



## THE AFRICAN CONSCIOUSNESS-AN EXPLORATION INTO POSTCOLONIALWAR POETRY

LASEKAN OLUSIJI ADEBOLA

Department Of English, Jain University, Bangalore, India



LASEKAN OLUSIJI  
ADEBOLA

### Article Info:

Article Received:

04/010/2013

Revised on: 16/10/2013

Accepted on:19/10/2013

### ABSTRACT

Many countries were ravaged by war in Africa during the colonial and post colonial era. Most African poets who were also soldiers or civilians recount their experiences during and after the war. African war poetry covers civil war in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Nigeria, Somalia, Liberia, etc. This paper analyses thematic issues such as civilian fear, patriotism, freedom, land protection, country rebirth, reformation, death, loss, disease, pain and unfairness in different kinds of African war poetry. Some of the prominent African war poems examined in this study include Casualties by J.P Clark, Mothers Sing a Lullaby by Susan Kiguli, Blood of Kings By Ndahiro Bazimya, Hey Shabab, Where Is My Son? By Sallam Yassin and Skull Trees by Adrie Kusserow. The study reveals how the themes of death and Child Soldier become prominent in most of the poetry. This is inevitably consequences and causes of war respectively. Five poems from five African countries are considered for analysis.

**Key words-**Africa, Poetry, Postcolonial, War

### INTRODUCTION

#### Historical background of African wars

Since the second half of this last century, no single phenomenon has marred the image and development of Africa more than senseless fratricidal wars which rapidly followed the political independence of nations. Some of the Africa postcolonial wars are the following.

#### NIGERIA

The **Nigerian Civil War**, popularly known as the **Nigerian-Biafran War**, 6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970, was a political conflict caused by the attempted secession of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria as the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra. The conflict was caused by economic, ethnic,

cultural and religious tensions among the various peoples of Nigeria.

#### Rwanda.

The **Rwandan Civil War** was a conflict within the Central African nation of Rwanda, between the government of President Juvénal Habyarimana and the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). The conflict began on 1 October 1990 when the RPF invaded and ostensibly ended on 4 August 1993 with the signing of the Arusha Accords to create a power-sharing government. However, the assassination of Habyarimana in April 1994 proved to be the catalyst for the Rwandan Genocide, the commonly quoted death toll for which is 800,000. The closely

interrelated causes of the war and genocide led some observers to assume that the reports of mass killings were in fact some new flaring of the war, rather than a different phase. The RPF restarted its offensive, eventually taking control of the country. The Hutu government-in-exile then proceeded to use refugee camps in neighboring countries to destabilize the new RPF government. The RPF and its proxy rebel forces prosecuted the First Congo War (1996–1997), which led in turn to the Second Congo War (1998–2003), all of which involved a Hutu force with the objective of regaining control of Rwanda. Thus while the civil war officially lasted until 1993, some literature has the war ending with the RPF capture of Kigali in 1994 or with the disbanding of the refugee camps in 1996, while some consider the presence of small rebel groups along the Rwandan border to mean that the civil war is ongoing.

**Somalia**

Somalian war began in 1991, when a coalition of clan-based armed opposition groups ousted the nation's long standing military government. The most influential group in the coalition is Al-Shabab. The group has been engaging in recruiting children as a soldier. The children are mostly kidnapped from their parents. According to a humanitarian newsletter (IRIN), a woman reports the missing of her son. Hawa\* is a 40-year-old mother of

four, whose 13-year-old son was forcibly recruited. "I have been looking for him for the past 15 days," she told

**Liberia**

The 1989-1996 Liberian civil war, which was one of Africa's bloodiest, claimed the lives of more than 200,000 Liberians and further displaced a million others into refugee camps in neighboring countries. Entire villages were emptied as people fled. Child soldiers committed atrocities, raping and murdering people of all ages. Liberia's civil war claimed the lives of one out of every 17 people in the country, uprooted most of the rest, and destroyed a once-viable economic infrastructure. The strife also spread to Liberia's neighbors, contributing to a slowing of the democratization that was progressing steadily through West Africa at the beginning of the 1990s and destabilizing a region that already was one of the world's most marginal.

**SOUTH SUDAN**

Sudan has been at war since its independence from Great Britain in 1956, with most of the fighting involving the Islamic central government in the north and the largely Christian and Animist population of the South. According to world without borders report, over 480,000 of the Christian community have been killed, and over 2.8 million people are displaced

**POEM ANALYSIS**

**SOUTH SUDAN**

**Poem**

**SKULL TREES By Adrie Kusserow,**

Arok, hiding from the Arabs in the branches of a tree,  
two weeks surviving on leaves,  
legs numb, mouth dry.

When the mosquitoes swarmed  
and the bodies settled limp as petals under the trees,  
he shinnied down, scooping out a mud pit with his hands  
sliding into it like a snake,  
his whole body covered except his mouth.

Perhaps others were near him,  
lying in gloves of mud, sucking bits of air through the swamp holes,  
mosquitoes biting their lips,  
but he dared not look.

What did he know of the rest of South Sudan, pockmarked with bombs,  
skull trees with their necklaces of bones,

packs of bony Lost Boys  
 roving like hyenas towards Ethiopia,  
 tongues, big as toads, swelling in their mouths,  
 the sky pouring its relentless bombs of fire. Of course they were  
 tempted to lie down for a moment,  
 under the lone tree, with its barely shade,  
 to rest just a little while before moving on,  
 the days passing slyly, hallucinations  
 floating like kites above them  
 until the blanched bones lay scattered in a ring around the tree,  
 tiny ribs, skulls, hip bones—a tea set overturned,  
 as the hot winds whistled through them  
 as they would anything, really,  
 and the sky, finally exhausted,  
 moving on.

### ANALYSIS

The poem begins with Arok (non-Arab) who is being described in a dehumanized condition. It is a description of a South Sudan civilian who is hiding from the Arab soldiers. The second line shows the extent to which some of them suffer. A situation where people are feeding on raw leaves for two weeks. Sudan is a country that is made up of Arab majority in the northern part and the Christian minority who occupy the southern part of the country called Dafur. The community has been fighting for their own nation independence since 1983.

The second line is a description of numbness, a mouth that is dry which reveals that the civilian has not taken water for a long time. In his attempt to hide from the enemy, the speaker has to dig the mud with his hand so that he can hide. The extreme of hopelessness and the pain of survival is captured graphically in other lines.

“his whole body covered except his mouth”

“lying in gloves of mud, sucking bits of air through the swamp holes”,

Mosquitoes are in the centre of the poem. This is an insect that causes illness such as malaria. It is an indication that the writer is not far from a swampy area which helps in the breeding of mosquitoes. The third stanza deals with how the civilian begins to imagine what could have happened to the rest of South Sudan which has been bombed. Skull Trees is a yard stick that is used to measure those who are dead especially those people who are beheaded and their head is hanged on a tree. This is followed by

the picture of lost young boys migrating towards the Ethiopian border for safety. We are made to understand that people scanning for safety choose to lie down for a while because of military air raid the “sky pouring its relentless bombs of fire”.

People continue to daydream in hunger which leads to death of some and malnourishment of others.

### Themes

**Survival**-The poem shows people’s desperation to get into safety. The person in question goes in hiding, digging a mud so that he/she can hide from the enemy. Even those that are trying to migrate to Ethiopian boarder have to hide from the surveillance of their enemy so that they can arrive at their destination safely. Survival is highlighted as the main theme of many of the poems. Be it the valiant hero surviving the evil foe, the accident victim surviving a plane crash or the cancer patient fighting the disease. Philip Larkin’s finest quote on perception on survival is this” what will survive of us is love”. What then is the miracle of survival? Will it ever manifest amidst people, races and tribes?

**Imagination**-The poem also shows how the people in hiding are imagining what is happening to the city regarding the consequences of the air raid of their city. According to Coleridge, who believes that a strong, active imagination and consciousness could become a vehicle for transcending unpleasant circumstances., Here, the suffering of the people hiding in the bush, they decide to use their imagination, the hallucinations are “floating like kites above them” and past memory help them to

escape their present suffering(a kind of transient transcendence).

**Fear**-The poem shows how the protagonist fears death. He fears death to an extent that he digs ground with his hand in order to hide from his enemy. The speaker refers to the protagonist as "HE". This shows that the protagonist is a man. In African culture, a man is not expected to fear death or express any kind of emotion that are associated with women. This can also be observed in the life of Okonkwo in "Things Fall Apart". This shows how the war has caused psychological disorder in men (mental instability).

**Migration**-This is a contemporary problem in today's world. as well, the speaker mentions how people are running towards the border of Ethiopia. Some of the countries that share borders with war torn countries have set up a refugee camp. Recently, United Nations estimate that 36000 South Sudanese refugees are living in Ethiopia. They all fled from the ongoing war in Dafur.

**Motif**

Skull-The word "Skull" is mentioned twice in the poem. This is a symbol of death. The skeleton motif is dominant. "the man sees skull trees with their necklace of bones". This is the stark landscape of death

**Language**

The poem of is full of language of the extremes. They are used to describe the dehumanized condition of the speaker.

"Leg numb, mouth dry"

"bodies settled limp as petals under the trees"

"skull trees with their necklaces of bones"

**Symbolism**

The only respite in this same land of numbness, dryness are the delicate images of the petal under the tree. Considering the paradoxical title of the poem. The tree is a symbol of growth, life and that which is organic. Poets use paradox to create tension in the reader's mind by placing words or phrases together so that at first that do not seem to follow the rule of logic or accepted truth. The speaker also use paradox to create an unusual thought or visual image with words and sometimes the same words would often otherwise read as ordinary and unremarkable but when placed in different combinations they are striking. According to Cleanth Brook in his essay, "The Language of Paradox", he states that language of poetry is the language of paradox. Brooks bases his position on the contradictions that are inherent in poetry and says that if those contradictions didn't exist then neither would we have some of the best poetry that we have today. paradoxes drive home the harsh death. Illustrating from Wordsworth to Shakespeare, Brooks shows how the only way some ideas can be expressed is through paradox. His best example of this idea is from Coleridge's description of the manner in which the imagination fuses and reconciles opposite and discordant qualities. Here skull Tree for, those, whom thou thinks', thou dost over through, die not, poor death, not yet canst thou kill me is a powerful blend of the good (organic), bad life, and death (macabre bone-necklace)

**Somalia**

**Poem**

**Hey Shabab, Where Is My Son? By Sallam Yassin**

In life

When elephants fight

A flower dies

So my son what they putted in your mind

to blow up me

the bullet isn't killer

son

but your hate

son

A terror

You feel shames

That's why  
 you walks in shadows  
 And hides in cave  
 And u wears this turban on face  
 hey my son  
 they pulled out  
 your heart  
 And replaced  
 with bomb  
 Hey shabab  
 where is my son?

### Analysis

The poem starts with the popular saying which is uttered by the speaker's son "when elephants fight a flower dies". The elephants symbolize the rebel fighters (Al-Shabab) and the government soldiers. Here is an image of power and strength as symbolized by the elephant and another image of beauty and powerlessness, being that of the flower. This reminds me of Shakespearean sonnet number 65.

"Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea  
 But sad mortality o'ersway their power  
 "how will this rage shall hold their plea  
 Whose action is no stronger than a flower"

This shows that innocent helpless people are always the victims of war. From the poet reaction to the statement; it shows that the speaker is shocked. He finds it hard to believe that his son's death can justify the consequence of war.

Through that statement, the speaker begins to ask questions as to how and who poisoned his son with bad ideology. We later understand that the son is filled with hatred because of his hatred, he feels ashamed, walks in shadow, hides in cave and wear turban in other to hide his identity. All these are attributes of rebel groups. "they pulled out your heart and replaced with bombs". This statement shows that they change the tender mind of child and turn it to violence/evil mind. The poem ends with the poet asking for the real and old values which his son knew and how they have been taking away by Al-Shabab.

A son is corrupted by wrong ideology by the Al-Shabab. The child does not deserve to be corrupted

because they are innocent. According to William Blake "in songs of innocence", "childhood is a time and a state of protected innocence but that which not immune to the fallen world and it's institution'. All these show the helplessness of a child that is faced with immense cruelty.

Tone-the protagonist tone is filled with anger which is a result of what the war has turned his son to.

### Theme

**Child soldier**-This is about a son of the speaker who has been recruited to prosecute a war by the rebel group. Many poets have written on this tragic theme. One of them is Fred D'aguier. In his poem "Boy Soldier" he describe how adults are using children to kill on their behalf.

The language of the poet is colloquial. Starting from the title. "HEY AL-SHABAB" the speaker sounds so informal in his language. This is also reflected in his writing. "You" is written as "U". The deliberate use of colloquial language even when in a context where Standard English is expected is unusual. This shows that his language is a social marker indicating his social status and level of education. Further his speech which raises several questions

What they putted in your heart to blow up me?  
 And again you feel ashamed.....  
 walk in shadows?  
 ... hide in cave?

Here language establish a descriptive emotional attitude especially one of the pathos when he cries "They pulled out your heart and replaced with bomb"

All these culminating in an angry question " Al-Shabab, where is my son"

**RWANDA**

**Poem**

**Mothers of sing of lullaby BY SUSAN KIGULI**

Mothers sing a lullaby  
 As the dark descends on trees  
 Shutting out shadows.  
 The sensuous voices swish and swirl  
 Around shrubs and overgrown grass  
 Hiding mountains of decapitated dead  
 And the glint of machetes  
 That slashed shrieking throats.  
 In these camps without happiness  
 Mothers maintain the melody of life  
 Capturing wistful wind  
 To sing strength into the souls of children  
 Who have never known  
 The taste of morning porridge  
 Or heard the chirrup of crickets in the evenings.  
 Mothers sing a lullaby  
 For the staring faces  
 Who cringe at the sound of footsteps  
 Whose playmates are grinning skeletons.  
 Mothers become a lullaby  
 Silencing the sirens of sorrow  
 Restoring compassion to the nation.

**Analysis**

“Singing of Lullaby by a Mother” during the period of war is the major theme of the poem. The poem starts with the description of a woman probably hiding in a forest singing a lullaby in a surrounding that is marked with deadly people. In spite of the sad mood of the mother. She chooses to sing lullaby to her children. It is a sonorous voice that goes along with the wind. The objective of such song is to give strength to children. The poet makes us to understand what such children go through during the war and the effect of war on those children. Some of them are so young that they have not started eating solid food like porridge or may never get to taste it. The lullaby is for those who live in fear. The fear is seen on the faces of the sorrowful children whose playmates have been killed

**Themes**

**Death**-According to John Donne,

“death be not proud though some have called the mighty and dreadful for, thou art not see, for, those, whom thou think’st, thou dost overthrow, die not, poor death, not yet canst thou kill me.”

The poet spends a lot of time talking about death situation of the mother’s singing lullaby .” hiding mountain of decapitated dead”.

This signifies the consequences of the war. The lullaby has positive effect on the children. The first effect is to calm them down and helps them to sleep away.

The poem begins with the descending darkness that shut out shadows the sensuous voice envelop swish and swirl, hiding mountain of decapitated dead. it also brings to mind the glint of matchet “the slashed shrieking throats”. This is a truly horrifying situation.

**Mother's love**-The mother sings because she is sorrowful about the war. She feels sorry for the children. She shows the maternal love instinct for her child. Mothers are the most affected group of people during war because they are weak and their role is of lesser value in the society.

**Protection**-The poem reveals how protective a mother can be towards her child. In African culture, Father is the head of the family and his major responsibility is to protect the family. Since all the men are enlisted in the army. The fatherly role is then transferred to the mother. They have to look after the household and take care of the children.

The most striking lines in the poem speak of binding tenderness of the mother maintaining the melody of life.

Mothers maintain the melody of life  
Capturing wistful wind

This is highlighted by alliteration

“Shutting out shadows”

“sensuous voices swish and swirl”

“sing strength into the souls”

“Silencing the sirens of sorrow”

It is as if this note thus “sing strength into the souls of children” is like a plaintive anthem.

#### RWANDA

BLOOD OF KINGS By Ndahiro Bazimya

I am the son of scholars

Soldiers, warriors, dancers

Politicians, Farmers

Herders, poets

Athletes, survivors’

I saw my father’s destiny

rise,

Despite all who opposed

Who wait

With teeth gnashing and weapons ready

For his downfall

And through which in strength and integrity

will never come.

I have listened to my mother’s voice

Painting a picture through brown eyes

Of her childhood

About her family’s noble lineage and dignity

And the horror that changed it all

Through murder and destruction

Men prayed for death, not gods

My parents were pioneers

Rising above hate

The pride of Africa in their skin

As they led the way In that I was conceived in

Third born of a new ara.

Blood of Africa

Born of the Western world

Raised with new ideas

While holding tradiition

The son who will

Blaze through a new world

While keeping in his heart an old one.

**Rwanda: Where Tears Have No Power**

By Haki Madhubuti

Fifteen blocks from the White house  
 on small corners in northwest, d.c.  
 boys disguised as me rip each other's hearts out  
 with weapons made in china. they fight for territory.  
 across the planet in a land where civilization was born  
 the boys of D.C. know nothing about their distant relatives  
 in Rwanda. they have never heard of the Hutu or Tutsi people.  
 their eyes draw blanks at the mention of Kigali, Byumba  
 or butare. all they know are the streets of d.c., and do not  
 cry at funerals anymore. numbers and frequency have a way  
 of making murder commonplace and not news  
 unless it spreads outside of our house, block, territory.  
 modern massacres are intraethnic. Bosnia, Sri lanka, Burundi,  
 nagorno-karabakh, Iraq, Laos, Angola, Liberia, and Rwanda are  
 small foreign names on a map made in Europe. when bodies  
 by the tens of thousands float down a river turning the water  
 the color of blood, as a quarter of a million people flee barefoot  
 into Tanzania and Zaire, somehow we notice. We do not smile,  
 we have no more tears. we hold our thoughts. In deeply  
 muted silence looking south and thinking that today  
 Nelson Mandela seems much larger  
 than he is.

**Analysis**

The speaker starts by saluting the African fathers whose fore-fathers are from a proud heritage of scholars, soldiers, warrior, dancer, politicians, poet, etc. He describes fathers who strive to achieve success against all odds. The middle stanza of the poem describes typical African mothers who shared stories with the children. Telling the stories of African past heroes and their sacrifices for the country. She describes men praying for death during war. The speaker now describes his parents who refuse to hate their enemy and they are proud of their African heritage especially their skin colour. He describes himself as a new generation that is born in western world, full of new ideas while still rooted in the old African tradition

**Theme of Reconciliation.**

The poem embraces the use of war trauma texts which can be in form of oral narration, novels, documentaries, poetrys. They are important tool to heal psychological wounds that

are caused during the war. It helps in reconciliation of those that are involved in the conflicts. Reconciliation helps all the parties that involved in the war to forgive one another, prosecute those involved in the war crimes and prevent any future war occurrence. The speaker describes how his mother narrates all the murder and destruction during the war and how his parents choose to love rather than hate.

**Alliteration**-Different levels of sound constitute note of melody of metaphor.

**Poem of generation**

The proud lineage of the both parents helps them to rise above fears struggle and then enable them to rise above hatred. This is a poem of generation where the people are conscious of the pride of Africa in their skin, thus memories of ancestral voices and the pride of Africa lead to a new era of the new generation, born of the western world, blaze through a new world while keeping in his heart an old one.

**Where tears have no power**

The second poem by Haki Madhubuti (where tears have no power) describes young boys of Washington DC whose values contradict the values of the third generation in the poem "Blood of Kings". These boys neither know about their ancestors nor about the two tribes (Hutu and Tutsi) in Rwanda. However, African writers such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka belong to the third generation who study abroad and still retain their identity as an African. They carry their identity within them therefore they can't be dislocated. But the DC boys are so disconnected from their homeland that the

mentioning of Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda is strange to them. They look at their motherland through the eyes of the western world. According to them, countries name such as Rwanda is a "small foreign names on a map made in Europe". The map is drawn with a complete ignorant of the sense of history,culture,religion,social and cultural background. The speaker shows people's insensitivity to death news

"numbers and frequency have a way of making murder commonplace and not news".

Therefore,people have no more tears because they have witness so much death.

**Liberia**

**Poem**

**Liberia Oh! Liberia by Toris Okotie**

Liberia O. Liberia

On the streets lies the bodies of your young  
the screaming echos of unweary souls  
bullet blasting, unsuspected, dead

A boy,

young in age

A Liberian soldier.

Educated only in the field of war  
to write, he write's not  
to kill, licensed and well informed

seven skulls of his victim

he counts his age

with pride and honor

he fights for his country

"Liberia free, free Liberia"

that was his last words

has he fell to the floor

waving the flag he so loved

has he lay down upon the ground he came from  
the flag still waving, the hope still alive  
another young soldier, same in age  
in respect, with falling tears, closed his eyes  
picked up the gun and continued to fight for Liberia

**Analysis**

The poet recounts and reminiscence about the bodies of young people that lie on the ground during the Liberia war. This is accompanying by blasting of bullet and the "screaming of the unwearied soul". The second stanza shows how underage children are used to prosecute the war. The speaker reiterates how children who are supposed to be in school acquiring formal education are being trained and licensed to kill. The third stanza shows how the child's soldier takes pride in the art of killing. They have been brainwashed to believe that it is honorable to fight for their country at a tender age. The speaker describes how the child soldier died as a hero. At the point of death the child is still demonstrating his allegiance by waving his country's flag. The poem concludes with the waving flag which is a symbol of the struggle and the fight that still continues.

These young ones are ignorant of music and TV because they are indoctrinated to stand and fight for a higher cause. What is the higher cause? The child soldier calculates the age of his victim with pride and honor because he fights for his country. His last tragic cry is "Liberia free". He falls down, dying upon the ground. Another young child comes and waves the flag with falling tears, pick up the gun and continue to fight for Liberia. Is this patriotism?

**Motif**

Their only childhood is the battles that they fight in jungles and places. It is a childhood that is emptied of the richness of the imagination and warmth of emotions. They don't know music, their lives of imagination has been destroyed. They only listen to lyric of machine gun that bursts forth.. The motif of music is hunting because what is left behind is only the soundtrack of dissolution.

**Themes**

**Patriotism**-The speaker emphasizes the organic relationship between the soldier and his country. It is about a child soldier who is fighting for a cause and belief the poet's tone is laudatory by the giving of accolade to the child soldier. a sense of dedication affection and respect to the country. This is indicated in the last stanza" continue to fight for Liberia"

**Freedom**-The child soldier keep chanting "Liberia free". Just like most of the war in Africa. The reason for such of wars is because people want freedom for themselves. As Tagore says "when we fight for the outer freedom, we cry for the inner freedom as well"

**Nigeria****Poem****THE CASUALTIES**

**BY John Pepper Clark**

The casualties are not only those who are dead:

They are well out of it.

The casualties are not only those who are wounded,

Thought they await burial by installment

The casualties are not only those who have lost

Person or property, hard as it is

To graze for a touch that some

May not know is not there

The casualties are not those led away by night;

The cell is a cruel place, sometimes a heaven,

Nowhere as absolute as the grave

The casualties are not those who started

A fire and now cannot put to out. Thousands  
 Are burning that had no say in the matter.  
 The casualties are not only those who escaping  
 The shattered shell become prisoners in  
 A fortress of falling walls.

The casualties are many, and a good number well  
 Outside the scene of ravage and wreck;  
 They are the emissaries of rift,  
 So smug in smoke-room they haunt abroad,  
 They are wandering minstrels who, beating on  
 The drum of human heart, draw the world  
 Into a dance with rites it does not know

The drum overwhelm the guns...  
 Caught in the clash of counter claims and charges  
 When not in the niche others have left,  
 We fall.  
 All casualties of war,  
 Because we cannot hear other speak,  
 Because eyes have ceased to see the face from the crowd,  
 Because whether we know or  
 Do not know the extent of wrong on all sides,  
 We are characters now other than before  
 The war began, the stay- at- home unsettled  
 By taxes and rumor, the looter for office  
 And wares, fearful everyday the owners may return,  
 We are all casualties,  
 All sagging as are  
 The case celebrated for kwashiorkor,  
 The unforeseen camp-follower of not just our war

### Analysis

The poem is about the Nigerian Civil War, known as the Nigerian - Biafra War. The war began on July 6, 1967. Many common people were greatly affected by the war. The speaker points out that the casualties are not only the ones who are dead, for they are far from the devastating consequences of the war. They are not only those who are wounded though they are well on the route to death. They await burial by installments as death is the Ultimate escapism. It is not only those who have lost their material assets and property, it is also those who have irretrievably lost their near and dear ones. It is those who long heart-rendingly for a touch. The casualties are not only those led away by the law at

night, there is always the uncertainty about the cell. To some people it may be a cruel place, but function as a haven for others.

In addition, the casualties are not only those who caused the war and cannot put an end to it. This may be any form of rumour or issue that kindles a controversy or sparks communal violence. The scapegoats are the innocents who had no say in the matter, and they are the victims of the fire. They are also the ones that escape the war, for they reside in the shattered shell of its aftermath. They always experience the walls falling against them. These diplomats remain smug in their rooms smoking. (J. P. Clark was also a diplomat). 'Smoking' apart from

its literal meaning also connotes the means of alleviating tension using a short-cut.

This stanza refers to the casualties of the war in an ironic and sarcastic tone. These so-called 'casualties' exist outside the scene of ravage and wreckage. They are the emissaries of rift rather than being the emissaries of peace. They are smug in room smoking. The term 'smoking' here literally means ways of alleviating tension using an easy method. They cannot see the funeral fires consuming the forests or natural vegetation. They fail to have a far-sighted view. They are the wandering minstrels who beating on the drums of the human heart, taking advantage of human-sensitivity to certain issues. These drive humanity to a frenzy that is unfamiliar to its basic nature itself. These drums possess a power that overwhelms even guns.

We are thus caught in a chaos of charges and counter-claims.

When not in the niche others have left,

We fall,

All casualties of the war,

The 'niche' referred to here is that of being "politically correct". Those who are politically correct are therefore in a 'safe corner'. People are caught in the hatred of communities, or so wrapped up in a cause that they see only the tumultuous crowds; nobody can hear each other speak. Nobody sees the innocent individual faces who are unnecessarily made the victims. This is very significant in the contemporary context of terrorism. To know or not know the extent of wrong on all the sides is not a matter of concern for them. "We are characters now": we do not have an existence of our own. Though we appear to be the "stay-at-home", we are unsettled by reports of inflation, taxation, rumors, etc.

By taxes and rumor, the looter for office

And wares, fearful everyday the owners may return,

We are all casualties,

All sagging as are

The case celebrated for kwashiorkor,

The unforeseen camp-follower of not just our war.

Kwashiorkor is used as a huge personification of all the deteriorating and devastating effects of the claustrophobic war. Kwashiorkor is an acute form of childhood protein-energy malnutrition. What the poet means to say that the war is like a disease

afflicting a child, or a new generation at its very core. It is the children of today that is the future of tomorrow. Therefore the best way to win a war is to prevent it.

**THEMES OF DISABLEMENT**-The poet says that "the casualties are not only those who are wounded". This is one of the major consequences of every war. Nigeria-Biafra war is not an exception. Most of the victims are wounded physically while some suffer from soul destroying disablement. They became handicapped, begging for money on the street so that they can meet their financial obligation after the war.

### CONCLUSION

Almost all African countries have experienced war. Be it civil or international war. Most African poets share their experience during the war while others writing about these wars is based on their observation as an African Diaspora. Poet like J.P Clark share their experience and tell the readers what they witnessed during the Nigerian civil war. Poet like Toris Okotie is a Nigerian but he writes about Liberian war. Also Susan Kiguli is a Ugandan poet that describes the Rwandese genocide.

Most of these poets represent the voice of the voiceless during and after the war.

Moreover, African war poetry is the poetry of protest. It comes as a reaction to various forms of injustices that is carried out during the war such as enlisting child soldier in the army and the killing of harmless civilians.

This work concentrates on thematic issues in African war poetry. Selected

Works of Africans were used for the purpose of this study. They belong to the fourth generation of African poets who usually consolidate on the current and contemporary problems militating against Africa. This work also focuses on the textual analysis of various war poems across Africa. All the poems are melancholic about the travails of war which are fought in the continent. Major themes were examined as the voices of the people who the poets attempt to exemplify poetically. The introduction of unique language gives the poems a different perspective from the English poets of the Elizabethan era, Romantic era or different from the Victorian era in English literature.

It is expedient to state here that these poets use distinct imagery which is distinctive from their contemporaries in Europe. It is also of paramount significance to state that new metaphors were established to illuminate the voices based on the poets' divergence of cultures. The work was situated based on a sociological approach to literary criticism with respect to realism because the poems under analysis were realistically expressing African experience and idiosyncratic norms. This work has made us to understand the root cause and cost of African wars. Some of the causes highlighted are patriotism and quest for freedom while the cost of the wars are creation of fear among civilian, children recruitment into army, massacre, disablement etc. All these themes give an explanation into the African consciousness-an attempt to reveal the dynamics of the soul of Africa.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Prof Hemalatha John for the useful comments, remarks and engagement through the learning process of this master thesis. Furthermore I would like to thank the entire staff of the University

English department for the support on the way. I would like to thank my loved ones, who have supported me throughout entire process, both by keeping me harmonious and helping me putting pieces together. I will be grateful forever for your love.

**WORK CITED**

- Adrie Kusserow, SKULL TREES
- *Prince Charles Dickson* The Casualties, Elections And Disjointed Nigeria, Retrieved from <http://www.gamji.com/dickson/dickson122.htm>
- John Pepper Clark THE CASUALTIES
- Ndahiro Bazimya BLOOD OF KINGS
- Sallam Yassin Hey Shabab, Where Is My Son?
- SUSAN KIGULI .Mothers of sing of lullaby
- Toris Okotie Liberia Oh! Liberia