

# They too are Casualties: The Toll on the Ecology in Nigerian Civil War Literature

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**Abstract:**

Critical scholarship on the literature of the Nigerian Civil War tends to dwell mostly on the human tragedy, often neglecting other nonhuman casualties of war. I identify the use of the environment as a tool of war in the theatre of combat especially during violent confrontations between the fighting troops and will analyse how this is depicted in selected war narratives on the Nigeria–Biafra war. By focusing on the effects of the war on the ecology, my study invites a more holistic examination of the total landscape of war bearing in mind the entanglements and shared vulnerabilities between humans and nonhumans. It also admits to an intersection between war literature and ecocriticism for if there are claims of genocide because of the perceived vulnerability of a group of humans during the war, then there are also evidences of ecocide as a result of the attacks on the defenceless nonhuman entities within the domain of war.

**Keywords:** Nigerian Civil War literature, Ecology, Environmental ethics, Warfare

**Introduction**

Whether by accident or by design, war is of human making. In most cases, it is as a result of perceived grievances and injustices by one against another. Periods of conflict often reveal the operations and depth of man’s baser instincts as combatants engage in wanton destruction of lives and properties in attempts to subdue and defeat the opponents. On another level, wars can be seen as reflections of man’s self-centred acts that invariably affect, damage and alter the natural environment. Rakesh Chandra (2017) observes that one of the constant elements “of warfare is its degrading effects on the environment (369).

Land possession is one of the factors that fuels a war (Cajetan Iheka, 2017: 68) and many believe, for example, that perhaps there would have been no civil war in Nigeria without the bets on the newly discovered rich oil reserves of part of what is today known as the Niger Delta region (Chibuike Uche, 2008). There is thus a conjunction of war and human greed for capital which initiated the destruction of the ecology that this work is based on. While humans are the active

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participants during the fight, nature and other non-human elements are passive partakers and are a huge part of the collateral damages of war as they are drawn in by virtue of being within proximity or as battlegrounds.

This study heeds Madhu Krishnan's (2019) charge for the urgent need for ecocriticism to focus more on the entanglements or relationships between human and non-human elements towards a more wholistic understanding of the prevailing conditions of the environment. It also aims to stimulate an alternative perspective to literary discourses on environmental crises which for long has mostly focused on the consequences of oil extractive activities. My perspective aligns with Iheka's (2018) acknowledgement that there are indeed complex interactions between humans and non-humans during armed conflicts as both have shared vulnerabilities and each deserves close attention during critical exegesis. Therefore, this essay is significant as it provokes a balanced examination of the total landscape of war by focusing on the cost of war on its non-human casualties.

Literary scholars have examined creative works based on the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 dwelling on the toll of war on humans from just before it started through post-war reconstruction efforts. While some of the primary texts were first witness accounts as in Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra*, others were purely fictionalized versions as in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Often, these narratives recount the suffering, destruction, dislocation, and deaths caused by man's inhumanity to man in the form of war. As is expected, critical studies tend to largely dwell on the human experience of the internecine conflict while ignoring the non-human participants in that war.

Kole Omotosho (1981) is of the view that the civil war constitutes the most important theme in post-war Nigerian writing as both writers and critics try to reconstruct and reconfigure the polemics responsible for that tragic experience. Ime Ikiddeh (1976: 168) examines this period as one which portrays "the inescapable decline in values and the dehumanizing effect which go hand in hand with war as a human menace". Maxine Sample's (1991) essay deals with the fate of war refugees by showing the miserable conditions of this group during the war and post-war reconstruction. Full volumes of literary essays on the Nigerian Civil War like *A Harvest from Tragedy: Critical Perspective on the Nigerian Civil War Literature* (1997) edited by Chinyere Nwahunanya and *War in African Literature Today* (2008) edited by Ernest N. Emenyonu have also focused on the human condition during this era of strife. Even the female gender which is often regarded as the marginalized Other in imaginative and critical discourses on the war has

over time received significant attention in discussions on the role of women during the Nigerian civil war (Jane Bryce, 1991, Mariam Cooke, 1993, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2005, Shalini Nadaswaran, 2013). However, Iheka's chapter on the ecology of war in Nuruddin Farah's novels is one of the few studies that takes on a complementary view of what he terms the "agential capabilities" (2017: 65) of the Other as he explores how humans and nonhuman elements interact with the environment during a period of crisis. By commending Ben Okri for showing "a sympathetic awareness of how human agency is a damaging force threatening natural processes", critics like Nicoletta Brazzelli (2017: 152) also admit to the importance of projecting environmental sustainability in African literature.

Much of the critical scholarship available on the Nigerian Civil war experience points to the fact that little attention has been given to the deleterious effects of war on non-human entities, including settings and physical structures. There seem to be a tacit conspiracy in the manner the series of ecological degradation this subset suffer has been ignored or subsumed during discussions on this literary subgenre. Yet, there is no doubt that even though it does not literally die like humans, the ecology of the physical environment is greatly diminished during armed conflicts which implies it has some form of mortality. Therefore, as a departure from the norm in ecocriticism or war scholarship, this essay goes beyond the human tragedy by exploring the decimation of the ecology and the representation of biotic community as also casualties of the Nigerian Civil war.

### **Environmental Warfare and Ethics**

Warring factions indiscriminately destroy environmental resources along their paths including land and water as they advance or retreat. As part of their defence tactics, these combatants employ some environmental forms of modifications like blowing up bridges, digging trenches, planting landmines, poisoning rivers, destroying food crops and animals. The use of chemical and nuclear weapons in modern times are some of the strategies of warfare that also destroy the environment. A corollary of warfare on the environment is that such areas become unusable or wastelands. Many sites of war never fully recover or get rehabilitated or reconstructed even after the war has ended as seen in the effects of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Some parts of Eastern Nigeria today still bear visages of environmental devastation as a result of the internecine conflict that happened over fifty years ago. The unmitigated attacks on the foliage and pollution of water during the Vietnam and Gulf wars respectively were believed to have brought the dangers of warfare's environmental destructiveness to international

attention. This was one of the reasons for promulgating environmental laws meant to protect ecologically sensitive areas in case of violent or armed conflicts. These laws were primarily made to discourage humans from deliberately destroying the nonhuman elements during war. One of such is Protocol One, Article 55 which emanated from an amendment of the Geneva Convention law of war and its conduct. Paragraph 1of that law states that:

Care should be taken in warfare to protect the natural environment against wide-spread, long-term and severe damage. This protection includes a prohibition on the use of methods or means of warfare which are intended or may be expected to cause such damage to the natural environment and thereby to prejudice the health or survival of the population (quoted in Chandra, 2017: 373).

But in spite of these laws that have been put in place to enforce a more considerate treatment of the natural environment in times of war, humans still remain non-committed to the well-being of the “Others” in the prosecution of war. One is yet to see a perpetrator punished for crimes committed against the environment during war. This therefore calls up the need for environmental ethics.

Environmental ethics is a philosophical discipline that advocates that humans should be considerate in their interactions with the natural environment. This doctrine seeks to condition human interactions with the natural environment towards achieving a considerate relationship. Within African cosmology, many societies consider some nonhuman forms as viable life forms and therefore treat them with reverence or as if humans. Hence we have indigenous practices that are protective towards specific plants, animals and cultural sites. In treating the toll of war on the ecology in conflict narratives, I would lean more on Aldo Leopold’s conceptualization of land ethic which is embedded within the larger framework of holistic ethics as spelt out in the *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy’s* definition of “Environmental Ethics” (Environmental Ethics | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (utm.edu). Both (holistic and land ethics) thoughts on environmental ethics advocate human consideration towards all living things in a biotic community within a context where land, technically taken to mean the environment is not treated as “a mere object or resource” (n.p.). This source goes further to expatiate that “For Leopold, land is not merely soil. Instead land is a fountain of energy, flowing through a circuit of soils, plants and animals” (n.p.). The general advocacy here is for a moral standing towards the well-being, safety, preservation and sustainability of plants, animals and organisms in an ecosystem. But it is obvious that war is not a time during which humans primarily think of the well-being of the environment and

other non-human elements except how these can accelerate or enable their safety and victory.

### **The Toll of War on the Ecology in Nigerian Civil War Literature**

In this study, I will use the word “ecology” interchangeably with “environment”. An excerpt from Chandra’s article which I reproduce below will serve as a working definition. According to this source, the environment include “both biotic and abiotic, such as air, water, soil, fauna, and flora and the interaction between the same factors; property which forms part of the cultural heritage; and aspects of the landscape” (quoted by Chandra, 2017: 370). The ecology within war settings and narratives encompasses the nonhuman entities including the structures that are not animate, yet serve as veritable resources for sustaining humans. My emphasis here will be on how humans have used their environment and elements therein as war time expendables in their bid to win or survive the war. Put differently, I identify the use of the environment as a tool of war in the theatre of combat especially during violent confrontations between the fighting troops and will analyse how this is depicted in selected war narratives on the Nigeria-Biafra war. I propose that while primarily portraying the human tragedy of the war, these writers also present the impact of the war on the environment showing it was as adversely affected during the armed conflict as human beings. Thus, if there are claims of genocide because of the perceived vulnerability of a group of humans during the war, then there are also evidences of ecocide as a result of the attacks on the defenceless nonhuman entities within the domain of war. Thus, an imperative of this study is to establish the fact that the nonhuman elements were equally significant victims or casualties of the ravages of that war.

A study of the ecology of the Nigerian Civil War literature will also show a measure of environmental degradation that started even before another major one that has captured the literary imagination of the Niger Delta. This later phenomenon is the extraction of oil and gas which has been held responsible for the apocalyptic destruction of the environment and the accompanying toll on human health, economy, society, and culture. Coincidentally, the Niger Delta comprising of the South-South geopolitical zone of six states was initially claimed by secessionist Biafra and inadvertently became part of the setting of the civil war. Aside from places in the heart of Igboland in Eastern Nigeria, locations in the Midwest area (part of present day Niger Delta) came under heavy siege during the battle. Coincidentally, the effect of war on the environments of these two regions is one area in which Biafra and the Niger Delta intersect in social and literary experiences. Thus, there is a convergence of Biafra and the Niger Delta in the war as the Nigerian Federal Government also resisted Biafra’s manoeuvres by carving the

regions into individual states which separated the Midwest and some other South-South oil rich areas from the Biafran enclave.

This study is affirming that environmental degradation brought about by the war in what today constitutes the South-East and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria started before the ecocide caused by oil and gas exploration. To use a war parlance, the Nigerian Civil War “softened” the space of Biafra and the Niger Delta for crude oil and gas exploration to have it easy to destroy. One can safely say that the civil war caused havoc to the environment before the foreign oil multinationals and others would come and collude with various military regimes to further decimate the environment whose ecology had been made fragile by war activities. Indeed, the civil war’s toll on the ecology happened over the land long before the politics of oil gained traction.

This essay brings together in one study of the ecology three major areas of study or subgenres of Nigerian literature. Firstly, Nigerian Civil War (also called the Biafran war) literature with focus on the human toll. Secondly, Niger Delta literature of environmental degradation where the exploitation of oil and gas has resulted in issues of negative consequence to humans such as health, destruction of economy in farming and fishing, and socio-cultural problems as of destroying the places for regatta, masquerades, and social unrests of kidnapping and armed robbery. This again focuses on the consequences for humans and no attention paid to nonhumans. Thirdly, there is the bioregional focus of this study which spatially covers the South-Eastern and the South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria. These regions as geographical spaces were the theatre of humans unleashing destruction upon nonhuman beings and inanimate structures that should otherwise make life more convenient and comfortable for them.

The kinesis of war as violence in motion is significant in understanding the toll of war on the ecology in Nigerian Civil War literature. The ecology of devastated locations such as the bioregional rainforests of the South-East and South-South of Nigeria was also a casualty of the war. Images of war-ravaged natural environments, infrastructures and physical locations pervade these narrative maps as seen in the destruction caused by military occupations and usages during the war. As the fighting troops occupy or evacuate territories along the pathways of the combat, they persistently degrade the environment. It is either they are setting up their heavy war artillery or they are planting landmines, digging trenches, defoliating forests or contaminating rivers, thereby causing irreparable harm to the ecology.

On different occasions, Festus Iyayi’s Osime in *Heroes* is appalled by the level of dirt that litters the streets, markets and other locations in the newly liberated Benin city. He concludes that “it was



terrible, absolutely loathsome and horrible, what a war could cause, what three years of fighting and killing could drive a people to” (Iyayi, 1986: 26). The prevailing conditions during war do not allow for proper disposal of corpses so that instead of burying them in designated graves, dead bodies from casualties of war are indiscriminately thrown into the river or left to decompose in open spaces such as forests thereby despoiling the natural environment. These acts violate and alter the course of nature and depict a lack of consideration for environmental ethics during war. They also cause ecological damages that could result in other consequences like displacement, scarcity, sterility, forced migration, and pollution of the natural populations of these places. This corruption of the ecology by humans during war adds another dimension to the types of casualties of war. That this toll on the ecology also damages human capacity to live a healthy and normal life in the environment attests to the shared vulnerabilities between humans and nonhumans during armed conflicts.

Again, Osime gives the reader a glimpse of how war further exacerbates humans’ abuse of their physical surroundings when he tells us that the corpses “of the Biafran soldiers, flushed out of their hiding places...had been on the streets,...at least a hundred of them, all of them stripped to their pants, and the blood still fresh, running out of their mouths and ears or chests” (1986: 23). Apart from the gory image it presents, the foregoing has the potentials of triggering an epidemic of diseases within such an environment. There is also the paradox of a celebratory liberated city being dirty instead of being neat.

The very act of war itself in a tropical vegetation means that there will be interference with the soil and the fauna and flora of the area where war is being waged. Many war narratives are replete with instances of both civilians and soldiers using nearby bushes or forests for concealment or as shield for their safety thereby bringing such locations under siege of attacks from air raids, bombardment, combing, defoliation and other violent incursions engendered by the conflict. Civilian settlements are not spared from heavy bombardment during war and one notices that during such attacks, people instinctively head for the nearest bush or forest to keep safe. Olanna and Odenigbo’s wedding ceremony was marred by an unexpected air raid which forced them and some of their guests to make for a patch of cassava farm nearby for cover (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, 2007: 202). The soldiers’ lack of concern for the damage war inflicts on the environment is depicted in Okpewho’s *The Last Duty* during the aftermath of an air raid on the city of Urhukpe by the rebel fighters. Okumagba, one of the soldiers on duty within the city in taking stock of the damage records:

One of the bombs landed about two poles away from me. It did not hit any important object – it fell on a clearing – but it dug a ditch huge enough to bury sixty people comfortably, and a mango tree some yards away from the spot was all but uprooted and now tilts dangerously (Okpewho, 1976: 200).

The tone of the character is dismissive of the huge damage the air bombardment has caused the environment. This is reminiscent of the general attitude of humans towards nonhuman matter like land and plants which they regard as “not important” objects in war time. Yet, such invasions and lack of empathy for undue interferences with the biotic community and instances of environmental modifications caused by war are typical human treatment of and responses to the nonhuman entities around them in times of armed conflicts. In some instances, writers project intangible aspects of nature such as the atmosphere as responding to the devastation of the environment during armed crisis. Okpewho’s Major Ali during one of his inspections of the post-effects of the rebel’s attack on the city observes that “the entire landscape is as cheerless as the looks on the people’s faces -sombre, retractive, bleak. There is a very mild wind, and leaves and grasses sway dully as though labouring in slumber” (1976: 101). Similarly, soldiers and civilians have been known to manipulate even the forces of nature such as the time of the day and weather conditions to their advantage during war crisis. For example, both feel safer moving from one location to another under the cover of night even as many tactical military strategies are planned and executed using the dark as shield. While the combatants are active, the land is passive and helpless to human interference or destruction of their space during such times.

As mentioned earlier, water, bridge, and the earth are important ecological features in the Nigerian civil war literature. Okri’s recollection of the war in “Laughter Beneath the Bridge” tells of three men “huddled in a pit” (1993: 5), a trench dug deep into the earth and used as shield. In that particular episode, we are told that “one of them had been shot through the teeth. Another one was punctured with gunshots and his face was so contorted it seemed he had died from too much laughing” (1993: 5). The narrator goes on to say, “The soldiers were laughing above the bridge... Above on the bridge, one of the soldiers laughed so hard he had to cough and spit at the end of it” (1993: 17). Rosemary Gray’s interpretation of the above scene is that:

Okri transports us imaginatively to consider the loss of meaning caused by the insanity of internecine warfare. The bridge becomes a simulacrum for those with the power to inflict violence. Those “beneath” the bridge are the living dead caught in the fray, together with the bloated corpses in the river below the bridge which can no longer flow because it is choked with “the swollen *corpses* that were *laughing* (Gray, 2021: 201).

In a sense, the soil and river are being polluted as the men did not die naturally but rather from war, an idea further underscored by the image of “swollen corpses” that would go on to contaminate the water as well as clog its natural flow. The act of pouring out spit is not only an unhealthy habit capable of polluting the surface spat on but also causing the spread of diseases. Okri’s narrative reinforces what Iyayi and other writers portrayed about the indiscriminate use of the soil and the rivers earlier. Trenches and bunkers dug during war time as protective spaces for humans are violations of the bowels of the earth and ways through which war alters the natural course of the ecology.

The bridge is portrayed in these war narratives as significant. In Okri’s poem above, those above are the soldiers or combatants driving their jeeps through to cross a divide. That divide represents the Anthropocene – man is on top while the nonhumans and nature are below. Water, fish and other aquatic beings are below the human. The soldiers in ravaging their human kind, blindly destroy the “Others” through their actions of cruelty. In a way, humans transfer their cruelty to one another to damage the ecology of the place. In Iyayi’s novel, the then newly constructed Niger Bridge suffers double destruction within a couple of hours. It was first blown up at the Onitsha end by the Biafran soldiers to impede the federal army from crossing over into their stronghold. Then, in order not to allow the Biafran soldiers seize them, the federal army also blew up their war weaponry, further damaging the bridge in the process. In both cases, the human casualties and debris from the vehicles, weapons and bridge end up in the river below. It is significant that human savagery is acted out to also destroy even public infrastructures. Yet ironically, as a last resort for safety, many soldiers and Osime jumped off the bridge into the river implying nature offers more protection for humans than their fellow men in times of armed conflict. These literary depictions draw attention to the irony of the same people self-destructing the vegetation, soil, waters and physical structures that used to be their sources of nurture.

Nigerian civil war writers have captured in their imaginary the relationship between humans, here the combatants and the local communities, and their environment. There are two aspects of this relationship as reflected in the literary works that depict how these affect the environment. One of them is mass evacuations of territories that are in the pathways of an advancing army to prevent the civilian population from being captured or suffer great casualties. Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* deals with evacuations. Olanna and Odenigbo are forced to hurriedly abandon their university campus accommodation at the news of the federal army’s invasion of Nsukka, the university town. When they

return after the war ends, they are appalled by the soldiers' wanton destruction of their properties and the environment. In fact, many observers believe local communities are always on the move to avoid the fighting and in the course of such mobilities, the environment could suffer more than the combatants themselves. The other related human activity during wartime is the reprisals of an army against a people or land they feel has sabotaged or made things difficult for them. The Nigerian Army was known for such reprisals as killing of animals like goats, chickens, sheep, pigs, or any animal that they could not immediately use for their meals. They also destroyed cassava and yam farms on enemy territory. By doing this, they are causing imbalance in the environment that led to hunger. Of course, the insecurity of the civil war did not allow for the sustenance of traditional occupations like farming or fishing. Iyayi laments in *Heroes* that "War changes everything, the lives of the fishermen, of the fish and of the birds. In the place of fishermen, there are soldiers, and in the place of the white sand there are the boot marks and the trenches along the banks of the river..." (1986: 79). The constant movement of armies through different fronts just as civilians seeking refuge wherever they could find shelter also unsettles the environment. There is often undue pressure on the forest or bush where these war participants hide for safety as these locations are invaded, ransacked or decimated. Such actions dislodge the nonhumans having the forests as their habitats. It is best left to the imagination how evacuations and reprisals adversely affected birds, reptiles, and other fauna and flora in the course of war as their respective habitats would have been damaged in the human (military or civilian) attempt to protect his life at the expense of the nonhuman. It is thus not surprising that the environment suffers during a civil war as the Nigerian-Biafran one.

Even cultural artefacts as significant parts of a people's cultural landscape are looted and relocated during war. In Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*, Alan, the British administrator and his friend ignored the risk involved in travelling to Okpanam in the heat of a raging war because of the above agenda. On their arrival:

word went round that all Alan Grey wanted were discarded articles of worship, all the huts, the big houses, the old public shrines dislodged their various carvings, mouldings, ancient animal ornaments which they now regarded as pagan objects. Most of them had been badly burnt or buried in the 'bad bush' with the dead, but the young boys of the village laughingly went and dug them up, wondering as they worked what the white man wanted with these discarded things (Emecheta, 1982: 135).

In the first instance, it was tragic enough that the indigenous people have been made to believe that their traditional ways and cultural

objects of worship are now agnostic and therefore best abandoned or cast aside. Yet, the foreigners who have perpetuated this narrative are the ones who have now returned during a period of great chaos to cart away “these discarded objects.” In all of this, the exploiters are either oblivious or choose to ignore the protection of cultural artefacts by law even during war.

While the poetry of the civil war, like the fiction, deals with the human casualties, the poets also touch on the ecology of the war. Even before the war started, Okigbo as foreboding in *Path of Thunder* writes “The smell of blood already floats in the lavender-mist of the afternoon / The death sentence lies in ambush along the corridors of power” (1971: 16). The allusion is to an atmosphere already tinted by the tragedy of an impending war. It shows how human excesses of power could lead to a pollution of the environment metaphorically represented by the “smell” and “lavender-mist” that ensued. This is also implicit in the irony that even though the war writers are mainly focused on the human experience or tragedy of war, they unconsciously draw attention to the condition of the ecology of the places affected by the crisis.

Soyinka has even before the war associated nature with nurture in his poems. He projects that war itself would bring discord to the symbiotic relationship between humans and nonhumans. In “Massacre, October 1966”, (*Idanre and Other Poems*) he uses the image of the acorn as food for pigs as a “devaluation of life” (Ikiddeh, 1976: 171). In “Après la Guerre” in *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, he sees the civil war as damaging the environment which provides humans with nurture when he writes:

The tuber of our common flesh, when  
trampled deep in earth embattles  
Death, new-girthed, lunges at the sun  
but lest it prove a hollowed shell  
And lest the feet of new-born lives  
Sink in voids of counterfeiting  
Do not swell earth’ broken skin  
To glaze the fissures in the drum (Soyinka, 1972: 84).

While in detention during the civil war, it was from nature that he sought solace. Humans suffer from tragedy during the war and while in enforced confinement, consolation could emanate from nature even if it is in the form of the sight of an insect. Soyinka sees the environment of fruits and other food crops as essential nutrients of humans and laments that during war, humans invariably destroys and gets disconnected from nature. The advocacy here is that a holistic post-war reconstruction should take in the human and nonhuman casualties.

Clark’s poetry collection titled *Casualties* is dedicated to his feelings and thoughts about the Nigerian Civil War. While harping on

the human casualties, he unconsciously speaks loud on the environment of nonhuman beings. He mythologizes a historical event – the civil war – by deploying nonhumans and nature as metaphors for humans. In “The Burden in Boxes,” he symbolizes Aguiyi-Ironsi, who came out as Head of State, after the 1966 coup as remotely responsible for the civil war:

*Open the boxes was the clamour  
Of monkeys above tides. Open them all!  
Cows in the plains mooded over grass. But  
Into cold storage the high priest  
Of crocodiles moved the boxes,  
Draping them in sacks muzzled at  
The neck... (Clark, 1970: 6)*

Ironsi used a crocodile-inscribed walking-stick and is apparently “the high priest / Of crocodiles.” The poet’s tone is one of admonition as he blames the rabble-rousers (“monkeys above tides”) who instigated the war because of personal and greedy interests (“cows... mooded over grass”). Clark’s deployment of terms like “monkeys”, “tides”, “cows”, “plains”, “grass”, and “crocodiles” exemplifies his impression of the interface between human and nonhuman elements in this poem on the Nigerian civil war. In one of his best poems, “The Cockerel in the Tale”, he again mythologizes the coup leaders using animal imagery to depict his take on who played the lead role:

AT THE DESERT end of a great road  
to the sea, he who woke up the lion  
and burnt down his den over his crest,  
He who the same night bagged  
a rogue elephant, not sparing his brood,  
He who in heat of that hunt  
shot in the eye a bull with horns  
They say never gored a fly, hooves  
that never trod on cocoa or groundnut farm,  
Stood,  
alone on the trembling loft of the land,  
And like the cockerel in the tale, proclaimed  
The break of day uncertain then  
Where the sun should rise.  
He lent the winds of the world  
His name, that morning he lent them forever (Clark, 1970: 8).

This poem is a parable of the nonhuman environment reflecting the human. The execution of the coup shows the opportunistic nature of some of the military officers. In “The Reign of the Crocodile,” the poet indicts “the alligator [who] is stark deaf” (1970: 9).

Clark deploys images of the tropical forest in which he was raised to express the anomalies of the coup which led to the civil war. In “What the Squirrel Said”, he bemoans the irregularities in the treatment of the different major actors which saw the persecutions of the helpless and vulnerable while leaving the dangerous ones:

THEY KILLED the lion in his den  
But left the leopard to his goats  
they killed the bull without horns  
but left the boar to his cassava  
they killed the elephant with his brood  
but left the crocodile to litter the field  
they killed a sheep who played shepherd  
but left the hyrax who was hyena (1970: 13).

Above, the mistakes of the coup were poetically put in the language of a fable reflecting the poet’s recourse to nonhuman images for depicting a war-related incident. Clark seems to be saying that the civil war that broke out in 1967 has its origins in the bad execution of the 1966 coup. This idea of engaging nonhuman metaphors in describing events during a time of chaos is further expressed in “The Locust Hunt.” This poem skirts around a perceived ethnic persecution which led a coup that appeared one-sided:

So a royal bull was slain  
With all the egrets on his hump  
So dog ate dog in a hunt  
With a scattering of the pack in the plain  
Oh, how many grasshoppers make up  
the loss of one elephant?  
How many ticks must there be  
to eat up one mastiff? (1970: 22)

The predominant image one gleans from the lines above is one of anarchy which is a common feature of war. That human actions in a time of chaos are once again described using animal or nonhuman equivalents attest to the poet’s conception of shared commonalities between both entities. To Clark and the other poets, the natural environment with its fauna and flora reflects the human kind; hence he seizes every opportunity in these poems about the civil war to deploy the nonhumans of the environment to weave a fable about human characters and actions. The nonhuman world is replete with comparisons to the human world. Ironically focusing on human errors because of greed and other foibles that caused the war, Clark is saying, perhaps unconsciously, that humans who pride themselves better than nonhumans are in fact the same. The use of copious animal images portrays that man becomes bestial in the

way war makes humans hunt and harm each other. Clark's very popular poem on the war, "The Casualties" significantly supports this study's submission for the need to acknowledge a shared vulnerability between humans and nonhuman as war victims when he declares that "We fall, / All casualties of the war" (1970: 38).

### **Conclusion**

Nigerian writers that re-imagined the historical Nigerian civil war have brought in the condition of the environment in their detailing of the human suffering and tragedy that it was. In the course of doing this, they have also left us with readings of their thoughts and feelings about the effects on the ecology or environment that were sites of the war. From the discussion of armed conflict in the novels and poems, it appears the fiction writers emphasized the physical damage done to the environment while the poets were more focused on using comparisons and fables based elements of the environment. The novelists portray disruption of the forests, rivers, and the land. The poets take from the environment tropes to describe the animal nature of humans. This study shows that delineating only the human tragedy of the civil war is an incomplete assessment of the consequences of the conflict. As the writers have shown in their respective novels, poetry, and other writings, the calamity of war spreads beyond the human to the often passive yet badly decimated ecology. As there is reconstruction after war, so should there be a restoration of the environment in order to sustain a harmonious and symbiotic relationship between humans and nonhumans.

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