1985).

Mene, as has already been said has a limited education and no wonder his “Broken English”. Elugbe and Omamor (1991) and Elugbe (1995) have tried to distinguish Nigerian pidgin from Broken English. They are of the opinion that Broken English represents the level at which the speaker has acquired English as there are

flashes of impeccable English but with real errors which are evidence of poor mastery. According to Elugbe, “some aspects of broken English may sound exactly like pidgin” (Elugbe, 1995: 297). In the novel we see flashes of good English being interspersed with bad and ungrammatical English especially each time the eponymous character wanted to impress Agnes, at the time the latter was still serving at the African Upwine Bar in Diobu. In a conversation with Agnes we note the following encounter:

“I am from Dukana”  
 “Dukana? Are you from Dukana?”  
 “Oh yes”, I answered, prouiding plenty.” I am a freeborn of Dukana. It is my own very village.” “Oh yes”. I was very very happy. This fine girl is calling me her brother (pp. 18 - 19).

There are many other instances of “code-switching” into good English all through the novel. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator says he is “a young man and apprentice driver” (p.1). Dukana is portrayed as not only underdeveloped but lacking in infrastructure:

“Dukana is far away from any other better place in the world... all the 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 of Dukana are fishermen and farmers (P.4).

In Dukana, at the advent of the war, the narrator explains his fascination for soldiers as they are displaying their marching skills singing loudly:

My father don't you worry.  
 My mother don't you worry.  
 If I happen to die in the battle field.  
 Never mind we shall meet again. (p. 72).

This very moving song is also accompanied by another similar one:

Why do you delay.  
 Come and save the nation.  
 Why do you delay.  
 Come and save the nation.  
 Oh why do you delay.

Come and save the nation.  
 There is danger.  
 Why do you delay? (pp. 48-49).

These songs are sung interchangeably by the soldiers and the effect they have on Mene strengthens his desire to become a sozaboy. It is interesting to note that these songs are couched in an unmistakable flawless English.

People are made to show their patriotism to the new state as any form of inertia is seen as sabotage. The songs challenge the patriotism of the youth and in the process place those who have joined the army to fight for and in defence of the fatherland as heroes worthy of emulation.

Again, Mene's dream about the devastation of the war with aeroplanes dropping bombs is narrated in what we can consider as good English:

Well, well, well, this dream of my own is almost identical. What can it mean? I tell you, I was very confused that morning. And that day I was turning the dreams in my mind. And I remembered too what the tall man said at the Upwine Bar. What Agnes said. What Zaza said. What the thick men said about salt and no salt inside the salt of our body. And ... everyday they were talking more and more about the war. The radio was shouting about it all the time. And they were saying that everybody must be ready for it (pp. 44-50).

We must hasten to say that what may be considered as good English is not sustained in the narration, rather it appears here and there. Of course, as noted earlier on, the writer did not intend to create a work written in good English. Part of the experimentation was to play with language in the most disorganized and “rotten” form.

As part of the experimentation with language, there are elements of phonological interference in the numbering of the chapters: “Lomber one (number one); “Lomber two” (number two); and the use of other words like, “enzoy” (enjoy), “zentle lady” (gentle lady), “porson” (person), “corple” (corporal); “massa” (Master); “sanmazor” (sergeant major); “Quashun” (Attention); “terpreta” (interpreter); “moless” (molest), “sah” (sir); “sosa” (soldier), “foto” (photo), “Hitla” (Hitler), “hooray” (hurray); “de” (the) “Awright” (Alright); “cunny” (cunning); “Tan papa dere” (stand properly there) etc. The author also makes use of reduplication: “small small”, “long long motor”, “dirty dirty rag;” “well well”, “long long grammar”, “softly softly”, aplenty plenty”, “to eat quick quick”, “true true”, “fine fine”, “before before;” “big big grammar”, “young young”, “corner corner”, “slowly slowly”; “big big bribe”, “proper proper”, “at all at all”, “jolly jolly”, “whether whether, “quick quick”, etc. These words and expressions are littered in the book.

Amidst the above mentioned phonological and reduplication elements found in the novel is the pervasive deployment of lewd language. As an under class with less polished mannerisms and etiquette the protagonist makes use of expressions that are very uncouth. These include but not limited to the following:

- (i) “He was shouting fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck and laughing, rolling on the ground” (P. 33).
- (ii) “But why did you not bring one long hair from that woman's yarse?” (P. 34).

(iii) "My man begin to stand up up like snake wey no get house" (p. 35).

(iv) "You foolish man. All your friends are making soza, you want to stay here and marry with that your thing standing like snake wey no get house" (P. 37).

(v) "Well, sozaboy, I'm sure you are fucking that girl well". Please don't tear her thing, oh. Because I know all you young young boys who have not seen *toto* before. When you see *toto* for the first time you will want to die before you leave it". Are you enjoying it? I hear the girl can jam the thing well. Is it Lagos style she is using?" Bom asked. Then Duzia replied quick quick, "I hear Sozaboy was shouting, begging her not to play like that or she will burst his blokkus" (P. 62).

(vi) Everytime when I see Agnes in the afternoon as she is walking, I will be glad. I see her J. J. C. and fine small buttocks moving up and down. And I will be thinking to myself "so all this J. J. C. and find bottom na my own ehn?" (P. 65).

(vii) "He! Sozaboy, you get big eye oh. Zaza, you see the kind of woman this little boy is marrying? You see her breasts like calabash. And that bottom. Oh, if better man puts his prick into that bottom, he will see Jesus Christ. Ha? Sozaboy, what fine dish you are going to leave behind for other people! Anyway, this night you most chop as you have not chopped before. Ha! Ha!" (P.69).

(viii) "You think sozaman get bed for sleep? Una don sleep for last time today. Get up bastard bugger, God don punish your *prick*" (P. 80).

(ix) They used to enter the houses in the night and fuck the women by force,..." (P. 132).

(x) But they can do it in their house eating and drinking and sleeping and fucking and they cannot care whether sozas are obeying the orders or not" (P. 140).

Furthermore, the novel is rich with core pidgin vocabulary and expressions such as "wey", "dey", "chop", "don", "self", "dem", "knacking tory", "the girl na waya oh", "bokwu", "yeye", "worwor", "yafuyafu", "mumu", "hellele", "man picken", etc. There are also expressions like: "choking me the choke", "smiling idiot fool smile", "I was jealousying them", "when come comes to become, she will be shaking shaking like shege", "I answered prouiding plenty prouiding"; "formfool", "kotuma ashbottom"; etc.

The sounds of guns are represented as *gbegam gbega gbagam!!*; *kikijigim*; *tako, tako; tako-tako-tako*. The speed of the bullets is described as *heeuun! Heeuun!*. The heart beats of Mene during these occasions in which these bullets are fired are described as *tam tum tum*. The sound of the guns, the movement of the bullets and the impact on the protagonist of the novel represent the chaos and violence that characterise the war. They are not only life-threatening but also terribly destructive. Human nature- and human language are both troubled by the harshness of the war.

Elugbe and Omamor (1991:67) have tried to distinguish between corrupted, bastardized versions of Nigerian

pidgin and proper Nigerian pidgin by drawing examples from the defunct Lagos Weekend column "Wakabout". According to them, the language of "Wakabout" is a mixture of pidgin and bastardised English. This type of writing is also currently being used by Tatalo Alamu, a pseudonym used by one of the critical columnists in The Nation on Sunday. The column is titled "Snooper". It is a deliberate attempt by the writer to experiment with the English language in his attempt to reflect on the contradictions and Shenanigans of the Nigerian society.

Sozaboy's language as has been noted in the preceding discussion represents a conscious use of language to capture the writer's perception of the Nigerian/Biafran war. And as Larson observes, "the novelist's unforgettable opening sentence/paragraph dangles in mid-air, holding the reader breathlessly waiting for more." The language has the capacity of arresting the reader's interest and provoking his/her consciousness about the evil, violence, destruction and such other negative influences of war on humanity.

## Conclusion

Sozaboy is an anti-war novel which exposes the intrigues, deaths, humiliations and other anti-human activities that are associated with war. Mene the soldier-boy after seeing and surviving the evil effect of the war, manages to come back to his village only to discover to his chagrin that, although he has survived, much of his village (including his mother and his wife) has not.

By trying to register his disagreement with the war, Saro-Wiwa through Mene uses a language that is distorted and somewhat vulgar to narrate the story of the Nigerian/Biafran war from the perspective of one whom is from the minority. This language as we have noted is a mixture of grammatical English, ungrammatical English, pidgin and broken English. It is also possible to argue that perhaps by his experimentation with language, the author considered the linguistic and cultural ecology of the area in which the novel is set (the Niger Delta). The Niger Delta is a multilingual environment with Pidgin English as the dominant means of communication in the area.

The language code-mixes with all kinds of borrowings from the indigenous expressions of not only the environment of the author, but also those of other parts of Nigeria. In Nigeria, as indicated earlier on in the essay, there are many indigenous languages spoken by the people. These languages have in very significant ways affected the use of English in the country. This is manifested in the varieties of English written and spoken in Nigeria. Expressions and words like "*lailai*" (Hausa), "*Okporoko*" (Igbo), "*Wayo*" (Yoruba), "tombo", "yanga", "ginkana", "wuruwuru", etc. are mixed freely with core pidgin vocabulary items. This experimentation clearly exhibits a creativity in the use of English language in

Nigeria. It also shows the limitless extent to which the English language can be manipulated within the Nigerian environment in the service of communication.

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