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FOREGROUNDING OF PSYCHO-SOCIAL EXPERIENCE OF THE NIGERIA-BIAFRA WAR IN EMPATHETIC RENDITIONS

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ABSTRACT

The Nigeria-Biafran Civil War became a knife sharpener for the functional expression of language for literary creation. Multifarious songs showcasing creativity in responding to the crises were demonstrated. This literary creation channeled via speech foregrounded human psycho-social experience of hopes and fears, attitudes towards an existing event and reactions against man's repression of man. Song rendition depicts these experiential thoughts of man captured in language – literal and literary – strung to reveal problems of psychological nature bubbling away in the hearts of the participants in the war. This paper strives to present how the war motivated the Biafrans to improvise songs in heart-rending language to tell, whoever was willing to listen, the hopelessness of the corrupt and muddled war. In so doing, it depicts the pivotal roles of language in foregrounding the experience: the syntactic structures encoding the experience, the associative or literary use of language describing the experience and social identity signaling collectivity pictured in language.

Keywords: empathetic, experience, foreground, rendition, war.

1. INTRODUCTION

“To foreground is to bring something into prominence, to make it dominant in perception” (M. H. Abrams & Geoffrey Galt Harpham 2012:139). The Civil War became a muse for foregrounding of the psycho-social experiences of Biafrans in rousing pieces of songs whose literal and literary languages denounced the supposed enemies, excited the suffering victims, and counselled fortitude as the struggle proved stubborn.

The Nigerian Civil War of 6th July, 1967 strove to crush dissidence and reunite separatist Biafra. But, the Biafrans plunged into it to restore her dignity, to free herself from the ethnic biased Yoruba and the hegemonic Hausa oligarchy, and to free herself from repression and ethnic cleansing in the north. The “police action” drafted to arrest Biafran rebels lingered for thirty months. During this period, what Biafrans could not get through weaponry, since “power”, according to Mao Tse Tung, “comes out of the barrel of a gun”, they attempted to achieve via songs in well-couched language structures which captured their psycho-social experiences of the war. These songs captured their patriotism, their denunciation of Britain, the United States, Russia and Egypt for rendering support to Nigeria, and their willingness for survival. In other words, they captured their psychological attitude and the social implications of freedom. The lofty objectives of song are summed up by Merriam (1964:208) as quoted in Okafor, et al (1999:6):

...The area of music – language relationships is important to the ethnomusicologist and the linguist, as well as the student of poetry, for music influences language and language influences music.... We find

as well that song texts reveal a number of problems of psychological nature, as they concern the individual and the society at large. Texts reflect mechanisms of psychological release and the prevailing attitudes and values of a culture, thus providing an excellent means of analysis.

The relationship between language and songs reflecting psychological release and the prevailing attitudes and values of a culture is aptly presented by Emeka Lawrence in a “Forward” on *The Life and Works of Celestine Ukwu* (1999:v) by Okafor: “Those who know about the Igbo culture will admit that it attaches a lot of significance to music and to words. Music flows through Igbo life.... Words mean a lot in Igbo life. An Igbo saying holds that ‘a man is known by the words he speaks’. Affirming this assertion, Arch-Deacon G. T. Basden writing on Ibo music observes that “they certainly have inherited a fair share of the art originated by the Father of music”, Jubal-Cain the supposed ancestor of the Ibo race. He further furnishes the relationship between language of the songs (music) and the psycho-social experience of the Ibo thus:

The more one listens to native music, the more one is conscious of its vital power. It touches the chords of man’s inmost being, and stirs his primal instincts. It demands the performer’s whole attention and so sways the individual as almost to divide asunder, for the time being, mind and body. It is intensely passionate, and no great effort of the imagination is required to realize that such music could only have originated with the son of Cain! Under its influence, and that of the accompanying dance, one has seen men and women pass into a completely dazed condition, oblivious and apparently unconscious of the world around them. Both sexes are drawn under its spell and lose themselves in it.

Summing up this intertwinement of language, songs/music and dancers/performers, in holding out psycho-social world-views of rural Nigeria, Agu (2001:198), as well as quoting Nzewi and Nketia, states:

Music in rural Nigeria is clearly indispensable to the proper promulgation of the activities of the ethnic societies. Its creation, expression and appreciation are fascinating experiences. The music... is directly “associated with socio-cultural, religious and political systems and preserved by tradition”, Agu (1989). Nzewi (1980) noted also that “in all its elements and applications it has latent psychological, psychical and spiritualizing essence”. The verbal texts of the traditional music in Nigerian culture, like in most sub-Saharan African countries, “express the performer’s attitude to life, his hopes and fears, his thoughts and beliefs”, Nketia (1963).

The Biafrans and/or the Igbo are originally endowed with the effusive display of feelings – social, psychological, economic, political, world-views – via songs/music. It is therefore not surprising that the Nigeria-Biafra conflict became a traumatic experience serving as a spring-board pulling them into expressing their hopes and fears, their thoughts and beliefs in songs. The purpose is to make one recall that crises breed creativity: just as there exist colonial and post-colonial or independent African literatures, both inspired by imperialism and challenges of the fledgling independent African states, so also, there exist Civil War songs in Nigeria. Those songs, preponderantly in the Igbo language, are yet to be fully gathered, studied to aid audio-visual sensory writing of history, plays and novels of the grueling thirty months Civil War. Thus, the paper contributes to bringing to the forefront vital information stored in an endangered Nigerian language (igbo), to talking about the creative inspiration induced by crisis, and to highlighting the biased posturing of some developed nations over a crisis that could have been nipped in the bud.

2. 2 PSYCHO-SOCIAL EFFUSION FOREGROUNDED IN SONGS

The song samples express sundry subject matters relating to the mood of the particular period. The themes range from the invitation to fight for the mother land (patriotism), the indictment of the West (Britain and the US), Societ Union, and the Arab world led by Egypt for hamstringing freedom from the mean and repressing Nigerian government led by Lt. Col. Gowon.

2.1.1 Song 1a – Invitation

1. I want you to join us.
2. Join the company.
3. I want you to join us.
4. Joining the company.
5. Oooh joi...n the company.
- Oooh joi...n the company.
- Oooh joi...n the company.
- Oooh joi...n the company.
- Oooh joi...n the company.

2.1.2 Song 1b – Invitation

1. Why do you delay?
2. Come and save your nation
3. Why do you delay?
4. Come and save your nation

5. Oh why do you delay?
6. Come and save your nation
7. There is danger
8. Why do you delay?

From Sarowiwa's *Zozaboy* p. 48.

The two songs are suffused with the psychological implication of not fighting for a course. The first one pleads with people to join the march to freedom. The second jolts people from the slumber of unconcern, and warns of the danger of losing a nation if not saved and the consequence of the social trauma of losing independence, of losing territories, and of losing ego. The two songs also demonstrate the issue of recruitment and conscription into the fighting fold.

2.2.1 Song 2a – Commitment/Patriotism

Igbo Language	Transliteration
A gabago m ikwa mgbo n'Ozuakoli	I'm off to beat the drum of bullets at Ozuakoli!
A gabago m ikwa mgbo	I'm off to beat the drum of bullets!
Baby na-ebe akwa	But my baby (girl) is crying!
Egwu atukwana baby ooo	My baby do not be afraid!
Ooo Baby isi m gbalaga	Oh my baby do you ask me to run away!
Onye ga-akwa mgbo ma Awusa bia	Who will beat the drum of bullets when the Hausa's arrive?

- Anonymous

2.2.2 Song 2b

1. My father don't you worry
2. My mother don't you worry
3. If I happen to die in the battle field
4. Never mind we shall meet again.

From Sarowiwa's *Zozaboy* p. 48.

The persona of song 2A is irrevocably committed to confront the enemy. Nothing – even his fiancé or girl friend – is incapable of frustrating his resolution. The persona in song 2B counsels the parents – father and mother – to bear his commitment with fortitude. Alluding to the resurrection or the life after death, he reminds his parents of their meeting again if he happens to die.

2.3 Songs 3 – Freedom And Indictment

	Igbo Language	Transliteration
1	Biafra n'inwerela onwe giii	Biafra, you've got your independence
2	Obodo Biafra n'inwerela onwe giii	The nation of Biafra you've got your independence
3	Ndi niileeee chorọ ikpado anyiiii	All who want to suppress us
4	Obodo niile nke chorọ ikpado anyiiii	All the countries who want to suppress us
5	Bia nu ooo amara ejuputaaa	Come to us for grace is overflowing
6	Obodo anyi na-aburo obodo ajuru ajuruuu	Our country is not an accursed or forsaken one!
7	Obodo anyi na-aburo obodo ajuru ajuruuu	Our country is not an accursed or forsaken one!
8	Britain weere akụ na egbe nye ndi iro anyiiii	Britain armed our enemies with arms and ammunition
9	Russia weere ugbo ha je fee n'elu nyeee	Russia flew her jet fighter and bomber over us
10	Egypt bu ndi na-enye ha ozuzu n'aka	Egypt trained our enemies freely
11	America sokwa ha megide anyi oo	America connived at our repression!

- Anonymous

This song depicts the psycho-social attitude towards freedom and attack on those stifling this freedom. In *Divided We Stand*, Cyprain Ekwensi (224) sums up the indictment of Britain and Russia in their callous support of Nigeria. In this text, the placard carried by Biafran demonstrators reads:

**HANDS OFF BIAFRA
BRITAIN STOP SUPPLYING ARMS TO
NIGERIA
BRITAIN AND RUSSIA PARTNERS IN
GENOCIDE
BRITAIN AND RUSSIA STRANGE BED
FELLOWS**

The indictment of the West and Russia in this song as confirmed by Ekwensi is also affirmed by Ikenna Odife in *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol. IX (2007:114) [7]. Sidenko (1968) as quoted by Odife says that in Biafra “for the first time in history, were the running dogs of imperialism (America and Britain) demonstrably shoulder to shoulder with the Soviet Revisionist for the whole world to see” how the USA remains aloof or neutral by regarding Nigeria as Britain’s sphere of influence and unaffectedly watches as Biafra is decimated; how Britain supplied armament and military strategy to Nigeria. Madiebo (1980) [8] also captures the fusion of Britain and Russian in the execution of the war.

General Alexander of Britain... insisted that the immediate capture of Uli Airport, the only link Biafra had with the rest of the world, was the quickest way of bringing the war to an end. On the other hand, the British Broadcasting Corporation preferred simultaneous offensives by Nigeria on all fronts with maximum use of the newly acquired Russian 122mm artillery guns, whose capabilities, judging from figures released by the BBC, were truly frightening.

-349

These songs, as supported by Ekwensi, Odife and Madiebo, writers postdating this song, really present the hopes and fears, the thoughts and beliefs of Biafrans as regards their independence and foreign antagonism.

3. THE LANGUAGE OF THE SONGS

Sapir (1945:15) states that “language is but a garment” of thought which should be jogging along with it, hand in hand”. According to him, “thought may be defined as the highest latent or potential content of speech, the content that is obtained by interpreting each of the elements in the flow of language as possessed of its very fullest conceptual value”. Songs are thoughts encoded in language. Language as vehicle or garments of thought conveys or dresses thoughts which undergo musical rendition. Thought as “content” of speech suggests that language dresses thought in linguistic garments before both manifest in linguistic symbols of the grammatical elements segmentally isolated as subject, verb, object, complement and adjunct, “the elements in the flow of language”. These undeniable functional components of language have tripartite chains of transmission which start from the brain (psychological) becoming conscious of a signal which it communicates to the organs of speech (physiological) to be released as meaningful sounds (acoustic or physical properties of sound as perceived by the ear) for spoken sounds or the signal appears as the orthographic symbols put down in writing.

4. LINGUISTIC COMPONENTS FOREGROUNDING PSYCHO-SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

The linguistic elements identified in the poems are sentence types according to structure, function and style. The two sentences of song 1A variedly repeated structurally have these linear arrangements: I – Sub – want – Vb – you – Obj – to join us – A and the second has join – Vb – us – Obj, ie, subject – verb – object – adjunct and verb – object. Song 1B makes use of the functional sentence, the interrogative sentence, introduced by “why” to put across the message. Yankson states that “structures may... be marked as equivalents when they are initiated by the same lexical item, for instance, by a Wh-Question form, ...” Song 1B is marked by this linguistic parallel structures. The item “why” is repeated four times in this song. This pattern or syntactic repetition foregrounds the message of the song in the minds of the people and so brings home the seriousness of the civil conflict. “Linguistic parallelism”, according to Yankson, “can, therefore, be used for rhetorical emphasis” (18).

Song 2A has these structures: I – S – ‘moff – V – to rain bullets – A – at Uzuakoli – A; My baby – S – is – V – crying – C; My baby – S – don’t be – V – afraid – C. After expressing feelings in these structures, the song selects a complex question sentence style to register the persona’s decision not to bolt away – “who will rain bullets” – the message presented – “when the Hausa’s arrive?” Giving detail to “if I run who’ll confront the enemies”. Song 2B uses parallel simple structures in the first two lines and reverts to conditional expression to stylistically present a loose sentence style: “if I happened to die in the battle field” – captures the message – and “never mind we shall meet again” – supplies the futuristic aftermath of dying.

Song 3 has these structures: You – S – ‘ve got – V – your independence – O; All – S – come – V – to us – A – for grace is overflowing – A; Our country – S – is not – V – an accursed one – C; Britain – S – armed – V – our enemies – O – with arms and ammunition – A; Russia – S – flew – V – her jet, fighter and bomber – O – over us – A; Egypt – S – trained – V – our enemies – O freely – A; America – S – connived at – V – our repression – O. These structures string the constituent elements serving as garments or vehicles conveying the thoughts rendered in song. Linguistic parallelism is conspicuously used for the last four sentences of song three. These sentences have the same structural pattern of SVO, but the first three have the adjunct – A. This makes them syntactically equivalent: the noun phrases, NP^s subject and NP^s object, belong to the same paradigm, the noun class and the verb phrases of these parallel structures, ‘armed’, ‘flew’, ‘trained’ and ‘connived at’, are also in paradigmatic relation, i.e. belong to the same word class. The adjuncts of the initial three sentences belong to these grammatical categories: “with arms and ammunition” – Prepositional Phrase (PP), “over us” – prepositional phrase (PP), “freely” – adverb of manner. These adverbials serving as adjuncts tell how actions of the verb phrases are

carried out. Geoffrey Leech as Yankson (2002) quotes says that parallelism sets up a relationship of equivalence between linguistic items and strongly urges a connection between them. This is delivered by the last four sentences of song three.

Other linguistic notations used are the graphological conventions of punctuation marks: the exclamatory mark expresses the emotions of fear and hope in the first song. The interrogative mark in song 1B is rhetorically used to show that the answer needed is total identification with and commitment to the conflict. The exclamatory mark portrays two levels of passion in song 2A: the passion of love and fear depicted by the baby's posturing; and the passion of anger and commitment represented by the unalloyed determination to check the insurgence of Nigerian government. The period or the full stop ending song 2B shows finality and complete commitment to defending the motherland – the Land of the Rising Sun.

5. THE ASSOCIATIVE OR THE LITERARY FOREGROUNDING OF PSYCHO-SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

The major literary use of language in song 1A is repetition: the repetition of “oh, join, the company”. This pattern repetition helps to permeate the emphasis in the psyche of singers and listeners, and to jolt them into action. Song 1B makes use of the rhetorical question to drum the hopelessness and powerlessness of the people if they fail to rise up to the challenge posed by the imminent danger.

The major literary uses of language in song 2A are metaphor and rhetorical question. The sounds of guns discharging bullets are associated with the beatings of drums. This suggestion that the dancers of drum beats are intertwined with the sound of the music is noticeable in this metaphorical expression. This recalls what Basden says, as quoted in the earlier part of this treatise, “under its [music's] influence, and that of the accompanying dance, one has seen men and women pass into completely dazed condition, oblivious and apparently unconscious of the world around them”. The sound of drums associated with battle noise shows that in the war field the fighters' (soldiers) souls coalesce with the sounds of guns, and no one is frightened by any danger of being shot or of survival.

Again, the rhetorical question – “who will beat the drum of bullet?” – shows that if there are people to fight he will be found among them. It also suggests total commitment to the defence of Biafra and nothing can paralyse this resolution.

Song 3 also uses repetition to register the people's euphoria about their independence: “Biafra, the Nation of Biafra, Our country” are repeated to show sense of ownership and pride.

6. FOREGROUNDING OF LANGUAGE AS SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE CIVIL CONFLICT SONGS

“Speech”, in many ways, “is a form of social identity and is used, consciously, to indicate membership of different social groups or different speech communities. A speech community is a group of people who share a set of norms, rules and expectations regarding the use of language”, Yule (2002:239). The Biafrans and/or the Igbo identified themselves as people sharing these same social norms, rules and expectations as the words are spun to display hopes and fears, thoughts and attitudes during this period of the conflict. “You” appears twice in song 1A and four times in song 1B. The essence of repeating this plural pronoun, for it appeals to all to contribute his/her quota to the waging of conflict, is to compel everyone to identify with his people in checkmating the enemy. Also, identity is expressed in song 2A. The rhetorical question, “who will beat the drum of bullets when the Hausas arrive?” is an instance of the use of language to show total commitment to defending a social group or speech community. The word “baby” in the song symbolizes all obstacles striving to obstruct the persona from identifying with his social group to forestall the belligerency of the federal insurgency. Furthermore, the sentence, “I'm off to beat the drum of bullets” presents straightforwardness, determination and irrevocable commitment. There is no suggestion of possibility or probability: “I may be off...” or “I am about to be off...” is not implied in that declaration. Also, the expression, “My baby, don't be afraid” suggests that the persona or the soloist – representing all committed to defending Biafran nationhood – is confident about taking part in the battle field and admonishes others who might not be taking active part to adopt the vestige of confidence in their different roles of protecting the nation. In song 2B the possessive adjective ‘my’ identifies the paternity and maternity of the persona represented by the noun paradigm – father, mother. In Biafra, motherhood and fatherhood are revered institutions. This reverence is displayed by the filial piety shown by the singer to his/her parents by informing them of bearing his resolution which might be fatal calmly. Language is also used to remind his parents of resurrection, a state which will make them part no more. The social identity shown in this song is that of family union and those of Igbo block phrases sermonizing their world-view of brotherly keeping. Such philosophical phrases as “Onye aghara nwanne ya” translated as “No one should abandon or forsake one's mother's child” and “Igwe bụ ike” translated as “communal crowd is strength” are suggested in the song. The persona's resolve to take part or even die in the battlefield in defense of his people is a lucid testimony of not forsaking his people nor detaching himself from the extended family – the Igbo race, now the communal crowd – waging a war. In song three, Biafran independence is celebrated. The linguistic element, Biafra, describes a particular region. The words heralding the euphoria of the people about independence provide the highest form of social identity. These linguistic elements – the possessive adjective “your” in lines one and two, the pronoun “us” in lines three, four, five and nine, the possessive adjectives “our” in line six, seven, eight, ten and eleven – are plural signposts expressing collective identity, thus denoting the felicity of a group of people who share a set of norms, rules and expectations and long to be left alone to make or mar their fortunes.

7. CONCLUSION

Biafra became stillborn. Biafrans writhed in pains and mourned the loss of their dreams in songs foregrounding language as psycho-social experience. Agu identified three types of music/song practices among the Nigerian cultures. Among these is the occasional music “used in celebrating lifecycle: for example, birth rite, marriage and funeral ceremonies” (200). Biafra as a stillbirth is captured in a song commemorating the funeral of a nation overran by the West (Britain and the USA), by the USSR (Russia or Soviet Union), and by the Arab world represented by Egypt. The funerialness of this song positions language as a veritable vehicle for expressing psycho-social experience.

Song of sorrow

S/N	Igbo Language	Transliteration
1	Ọsọndụ ụwa, olee mgbe ọ ga-agwụ	The world's race for survival when will it come to an end?
2	Onye ike gwurụ ya jisi ike ndo	The one who is exhausted should please be sorry!
3	Ahụhụ ụwa olee mgbe ọ ga-agwụ?	Suffering in the world, when will it come to an end?
4	Onye ike gwurụ ya jisi ike ndo	The one who is exhausted should please be sorry!
5	Ngwugwu Chukwu kelu	It is parcel God has created:
6	Ndị nke o kelu mma	There are those He created good,
7	Ndị nke o kelu njọ	There are those He created bad,
8	Ndị nke o kelu mma nọdụ	Those He created good remain,
9	Ma njọ kwakolo..	But the bad one disappear!
10	Onye ike gwurụ	The one who is exhausted
11	Ya jisi ike ndo	He should strive to hold himself!

The experience of loss, the acceptance of the omnipotent and omniscient God as the pivot on which good and bad revolve as He created both, a plea for the retention of the good, and an appeal for the exhausted to take heart are pictured in the song using emotional-laden mournful language to foreground despair, fears, hopes (God is love), and thoughts (about the suffering-ridden world). These psycho-social experiences of Biafrans and/or the Igbo during the historic conflict are traumatic. Many lost their parents, children, relations and wealth prior to and during the conflict. It is in line with this painful experience that many able-bodied men and women volunteered to fight and die for Biafra. The songs are experiences spurring lion-hearted youths to action and inspiring effeminate ones to cast slough of diffidence off their psyche and identify with the rest of us in restoring the dignity of man being rubbished by those more equal than man.

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