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THE LANGUAGE OF TRAUMA IN KEN SARO-WIWA'S *SOZABOY*

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Acknowledgements

My exposure to the world of African literatures started in my junior year of college, when a professor and close mentor of mine, Dr. Molly Freitas, invited me to conduct an independent study of postcolonial literature with her. We read several novels, including Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, and throughout the study I realized that there was a whole corpus of texts out there that I'd never even heard of before. Part of the problem was the nature of the American education system, specifically its tendency to focus on American and British literature, but part of the problem was my own lack of awareness and ignorance of other voices.

For my senior thesis the next year, I built on my work from the independent study and focused on educational narratives in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, and Scholastique Mukasonga's *Our Lady of the Nile*. With the help of my advisor, Dr. Colleen Eils, I submitted a project I was proud of—but I knew I still had a lot to learn about the field (and a lot of reading to catch up on). I first heard about Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* from another professor of mine, Dr. Matthew Salyer, who described it as one of the finest anti-war novels ever written. I remember staying up late one night in the West Point library to finish it, and Mene's voice has stayed with me ever since. Around this time, my conversations with LTC (Ph.D.) Jeff Gibbons about trauma theory sparked an interest in the intersection between trauma and language, and got me thinking about potential future projects.

My dream to continue studying African literatures in graduate school came true when Fulbright gave me the opportunity to come to UGent to pursue an MA in African Studies. Since I've been here I've learned more than I ever imagined I would, and been exposed to ideas and perspectives from around the world. I am extremely grateful for the support of my advisor Professor Inge Brinkman—without her help and feedback this thesis would have remained a loose jumble of ideas and not a cohesive study. I would also like to thank Fulbright for giving me the opportunity to continue my studies in Belgium. Additionally, thank you to all the people who proofread my work and who were there for me throughout this process. Finally, I would not be here without the love and support of my family—thank you for everything.

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Introduction

"Although, everybody was happy at first."

The opening line of Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* emblematizes one of the most important stylistic choices an author writing a war story can make—the choice to use an impossible language to convey impossible events. The first word of the sentence, "although" is a conjunction that usually links two parts of a sentence together, most of the time a sentence that resolves in some sort of action in spite of whatever immediately follows the "although." The sentence above, however, does not resolve in any sort of action at all. Instead, it ends in a logical disconnect. There is something missing. The non-specific temporal marker "at first" creates a sense of confusion, the overt simplicity of "happy" reveals the potential shortcomings of language when it comes to representing emotion, and the noun "everybody" creates a specific kind of community defined however the narrator wants to define it. This first sentence does not tell the reader much, only that at an unspecified time, an imagined community of "everybody" felt "happy."

In fact, the most important part of this first sentence is not the words on the page, but what they imply. Without detailing whatever it is that causes everyone to presumably lose their happiness, Saro-Wiwa has crafted a line filled with a sense of foreboding and confusion. This short example provides a preview of his sustained literary experiment in *Sozaboy*, which is to convey the events of an unnamed war (which is likely the Nigeria-Biafran War) through the eyes of Mene, a young man from the small village of Dukana who becomes a "soza," or soldier, and is swept up in the violence. Saro-Wiwa's medium for representing the trauma of war is his own invention, "Rotten English." While the word "Rotten" may sound pejorative, Saro-Wiwa's Rotten English is simply "a mixture of Nigerian Pidgin English, broken English, and good, even idiomatic English" (Saro-Wiwa, Author's Note). In the first line of the novel, it sets the tone for the horrific tale that follows.

There is probably no other event in the modern history of Nigeria that has shaped literary production in the country more than the Nigeria-Biafran War. Spanning from 1967-1970, the Nigeria-Biafran War was fought between the Nigerian federal government and Igbo secessionists in the east. Following an unsuccessful Igbo-fronted military coup in 1966 that led to the deaths of several politicians from the northern part of Nigeria, Igbo people in the north were targeted and even killed as a form of retaliation (Anyanwu 48). The war began when the Igbo people under the

leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Emeka Ojukwu declared the eastern region of Nigeria an independent Biafra (Anyanwu 40). Well-known authors across generations, including Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ben Okri, and Wole Soyinka have reckoned with the political, social, and psychological ramifications of the war. Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* are somewhat prototypical accounts of the Nigeria-Biafran War. Achebe's work is a memoir that details his experience on the Biafran side of the conflict, and Adichie's is a fictionalized account that follows a large cast of characters through the horrors of war and displacement. These narratives, which largely focus on Igbo characters and people, do valuable work in shaping the narrative about Biafra and subverting the hegemonic post-war narratives of the Nigerian state. However, there is a notable silence in a large swath of the corpus of novels and memoirs on the Nigeria-Biafran War—that of Nigerians who do not belong to the three dominant ethnic groups in modern Nigeria, which are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo.

I argue that one of the most important works to come out of the Nigeria-Biafran War, and one that bridges the gap in minority discourses, is Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*. Published in Nigeria in 1985, then in Longman African Writers in 1994, *Sozaboy* follows Mene, a man from the fictional town of Dukana, as he becomes a "soza" and fights in a nameless and bloody conflict. The reader (and Mene himself) does not know exactly which side he is on, or why a war is happening in the first place. There is no mention of Biafra, Nigeria, or any ethnic group throughout Saro-Wiwa's novel, which opens the work up to larger anti-war themes divorced from specificity and outside of history. However, the novel is widely regarded as a novel of the Nigeria-Biafran War, even if it purposefully remains ambiguous. *Sozaboy* is also marked by a unique linguistic invention, which Saro-Wiwa refers to as Rotten English. By refusing to name the conflict of which he writes and creating a new language to narrate that conflict from a minority perspective, Saro-Wiwa embarks on a project that is both politically and aesthetically subversive.

This thesis offers an interpretation of Ken Saro-Wiwa's novel *Sozaboy* to argue that Saro-Wiwa's invention and implementation of Rotten English is uniquely suited to representing the trauma of the Nigeria-Biafran War from a minority perspective. Additionally, reading *Sozaboy* through trauma theory has wide-ranging implications for the field of literary trauma studies more broadly. While most scholars focus on literary representations of trauma marked by specifically modernist,

European narrative techniques, I argue that reading Saro-Wiwa's Rotten English as an alternative mode of representing trauma does important work towards decolonizing trauma theory. Furthermore, Ken Saro-Wiwa's extensive work on environmental issues facing the Ogoni people up until his execution by the Nigerian state in 1995 provides ample reason to read *Sozaboy* not only for its innovative linguistic representation of trauma, but also for the questions the novel raises about the effects of war and psychological trauma on Nigeria's ecology and landscape. In summary, I do not plan to view these two theoretical fields—trauma theory and ecocriticism, as necessarily separate. Instead, I propose a reading that combines these approaches in order to move towards an interdisciplinary, plural way of understanding Saro-Wiwa's language of trauma.

Section 1: Methodology

1.1 *Ways of Reading and the Problems of Representation*

As W. J. T. Mitchell points out in his discussion on representation in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, "representation, even purely 'aesthetic' representation of fictional persons and events, can never be completely divorced from political and ideological questions" (Mitchell 3). Indeed, ever since Aristotle distinguished between "the medium, the objects, and the manner" of a work of art in his *Poetics,* the door leading towards ideological critique has been left open (Aristotle 5). For if a writer seeks to represent the objects of his narrative, he must do so in a certain manner, which always springs from the mind of the writer and often manifests itself as style. Much of literary criticism has been dedicated to interpreting and describing "manner"—by closely studying the specific choices an author makes, the literary scholar comes closer to apprehending meaning. A crucial caveat to this enterprise is of course the argument of Wimsatt and Beardsley in "The Intentional Fallacy." As they write, "critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 487). In other words, as soon as a work exists outside of its creator and resides in a larger public space, the intention of the author "is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 468).

The crucial point here is that in this newly demarcated critical space, it is the critic who is responsible for aesthetic judgement and for ascertaining the success or failure of a work. In this conversation one must also consider Roland Barthes' contention in his seminal essay "The Death of the Author." As he posits: "Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body

writing" (Barthes 142). The act of reading is therefore something of a contradiction, as most readers readily subscribe to the notion that the author, as creator, is ultimately responsible for the meaning of their work. But Barthes replies: "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes 147). For many readers this imposed textual limit is acceptable, and preferable to being left without definitive answers entirely. However, most critics today benefit from knowledge on the author of a text, even as Barthes is correct to circumscribe the author's influence on a completed work. More recent ideas like reader-response theory in the tradition of Rosenblatt or Fish, hold that textual meaning in the case of literature is created in a transaction between author and reader—the reader is therefore responsible for meaning-making as well as the author (Mart 78). The purpose of this section is not to settle upon one theory or another, but to point out that the space of constructing literary meaning is a highly contested one. For these reasons, I argue that closer attention must be paid to the ways we read.

If the act of representation that constitutes a novel or any other kind of written work is always ideological, which I argue that it is, there is no reason why the act of reading itself cannot also be construed as ideological. Readers approach texts in different ways, because readers come from different backgrounds and histories. Much like authors or poets are often viewed as products of their time, specific cultural context, or the works that they themselves have previously read, readers should be viewed using similar criteria. Writing does not happen in a vacuum, and neither does reading. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss several different approaches towards reading literary works, and in doing so describe my own methodology.

1.2 Critical Attitudes and the Question of Genre

First, there is a trend within literary studies which I must mention to explain how my work will depart from that paradigm. With the advent of critical theories of modernity within the social and political sciences including Marxism, psychoanalysis, and postcolonialism, there has been an increasingly interdisciplinary turn in the field of literary studies. Oftentimes, critics will apply a particular "lens" to a particular work to see what sticks—in other words, to see if their methodological approach illuminates anything new or interesting. As Northrop Frye argues in his seminal work *Anatomy of Criticism*, such approaches are sometimes guilty of "substituting a critical attitude for criticism" and propose "not to find a conceptual framework for criticism within

literature, but to attach criticism to one of a miscellany of frameworks outside it" (Frye 6). In a similar vein, Frye goes on to argue that critics must "realize that criticism has a great variety of neighbors, and that the critic must enter into relations with them in any way that guarantees his own independence" (Frye 19). For example, he goes on to write "there can be no such thing as, for instance, a sociological 'approach' to literature" (Frye 19). Frye, in this work, is searching for a mode of criticism which comes out of literature itself. Given the prominence of "Marxist readings" or "Freudian readings" today long after the 1967 publication of *Anatomy of Criticism*, it is doubtful whether his goal has been realized. While I do not necessarily agree with Frye's argument, I do recognize that hastily applying fashionable theories to readings of literary texts can be dangerous. One danger of such a practice is what Frye outlines as "substituting a critical attitude for criticism" but another danger is the perversion of the text at hand in order to "fit" the theory to which the critic has subscribed (Frye 6). Furthermore, when it comes to African literature in the hands of Western critics, there is always the possibility of a misguided or incorrect application of Western critical theories in an African context. In my own project I hope to avoid these potential pitfalls not by shying away from the uses of external theories or concepts, but by staying rooted in the language of *Sozaboy*, thereby advocating for criticism on the level of the sentence and acknowledging the ways in which Saro-Wiwa's text disrupts established theories of trauma.

Another concern that usually defines a project of literary criticism is that of genre. The same is true in the case of African literatures, even though the signifier "African" does not really function as a marker of genre, but instead of region (and even so, there are reasons to doubt the validity of such a category in the first place). Given the fraught historical and linguistic relations between postcolony and metropole, the nature and status of criticism on African literatures is often contested, and identity usually plays a role in these conversations. For example, Eldred D. Jones warns against the unbridled production of literary criticism written by non-Africans on African works in his essay "Academic Problems and Critical Techniques." As he writes, "when the main critical voices are non-African there is a danger that the writers may come to emphasize the values which they think their foreign readership demands" (Jones 412). Indeed, there is oftentimes a large geographic disconnect between the people who write the work, and the people who edit, publish, and critique the work. The fact that the centers of discursive power within the literary world are often located outside Africa only reinforces Jones' warning.

Some critics seek to circumvent this problem by emphasizing different methods of reading African literature. For example, Kenneth W. Harrow in his essay "A Formal Approach to African Literature" advocates strict formalism when it comes to reading African texts. He essentially argues that because critics often ignore the chronological development of the African literary tradition, they end up "substituting cultural motivations/explanations and historical-social changes for literary choices and effects" (Harrow 422). Harrow's brand of formalism seeks to relate texts to other texts, as opposed to relating texts to the society which has produced them (Harrow 422). There are certainly merits to his approach—it is self-evident that paying attention to intertextuality is an essential part of good criticism—but I do not think that intertextual relations should necessarily be privileged over social ones.

Another critic, Christopher L. Miller, advocates an anthropological approach in his essay "Reading through Western Eyes." As he argues, "a fair Western reading of African literatures demands engagement with, and even dependence on, anthropology" (Miller 446). He continues, "no responsible Western reading of African literature can take place in the vacuum of a 'direct' and unmediated relationship with the text" (Miller 446). Miller is correct in pointing out that the "vacuum" of direct experience does not exist—one must only recall Abdul R. Janmohamed's words in his seminal essay "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" in which he argues that from the viewpoint of alterity, "thorough comprehension of Otherness is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture" (Janmohamed 18). This "bracketing" is just as impossible as Miller's "vacuum." But even as Miller acknowledges the irresponsibility of an "unmediated" reading, I think that his argument in favor of anthropology is misguided. One can imagine that Miller would not advise a French person reading Milton to ground their study in anthropology, or an Englishman reading Proust to do the same. Why, then, should Western audiences read African literatures from an anthropological standpoint? Such a view seems utterly patronizing and reinforces the harmful idea that work from Africa is somehow "exotic"—if a reader needs anthropology to understand it, it must be "exotic!" Being familiar with anthropological work is certainly not a detriment to studying African literature, but this kind of knowledge should not be viewed as a prerequisite. Furthermore, both Miller's and Harrow's wide-ranging proposals intensely flatten the extraordinarily diverse range of what "African literature" is. Any program that advocates one way

of reading anything "African" is doomed to fail because it does not appreciate the notion that African literature is not a monolith.

1.3 Mbembe, Fanon, and Quayson: An Antidote to Essentialism?

In his essay "Planetary Entanglement" which appears in *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization*, Achille Mbembe argues in favor of what he calls the "planetary library" (Mbembe 39). He sees a need for "reframing theory in the aftermath of the planetary turn of the African predicament" (Mbembe 39). In other words, since it is no longer possible to view issues on the African continent (or any other continent) from a single perspective, it is no longer feasible to view critical theory in a vacuum. As he writes: "The planetary library project rests on the assumption of the inseparability of the different archives of the world … Instead of holding them apart, it will recognize them as assets shared with all humans, nonhuman actors, and self-sustaining systems" (Mbembe 30). In other words, the planetary library is not only of everyone—it also belongs to everyone. Recall Frantz Fanon's words in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "But I am a man, and in this sense the Peloponnesian War is as much mine as the invention of the compass" (Fanon 200). Mbembe's notion of the planetary library and Fanon's notion of the collective humanist past are quite similar, and they both reveal the silliness of all the critical hand-wringing that accompanies discussions of how to read African literatures. This is not to say that critiques of Western modes of reading African literatures are unfounded or invalid—quite the opposite. Instead, Mbembe and Fanon's ideas reveal that Western methods fail if they regard African literature as something incomprehensible or completely "Other," when it simply is not. As Ato Quayson argues in his book *Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature*:

> The point is that I never read postcolonial literary tragedy or literature in general as illustrative of some exclusive enclave mentality, but rather attend to the ways in which it serves to illuminate fertile ethico-aesthetic questions and conundrums … To understand Sophocles, I tell my students, read Achebe! (303)

The kind of contrapuntal reading that Quayson mentions—looking at Achebe to understand Sophocles—is what moves the discipline forward. The fact of the matter is that there can be no particular critical apparatus or way of reading associated with African literature because the perceived alterity associated with works from Africa is socially constructed and usually contingent on reductive ideas about which works deserve to be canonized and which do not. While works

must be read with their particular contexts in mind, my argument is that there is no such thing as a definable "African context" given the diversity of culture, language, and history across the continent. In light of all these methodological arguments and counter-arguments, how should one read a novel like *Sozaboy*? My answer is simple—closely.

1.4 Close Reading

My main method for conducting this study is close reading. One of the founding thinkers who contributed to the methodological formation of close reading, I. A. Richards, writes: "All respectable poetry invites close reading. It encourages attention to its literal sense up to the point, to be detected by the reader's discretion, at which liberty can serve the aim of the poem better than fidelity to fact or strict coherence among fictions" (Richards 203). Regarding what the reader brings to the table, he "has to refrain from applying his own external standards" (Richards 203). Richards' description is fascinating because it incorporates two things—attention to the poems "literal sense" but also the "reader's discretion" (Richards 203). Close reading is therefore a fluid process that is influenced by not only what is on the page, but also what is in the reader's head. But even though Richards' work helps to lay the foundation for close reading as a methodology, it is still rather unclear what close reading is exactly.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith, in her article "What Was "Close Reading"?: A Century of Method in Literary Studies" also takes up the subject of close reading, positing that it is "not quite a methodology" (Smith 57). She continues: "The term *close reading* refers not only to an activity with regard to texts but also to a type of text itself: a technically informed, fine-grained analysis of some piece of writing, usually in connection with some broader question of interest" (Smith 58, emphasis hers). Herrnstein's definition is adequate enough, but under some scrutiny, it does not answer the question: What is the point of close reading? Jonathan Kramnick takes up a related question in his article "Criticism and Truth," asking: "Does literary criticism tell truths about the world?" (Kramnick 218). Kramnick underlines the importance of understanding what close reading is, but because any "attempt to provide a definition of close reading would likely seem inadequate or hubristic" he focuses instead on "how critics fold language they are writing about into language that is theirs" (Kramnick 221). He is right to point out that close reading is actually a "form of writing"—but this sleight-of-hand, no matter how accurate, does not get us any closer to a workable definition of close reading (Kramnick 222). Since every text (and every reader) is

different, it is impossible to ever prescribe a way of reading. My response to the lack of a workable definition of close reading is to simply remain as close as possible to the text itself, with the goal of isolating specific moments in which trauma and language intersect within the narrative. While I will look at granular choices Saro-Wiwa makes on the level of the sentence, I will also look at larger plot events as well as the role several characters play in the text.

1.5 Contextual Problems and Solutions

While there are compelling reasons to doubt any prescriptive approach to reading African literature, the question of context still remains: how exactly are we to view the relationship between a text and the societal, historical, and cultural conditions which influence that text? Contrary to what the deconstructionists would say, there is indeed something outside of the text, and that thing is undoubtedly important. In Ato Quayson's book *Calibrations: Reading for the Social*, he outlines an approach to reading which he calls "*calibrations*: a form of close reading of literature with what lies beyond it as a way of understanding structures of transformation, process, and contradiction that inform both literature and society" (Quayson xi, emphasis his). Interestingly, Quayson's method of close reading is influenced by his experience growing up in Africa. As he writes, describing the disconnect between the language of daily life and the language of education:

> This meant that we always had to go through a process of translating the language of the commonplace into the language of reason and vice versa. These multilingual negotiations led to a variety of breaches in the commonplace, in their turn making an endlessly restless process of translating linguistically hybrid social forms a necessity of everyday life. (Quayson xii)

The idea of translation for Quayson is inextricably linked with the notion of comparison: "translation to my mind involves many of the questions of commensurability, value, and the transfer of categories from one domain to the other that the comparative method assumes as essential to its procedures" (Quayson xiv). But this is not a translation between languages, but "between the literary and the social and vice versa" (Quayson xiv). The idea of the social in Quayson's work is different from "society" which is something apart from and not constituted by the text. The social, however, is embodied within the text itself and must be apprehended not as "the disclosure of an authentic cultural life but rather the embedded thematic of change, process, and contradiction" (Quayson xxxi). There is therefore no concrete link between a social situation

in a novel and a "truth" of the outside society it represents. Instead, the social should be understood as something that exists within a paradigm of multiple textually-contingent relations, specifically related to "change, process and contradiction,"—in other words, the social within a text is not an analogue for society outside the text (Quayson xxxi).

Quayson's argument in *Calibrations: Reading for the Social* is especially important when discussing a work like Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*. As Saro-Wiwa makes no mention of Biafra, Nigeria, or even different ethnic groups in his narrative, one cannot look too closely at Nigerian society or history for clues of interpretation. In other words, it is inadvisable to read Saro-Wiwa's work with Nigerian historical or social context as one's only guide. While context is certainly valuable, and I will discuss the context of the Nigeria-Biafran War later in my work, it is not the only thing that counts in a literary text. Instead of relying too much on context, one should, in the spirit of Quayson's work, read for the social within *Sozaboy*. This implies paying close attention to the processes of change and transformation which constitute Saro-Wiwa's narrative, without tying these processes to a specific historical moment, and instead looking at how his novel represents and interacts with the social without markers of ethnicity or nationality. One should not read *Sozaboy* in the hopes of gleaning insight into the real events of the Nigeria-Biafran War, because for all intents and purposes, *Sozaboy* does not represent those specific historical events. Instead, one must read for the social processes of change, transformation, and contradiction embedded in the text in the spirit of translating between the textual and the real.

1.6 Secondary Literature

In approaching Saro-Wiwa's text it will be necessary to draw upon secondary literature. These include not only articles written on the novel which appear in academic journals, but also canonical theoretical works. Several important articles on *Sozaboy* were published in *Research in African Literatures* volume 48, issue number four, which loosely focused on Saro-Wiwa as a public intellectual. These include Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham's work on neoliberalism in *Sozaboy*, Matthew Lecznar's work on structuring the Biafran War canon, Brendon Nicholls' interesting take on the environment and autonomous partial objects in *Sozaboy*, and Alexander Fyfe's work on the status of the land in Saro-Wiwa's larger body of work. Other works which I will reference refer more broadly to Nigerian literature, such as Jennifer Wenzel's "Petro-magic-realism: toward a political ecology of Nigerian literature," John C. Hawley's "Biafra as Heritage

and Symbol: Adichie, Mbachu, and Iweala," and Eleni Coundouriotis' book chapter on history-making in the novels of the Nigeria-Biafran War. When it comes to the construction of Rotten English more specifically, there is a large body of work which I will reference. These will include Chantal Zabus' book on the indigenization of literary English/French in West Africa *The African Palimpsest,* Ismail Talib's book *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures: An Introduction*, Moradewun Adejunmobi's *Vernacular Palaver*, Michael North's seminal article on the politics of Rotten English, and several other articles focusing on dynamics of orality within Rotten English. Given that there has not been much scholarship done on the intersection of trauma and language in *Sozaboy*, except for Chijioke Uwasomba's "War, violence and language in Ken Saro-Wiwa's Sozaboy," I will turn towards some canonical work on trauma theory as well as recent texts on trauma and postcoloniality. These canonical texts will include Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, as well as some more recent works including Stef Craps' *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*.

1.7 A Note on Terminology and Author's Reflexivity

Throughout this paper I will use "Nigeria-Biafran War" to refer to the events of 1967-1970. I will not use "Nigerian Civil War," because to do so would be to reinforce the hegemonic narrative of the Nigerian state, which propagates the notion that the war was fought in the name of national unity (Onuoha 4). The idea of Biafra still lives on in the memory of the Igbo people, even though it has been purged from official documents and records. Furthermore, I will capitalize "Rotten English" in order to reinforce the idea that it is Saro-Wiwa's own textual invention. While it certainly has many similarities to Nigerian Pidgin English, which I will discuss later, I argue (in line with Saro-Wiwa's own statements) that it is a unique mixture of linguistic modes which in turn creates a unique literary aesthetic.

In terms of my own position as the author, while I use the first-person in many parts of my thesis I have attempted to remain as objective as possible throughout my analysis. However, as many literary scholars would agree, the act of criticism and "close reading" is anything but objective. I am subconsciously influenced by the books I've read before, but my readings are also influenced by my upbringing, culture, and outlook on the world. I am not Nigerian, and I do not have any direct experience of Nigerian culture, politics, or languages. Additionally, I realize that from a

certain point of view, the attempt to apply largely Western theories of trauma to a Nigerian novel is a kind of misguided intellectual colonization. The fact that I have no scholarly background in Nigerian Pidgin English is another drawback of this study. One of my strategies for countering the overwhelming influence of Western critics and theorists in this work is to incorporate the work of African scholars as well, including Anyanwu, Obi, Adejunmobi, Mbembe, and many others. While African literatures cannot be the provenance of African scholars exclusively, any analysis of African literatures should strive to include a diverse range of secondary sources, especially ones from the African continent. Through my use of secondary literature, I hope to establish a plurality of voices on Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*, and compensate for my own lack of knowledge on certain subjects. Finally, the goal of this thesis is not only to apply a fresh perspective to Saro-Wiwa's work, but to center *Sozaboy* in the Nigeria-Biafran canon and encourage new critical debates on what I believe to be an extremely important aesthetic and political achievement.

Section 2: Theoretical Backgrounds

2.1 Literary Trauma Theory

The purpose of this section is to give a brief theoretical outline of literary trauma theory, and to outline some of the current debates within the field. In my fifth section, "Trauma and Representation," I will more closely discuss definitions of trauma as they relate to *Sozaboy*. To explain the long and often convoluted itinerary of literary trauma theory, I will trace the iterations of one particular story: the story of Tancred and Clorinda. In the third chapter of Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he elaborates on the repetition compulsion, citing Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. Tancred, the hero of Tasso's romantic epic, has mistakenly killed his love Clorinda in battle. After traveling with his army to a mysterious enchanted forest, he "smites a tall tree with his sword, but blood gushes from the wound, and the voice of Clorinda, whose spirit has magically entered into that very tree, accuses him of yet again doing harm to his beloved" (Freud 61). For Freud, this is a poetic manifestation of the compulsion to repeat, or act out, traumatic events which belong to the past. This example within his essay functions quite differently from much of his other evidence for the repetition compulsion, as it does not have the clinical objectiveness of the child's fort-da game in the earlier chapter, nor the real-world implications of war-induced traumatic neurosis. It is a literary example, which Freud describes as the "most moving poetical depiction of such a predisposition to fate" (Freud 60). The fact that Freud

includes this example from literature and understands its poetic resonance and utility for the study of the repetition compulsion creates the possibility for a literary theory of trauma.

One of the most important thinkers in the field of literary trauma studies is undoubtedly Cathy Caruth. In her seminal 1996 work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, which some regard as the founding text of literary trauma studies, Caruth reiterates Freud's discussion of Tancred and Clorinda. She calls attention not to the original event, but instead to the voice coming out of the wounded tree: "Tancred's story thus represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent's repeated and unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound" (Caruth 2). This idea of trauma as an impossible speaking wound reinforces Caruth's contention that trauma is something that is unrepresentable, at least through conventional narrative modes. In her introduction to the 1995 anthology *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, she argues: "It is the fundamental dislocation implied by all traumatic experience that is both its testimony to the event and to the impossibility of its direct access" (Caruth 9). Trauma is something that is dislocated, deferred, or otherwise hidden away from language as a tool of explication. Indeed, the notion of explicable trauma is incompatible with much of the orthodox thinking on the subject—one must only recall Adorno's paradigmatic exhortation in his essay "Cultural Criticism and Society": "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34). Caruth's iteration of the story of Tancred and Clorinda thereby focuses not on trauma itself but representations of trauma, or its un-representability, which is a key turn in the field.

Before moving on to Stef Craps' concerns with the story of Tancred and Clorinda in his work *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*, it is important to mention a few critiques of Caruth's work. First, Ruth Leys' critique of Caruth's work in her book *Trauma: A Genealogy* takes up an entire chapter, which underscores Caruth's impact on the field of literary trauma theory. Leys has many issues when it comes to Caruth's general project in *Unclaimed Experience*, but here I will only deal with the critique directed at Caruth's reading of Tancred and Clorinda. She takes Caruth to task for portraying Tancred as the victim of the story, even though he literally murders Clorinda: "In short, Tancred is a murderer, albeit an involuntary one, and Clorinda is his victim twice over" (Leys 295). Furthermore, Leys has an issue with Caruth's portrayal of Clorinda as a witness to Tancred's traumatic experience, and her suggestion that the voice that emanates

from the tree is not exactly Clorinda's but the "voice of the traumatized Tancred's dissociated second self or female 'other'" (Leys 295, emphasis removed). While Leys is correct that Caruth sometimes plays fast and loose with the original text in order to make "victimhood unlocatable in any particular person or place, thereby permitting it to migrate or spread contagiously to others," Leys ignores the fact that victims and perpetrators can both be traumatized (Leys 296). A more recent voice problematizing Caruth's work is Joshua Pederson, who in his 2014 article "Speak, Trauma: Toward a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory" argues that as scientific studies on trauma advance, so too should literary trauma theory. He cites specifically the work of Richard McNally, a researcher in Harvard University's Department of Psychology, who points out that Bessel van der Kolk's theory of traumatic amnesia is unsupported by empirical data (Pederson 337). This theory factors heavily into Caruth's work, so McNally's critique of van der Kolk "undermines the two most crucial tenets of Caruth's literary theory of trauma: the notion that traumatic memories are "unregistered" or "unclaimed," and the idea that traumatic memories elude straightforward verbal representation" (Pederson 336). Pederson's main point, that literary trauma theory must keep up with studies in the psychological sciences, is a valuable one. Perhaps it is time for a more "empirical" turn within literary trauma studies, or at least time to rely less upon orthodox assumptions within trauma theory. This sentiment is somewhat echoed by Michelle Balaev in her article "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" in which she notes that "a discursive dependence upon a single psychological theory of trauma produces a homogeneous interpretation of the diverse representations in the trauma novel and the interplay that occurs between language, experience, memory, and place" (Balaev 149). Another critique of literary trauma theory, though not specifically leveled at Caruth, is Alan Gibbs' argument in *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives* that trauma's "creeping ubiquity as a critical paradigm eventually becomes limiting" (Gibbs 1). Gibbs takes issue with what he calls the "trauma genre," which is a "self-reinforcing circuit of fictional and non-fictional prose narratives that existed in tandem with a supporting critical structure" (Gibbs 2). In other words, critics of trauma narratives are more likely to support works which conform to their own ideas of how trauma should be represented, which creates a kind of echo chamber.

To reiterate, the main point of Caruth's work for me has to do with the difficulties of representing of trauma. Corollary to the idea of trauma as something that is unrepresentable through "conventional" narrative modes is the proclivity for literary scholars in the field of trauma studies

to work on modernist texts that through stylistic ruptures convey traumatic events. As the many critiques of Caruth's work imply, there is a need to disrupt established tenets of trauma theory, and a need to turn away from European modernist strategies as the only acceptable way to represent trauma. One of the scholars seeking to problematize the orthodox assumptions of literary trauma theory is Stef Craps, who in his work *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* reckons with trauma theory's failed "promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement" (Craps 2). The problems that Craps sees with trauma theory include: the lack of attention paid to cultures outside of the West, the reliance upon Western hegemonic definitions of trauma, the fixation upon a modernist aesthetic for representing trauma, and finally the unwillingness to acknowledge the connections between Western and non-Western traumas (Craps 2). Furthermore, he brings up more concerns with the example of Tancred and Clorinda: "Given that this episode concerns the killing of an Ethiopian woman by a European crusader, an orientalist dimension which Caruth does not acknowledge, her reading of this tale can be seen to illustrate the difficulty of trauma theory to recognize the experience of the non-Western other" (Craps 15). This turn towards the cultural implications of trauma is one that neither Freud, Caruth, nor Leys make in their studies. Problematizing the ways in which non-Western traumas are discussed in Western criticism is a worthy project, and Craps' work is an important step in that direction.

When it comes to closer analysis of trauma in narrative texts, Mieke Bal's work in her book *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* is also important. In her discussion on focalization and memory, she writes: "Traumatic events disrupt the capacity to comprehend and experience them at the time of their occurrence … The incapability that paralyses the traumatized person can be situated on both story and text levels" (Bal 169). It is therefore difficult to trust a traumatized focalizer to accurately convey the events he or she has experienced. As the character of Mene in *Sozaboy* is both narrator and focalizer, one must be aware of the numerous ways in which his narrative could be destabilized by the trauma he experiences. However, while the "incapability" which Bal refers to certainly affects Mene's focalization and narration at some points in the text, the majority of *Sozaboy* is presented in a clear-eyed, sober way because Mene seems to be recounting his story from a time after the conclusion of the war. The fact remains that Mene sees and speaks the events of *Sozaboy*, and it is important to acknowledge his position as both narrator and focalizer. Through tracing the itinerary of the Tancred and Clorinda story, and paying special attention to Caruth's influence, it becomes clear that there is a need to broaden the

scope of literary trauma studies to look at works that do not represent trauma in the "accepted" way. I argue that Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* is one of these works, but the aim of this work is not to add Saro-Wiwa's novel to any kind of "trauma canon." Instead, my aim is to call attention to Rotten English as an innovative way of representing trauma, and one that has been overlooked in most major works on trauma and language.

2.2 Interdisciplinary Perspectives

While trauma theory will be the main critical apparatus which I will use in my study of Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*, it will not be the only theory which I will incorporate. To discuss the circumstances under which *Sozaboy* was written, it will be necessary to discuss theories of discourse and the writing of history. In a similar sense, when discussing the intricacies of Rotten English it will be necessary to incorporate work that has been done on orality in African literatures, as well as ideas on vernacular and the ways in which linguistic experimentation can be a political project. In my last chapter, I will also draw upon ecocritical theory to explain how the land functions in *Sozaboy,* and specifically how trauma theory must not ignore ecological concerns.

In the chapters that follow, I will focus specifically on the dynamics of language, trauma, and representation in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*. To reiterate, I do not seek to establish *Sozaboy* as a "trauma novel" or anything of the sort. Instead, I will closely examine Rotten English and its utility within Saro-Wiwa's narrative for representing traumatic events. The linguistic project of Rotten English has thus far not been examined in its relation to theories of trauma and language—specifically, it calls into question the idea that modernist textual strategies and the "fracturing" of a text are the only acceptable ways to represent trauma.

My first chapter will focus on Ken Saro-Wiwa's contribution to the canon of works related to the Nigeria-Biafran War, and his discursive position in relation to other Nigerian authors—I will also read for the "social" in Saro-Wiwa's work, drawing on Ato Quayson's method of calibrated reading. Next, I will discuss the political aspects of Rotten English in *Sozaboy*. Later chapters will deal with trauma and representation in Sozaboy, including a reading of the character of Manmuswak from the perspective of perpetrator trauma, and a reading of Mene from the perspective of traumatic embodiment. Finally, I will give a brief overview of ecocritical theories

of literature, and propose another iteration of the Tancred and Clorinda story. This time, I will focus on the function of the wounded tree in the narrative in order to explain the role of the land in *Sozaboy* from an ecocritical perspective, and to bring together ecocritical readings of literature with the lessons of trauma theory—a topic which is gaining traction in recent critical debates.

Section 3: The Canon, Language, and Power

3.1 Sozaboy and the Nigeria-Biafran War Canon

Sozaboy is one of many novels that are located in a canon of works about the Nigeria-Biafran War, so it will be necessary to locate Saro-Wiwa's novel in a discursive continuum before proceeding with further analysis. I will focus here only upon literary discourse, even though there is important work to be done in explicating the relationship between novels of the war and public, state narratives of the war. In her book *The People's Right to the Novel: War Fiction in the Postcolony*, Eleni Coundouriotis dedicates an entire chapter to novels of the Nigeria-Biafran War. In her study, Coundouriotis places the number of works on the Nigeria-Biafran War at around twenty-nine novels, not including works of poetry, drama, or autobiography (Coundouriotis 98). She mainly focuses in this chapter on laying the groundwork for her later analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and how that novel was influenced by the work of Flora Nwapa and Buchi Echemeta. Moreover, she loosely divides some of the remaining Nigerian authors into three groups, looking at "the story of the war … both in its canonical expression in such figures as Achebe and Soyinka … and its popular expression in Ekwensi, Iroh, and Ike. The discussions of Iyayi and Saro-Wiwa add important dissenting voices to this complex picture" (Coundouriotis 100).

Right from the start, it is clear that Saro-Wiwa is on the periphery of Coundouriotis' canon. He is not in the canonical nor the popular groupings, instead he is only "dissenting." Furthermore, it is also clear that Saro-Wiwa's novel does not quite belong in two of Coundouriotis' broad-ranging arguments—first that through their works, these writers desire to see in the war's conclusion a "renewal for the promise of the nation," and second that these works exhibit "a tone of moral seriousness" (Coundouriotis 104). It is difficult to see in the conclusion of *Sozaboy* any "renewal for the promise of the nation," as Mene's story concludes with one final warning to the reader: "But now if anybody say anything about war or even fight, I will just run and run and run and run and run. Believe me yours sincerely" (Saro-Wiwa 181). Mene's world and his narration are void

of any lofty aspirations towards restoring the nation, and moreover, the tone of the novel is not exactly morally serious even if the events Saro-Wiwa portrays are. While the subject matter and underlying message of Saro-Wiwa's work is certainly serious in a moral sense, the tone of Mene's narration is confused and at times despairing. It would also be difficult to construe the tone of *Sozaboy* as morally serious because there is nothing resembling a moral framework in the novel—neither side of the conflict is justified, and Mene navigates areas of moral ambivalence throughout his journey.

Scholars like Coundouriotis have a significant role in creating and sustaining the literary canon (any literary canon, no matter how its boundaries are marked). For this reason, it is important to reinforce the idea that canon-making may start as a quest to catalog and describe a collection of literary works, but it nearly always ends up having political implications. This is where Coundouriotis' analysis falters. As she writes towards the end of her chapter: "One might ask, how come the novels of the Biafra war, mostly written by the defeated party, become mainstays of the national literature? It is their class politics, and not ethnicity, that resonates" (Coundouriotis 151). The issue I see here is that it is quite difficult to view Igbo narratives of the war, like Achebe's autobiographical *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* or even Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* as "resonating" from a pure "class politics" perspective. After all, the Nigeria-Biafran War was not a class war, it was instead a conflict divided for the most part along ethnic lines. Achebe's work especially is infused with Biafran nationalism, and his Igbo identity is undoubtedly a central component of that nationalism. Trying to make the point that Igbo writers tell stories about Biafra so that they resonate along the lines of class and not ethnicity is misguided. This is not to say that class is not an important factor in the literature, as Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* pays special attention to class in a way that is quite compelling—instead, I argue that Coundouriotis' blindness to the importance of ethnicity in the conclusion to her chapter reinforces the false notion that the main organizing principle for these works is class and not ethnicity. Her point is especially problematic when discussing a work like *Sozaboy*, as the novel is influenced by Saro-Wiwa's status as a member of the Ogoni ethnicity, a minority group in Nigeria.

While Saro-Wiwa's work is mentioned only on the periphery of Coundouriotis' canon, it is absent entirely from the canon that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describes in her essay "African

'Authenticity' and the Biafran Experience." One of the key moments in her essay is when she reads *Things Fall Apart*, a novel which helped her "see my African world as a worthy subject of literature" (Adichie 42). However, she recognizes when she comes to America that perhaps some of the stereotypes of Africa that her classmates subscribe to were influenced by the fact that they read *Things Fall Apart* in high school and had no other experience learning about Africa beyond that. Adichie then recalls the remarks of a Johns Hopkins professor on her first novel *Purple Hibiscus*: the professor informed her that it was not "authentically African" because her novel included Africans who were not poor and starving (Adichie 48). This conversation on the nature of authenticity continues throughout the essay, and Adichie outlines her project of writing *Half of a Yellow Sun* as follows: "I was aware that the book would in the end reflect my world view—it would be a book concerned with the ordinary person, a book with unapologetic Biafran sympathies, but also a book that would absolutely refuse to romanticize the war" (Adichie 50). The two main works she cites as influential in her essay are Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died* and Chinua Achebe's story collection *Girls at War.* As Matthew Lecznar points out in his essay "We all stand before history: (Re)Locating Saro-Wiwa in the Biafran War Canon," Adichie's exclusion of Saro-Wiwa continues in the actual text of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. At the end of her novel, Adichie includes a large reading list of works on the Biafran War, which includes writers like Chukwuemeka Ike, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, and Flora Nwapa. However, this list does not include Saro-Wiwa.

Lecznar posits that Saro-Wiwa's absence from Adichie's list might be due to the "form and narrative content" of *Sozaboy* (Lecznar 24). He goes on to point out that "the critical reception of *Sozaboy* has tended to neglect its position in the Biafran literary canon" (Lecznar 25). This could be because, as many critics have pointed out, the Nigeria-Biafran War is not mentioned by name in Saro-Wiwa's novel—and it could also be due to its "form and narrative content," specifically its "distinct 'rotten' style" as Lecznar writes, but I think that it has to do more with the politics of the text itself (Lecznar 24). To make this point, I must first explain how post-war discourses are organized within the Nigerian state itself, drawing upon Godwin Onuoha's article "Shared Histories, Divided Memories: Mediating and Navigating the Tensions in Nigeria-Biafra War Discourses." As Onuoha writes:

> The official and hegemonic historical narratives advanced by the state posit that the war was a "war of national unity," but Igbo people still perceive the war as a war of Igbo national liberation, and some ethnic groups relate to it in terms of the massacres and atrocities committed by the federal troops and secessionist republic in their communities, and continue to claim that their accounts have not been accommodated in official narratives. (Onuoha 4)

The discursive hierarchy within the Nigerian state can therefore be described as follows: the hegemonic state narrative is at the top, with the Igbo narratives below it, and the scattered testimonies of minority ethnic groups at the bottom. However, the discursive organization of the novels written on the Nigeria-Biafran War looks a bit different. As Wendy Griswold explains in her extremely comprehensive book *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria*: "The war genre constitutes over 5 percent of Nigeria's novels published since the war. Of the twenty-nine novels, three-quarters are by Igbo authors" (Griswold 229). She later points out that even as Igbo authors are overrepresented in Nigeria, the "writers of the war novels are even more disproportionately Igbo. Of the twenty-nine novels in the genre, we know the authors' ethnicity for twenty-six; twenty-two (85 percent) are Igbo" (Griswold 235). Igbo authors are clearly at the top of this discursive hierarchy, and minority writers like Saro-Wiwa are relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy once again. Quite tellingly, Griswold mentions Saro-Wiwa's Ogoni identity when she writes of his environmental activism, but not when she describes his novel *Sozaboy*, even though his status as a member of a minority group arguably influences the uninhibited critical nature of his work. Given that *Sozaboy* and the work of other minority writers are often marginalized within the Nigeria-Biafran War canon, it is not surprising that his work is absent from Adichie's list. According to Hugh Hodges in his article "Writing Biafra: Adichie, Emecheta and the Dilemmas of Biafran War Fiction," this is not necessarily a problem in and of itself. He calls Adichie's list of works a "fairly representative collection" and goes on to note that "it might also seem odd that all of the novels Adichie cites are by Igbo writers. However, the fact is that Biafran War fiction has been a largely Igbo tradition" (Hodges 1-2). Hodges' easy dismissal of anything problematic about this list signals that among most scholars, the dominant Igbo voices on the war are easily accepted.

Adichie as a writer is obviously free to be influenced by whoever she chooses. But my issue with Saro-Wiwa's conspicuous absence here is related to one of Adichie's main ideas in her aforementioned essay, as well as much of her other work, including her 2009 TED talk, "The

danger of a single story." Adichie is right to point out the danger of a "single story" when it comes to Africa, as oftentimes the perceptions of Western audiences are influenced by the repetitive and sensationalized news stories of poverty and conflict, or the one African novel that they have read (usually *Things Fall Apart*). But the same is true when it comes to narratives of the Nigeria-Biafran War. Works by Igbo writers like Adichie and Achebe dominate the corpus of literature on the Nigeria-Biafran War—and while some of these works certainly "refuse to romanticize the war," they oftentimes stop short of directly criticizing both sides of the war. Biafran sympathies do not change the aesthetic quality or importance of works like *Half of a Yellow Sun* or Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, but I think it is fair to say that when the literary market and therefore much of post-conflict discourse is centered on pro-Biafra novels, there is a need to carve out a space in the canon for more openly critical works like Saro-Wiwa's. Just as *Things Fall Apart* should not be taken to represent all of African literature, *Half of a Yellow Sun* should not be the definitive fictional account of the Nigeria-Biafran War. Restructuring the literary canon of the Nigeria-Biafran War to center the work of minority writers like Saro-Wiwa is undoubtedly a vital step towards mitigating the domination of post-war discourse by Igbo writers.

3.2 Reading for the Social in Sozaboy

As previously mentioned, perhaps one of the reasons for *Sozaboy*'s uneasy position in the Biafran war canon is the fact that throughout the novel, neither Biafra, Nigeria, nor any ethnic groups are mentioned. While it is widely accepted that the work does take place in Nigeria, (Pitakwa, or Port Harcourt, is one of the novel's many settings), it is slightly difficult to unequivocally categorize *Sozaboy* as a novel of the Nigeria-Biafran War. However, I would like to foreground Oyekan Owomoyela's observation in "The Literary and Cultural Context of West African Literature in English" that "modern African literatures began as a dialogue with history" (Owomoyela 9). *Sozaboy* is no different—even if it is not explicitly a novel of the Nigeria-Biafran War, it is still in a dialogue with history. In this brief section, I will return to Ato Quayson's work in *Calibrations*: *Reading for the Social* in order to explain the usefulness of calibrated reading for apprehending a work such as *Sozaboy* given its ambiguity.

Quayson's ideas in *Calibrations* are necessary here because it would be a mistake to blindly read the characters and events in *Sozaboy* in a 1:1 relationship with actual society. For example, while Saro-Wiwa may purport to tell wider truths about human nature, the impacts of war, and

interpersonal relations in a time of conflict, one cannot read *Sozaboy* for insight into the Nigeria-Biafran War specifically, or regard the people in the text as "real" people. This would be different in a more straightforwardly historical novel based on factual events, or a novel that includes historical figures as characters. However, even if we were to discuss that kind of novel, (*Half of a Yellow Sun* comes to mind), the same general point that literature does not directly reflect society would remain true. As Quayson writes, "any concrete social situation described in the literary text is to be grasped primarily as a problem or enigma whose purpose is not (solely) the disclosure of an authentic cultural life but rather the embedded thematic of change, process, and contradiction" (xxxi). However, the literary and the social are indeed "related to each other because they mutually mirror systemic heterogeneities that manifest themselves as constellated and reconstellating thresholds" (Quayson xxxi). The task of the reader is therefore not to conduct a scavenger hunt through the text for "real events" but to pay close attention to the ways in which the text represents "change, process and contradiction" (Quayson xxxi). This differs from the layman's understanding of the literary scholar as a person who embarks upon an expedition into a text and returns with "truths."

Instead of looking for the impossible, nonexistent kernel at the heart of the text, Quayson writes that we should "translate that pursuit into a quest for the contradictory intermeshing of various vectors that constitute the literary artifact" (Quayson xx). The two vectors in *Sozaboy* which interact most clearly, and which are most salient to my analysis are first, the community-building project of Rotten English, and second, the text's treatment of trauma and war. Both of these vectors are processual, unstable, and contradictory within *Sozaboy*, but they are themes which bring together the literary and the social—I identify them here to reinforce the idea that my project is not one of truth-finding, but of explicating several textual contingencies. I will spend the next sub-section discussing the politics of Rotten English, and I will return to the text's treatment of trauma and war in a following section on trauma and representation in *Sozaboy*.

Section 4: The Politics of Rotten English

In this section, I will give a brief overview of the debate regarding the language of African literatures, describe Saro-Wiwa's intervention in that debate, and explain how his literary invention, Rotten English, creates a new liminal space for artistic expression and community-building. The debate over the linguistic choices one makes as an African writer has been intensely

polarized ever since the 1960's, with some of the most well-known authors and critics from the African continent taking different positions. For example, as the Nigerian critic Obiajunwa Wali writes in his 1963 article "The Dead End of African Literature," "the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing, is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture" (Wali 282). Wali takes issue with the notion that African literature is "merely a minor appendage" when located in the main body of European literature (Wali 282). He argues that until African writers start writing in African languages, their project is doomed to "sterility, uncreativity, and frustration" (Wali 282).

Only a few years later in 1965, Chinua Achebe argued against Wali's position in his essay "English and the African Writer," writing "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (Achebe 349). Another salient point Achebe makes is a political one: "The only reason why we can even talk about African unity is that when we get together we have a manageable number of languages with which to communicate" (Achebe 344). However, who exactly is the "we" that Achebe refers to? It certainly does not include Africans who do not speak any European languages, which is a key group that the Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes in his seminal work "The Language of African Literature" which appears in the book *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. As Thiong'o writes: "African literature can only be written in African languages, that is, the languages of the African peasantry and working class, the major alliance of classes in each of our nationalities and the agency for the coming inevitable revolutionary break with neo-colonialism" (Thiong'o 27). The choice of the language that one writes in, for Thiong'o, is ultimately a political one.

However, Ken Saro-Wiwa's thoughts in "The Language of African Literature: A Writer's Testimony" problematize a few of Thiong'o's arguments. One example is concerning the use of English as a medium of instruction in schools. As Thiong'o recalls, after the state of emergency was declared in Kenya, English became the language of his education, and "one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gĩkũyũ in the vicinity of the school" (11). If a student was caught speaking Gĩkũyũ, they were punished either with a beating or made to carry a humiliating sign around their neck (Thiong'o 11). Furthermore, students were encouraged to turn

each other in, which created an atmosphere of mistrust and taught them “the lucrative value of being a traitor to one’s immediate community” (Thiong’o 11). Anyone who reads this passage is certainly discouraged from arguing that the imposition of English in schools was a positive development. Saro-Wiwa, discussing a similar policy in the Nigerian context, writes “there was a regulation forbidding the use of any of our mother-tongues at work or during recreation. This rule ensured that boys like myself did not feel lost in the school because we could not communicate with any other boy in our mother-tongues” (153). Saro-Wiwa was the only Khana-speaking member of the minority Ogoni ethnicity at his school, and the pro-English policy meant that he was able to communicate with everyone else. While the colonial contexts in Kenya and Nigeria were quite different, and Thiong’o is right to regard the treatment of students at his school as deplorable, the point Saro-Wiwa brings up regarding the status of minority groups is an important one. As he goes on to directly address Thiong’o’s decision to write in Gĩkũyũ: “I also wonder if he has thought or cares about the implications of his decision for the minority ethnic groups in Kenya and for the future of Kenya as a multi-ethnic nation or, indeed, as a nation at all” (Saro-Wiwa 156).

One of the central concerns Saro-Wiwa has when it comes to the question of language is the idea of a kind of African colonialism. He explains, “Africans have practiced colonialism as much as Europeans … The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo have inflicted on three hundred other ethnic groups a rule that is most onerous” (Saro-Wiwa 156). Consequently, he concludes: “Were I, as an Ogoni, forced to speak or write any of these languages (as is presently proposed), I would rebel against the idea and encourage everyone else to do the same (Saro-Wiwa 156). For Saro-Wiwa, the imposition of an African language on a minority group is comparable to the imposition of a European language. What’s more, writing in English is a way for Saro-Wiwa to reach a much larger audience than he would if he wrote in Khana, and furthermore, it is not necessarily incompatible with his Ogoni identity (Saro-Wiwa 156). By emphasizing the specific situation of minority writers in Africa, Saro-Wiwa adds important nuance to the debate on the language of African literature.

4.1 Linguistic and Cultural Intersections

Furthermore, the insights of scholars such as Ismail Talib, Chantal Zabus, and Moradewun Adejunmobi will prove valuable in this discussion of the language of *Sozaboy*—and will also

illuminate productive areas for future research. Talib's book *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures* mentions Saro-Wiwa's work only briefly, and offers a somewhat superficial explanation of how language functions in the text. He cites *Sozaboy* as a work "written entirely in creole or pidgin" and proceeds to discuss an excerpt which includes the words "commot" and "porson" (Talib 111). His point is that these words "are spelt in such a way in order to imitate the pronunciation in the variety of Nigerian Pidgin which the novel attempts to represent" (Talib 112). His assertion that *Sozaboy* is written entirely in pidgin is misleading, as Rotten English incorporates some words and grammatical structures from Nigerian Pidgin rather than being written entirely in that language. While his point about "porson" and "commot" seems valid, it remains a rather cursory glance at Saro-Wiwa's linguistic experiment, which reinforces the need for a closer look at *Sozaboy* from a perspective that focuses on language as an object of analysis. To continue, Chantal Zabus' study of pidginization and multilingual strategies in the third chapter of her work *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* makes an essential point regarding language and culture. As she writes:

> Although this study focuses on the analysis of *langue* as language-as-system, it is important to bear in mind that 'culture' informs language, which reflexively creates and sustains it. Thus the conscious lack of linguistic differentiation in early europhone literature affirmed the primacy of the European target-language … The creative representation of pidgin English West African novels constitutes a breach with that homogeneity, for it introduces the pidginized *variant* which, in marking the need for communication in the absence of a shared tongue, is the quintessential sign of life. (Zabus 52, emphasis hers)

Zabus' contention that the pidginized variant marks "the need for communication in the absence of a shared tongue" prefigures Michael North's argument about the politics of Rotten English, which I will discuss in the following section (Zabus 52). Additionally, the breach with homogeneity which Zabus mentions happens on two levels in *Sozaboy*—by incorporating elements from Nigerian Pidgin, Saro-Wiwa's novel breaks with other works written in standard English, but by sustaining Rotten English throughout the entire text, he also breaks with novels that incorporate pidgin only in dialogue, for example. Furthermore, later in Zabus' book she notes that Saro-Wiwa "conveys only the 'feel' of NP by retaining some of its signal features such as the reduplication of the adjective for emphasis and the non-inverted question" (Zabus 197). However, she also observes that sometimes "Saro-Wiwa delves into the deep structure of NP" causing unfamiliar readers to wrongly read phrases like "simple defence," which means "civil defence"

(Zabus 197). Saro-Wiwa's project is fascinating because it varies in complexity but is aesthetically consistent. I would also argue that Rotten English is distinct from the kind of pidgin-inflected language in works like Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, which implies that even other works which sustain some kind of pidgin throughout the entire body of the text differ from each other in significant ways.

Moradewun Adejunmobi makes a similar point to Zabus in her work *Vernacular Palaver: Imaginations of the Local and Non-native Languages in West Africa* when she explains that "associations which emerge out of networks where communication occurs in … languages of wider communication, will frequently tend to develop a different kind of understanding of the connection between the practice of belonging to a community and the idea of the local" (Adejunmobi 167). Even though Adejunmobi's argument refers mainly to spoken language rather than language in a literary context, it still illuminates an essential part of Rotten English, which is its potential for community-building (a point which is echoed by Zabus and North). Rotten English reformulates what it means to be a part of a community, which is one of the reasons Saro-Wiwa's work deserves further study. Emily Apter brings up a valuable point regarding *Sozaboy* in her article "War and Speech." As she argues, Saro-Wiwa's works "provide an opportunity to assess the apparent anomaly of a majority tongue becoming the vehicle of expression for a micro-minority linguistic group" (Apter 141). Saro-Wiwa's own words in his aforementioned "The Language of African Literature: A Writer's Testimony" answer Apter's point about that anomaly, but her argument still underlines the unique nature of *Sozaboy* as a text written by a micro-minority author.

4.2 Orality and Community-Building

Another aspect of language which is germane to this discussion is orality, or specifically, the influence of African oral traditions on written literature. It is not useful to view the oral in a binary opposition to the textual, as some critics are wont to do. Craig Tapping provides a useful overview of this tendency in his article "Voices Off: Models of Orality in African Literature and Literary Criticism." He describes the widespread belief among Western theorists that the oral is primitive, and the notion that the oral is often linked to archaic ways of being, which ties into the "imagery of primitivism, psychological and intellectual underdevelopment, and a simplistic notion of animism" (Tapping 77). For Tapping, the oral can be inscribed in the textual in a variety of

different ways. In the example of Thiong'o, orality has to do with "communal, verbal networks of the present though which his characters and communities exchange political and immediately contemporary information" (Tapping 78). On the other hand, in the case of Wole Soyinka's dramatic works, the oral is evoked though "rhetoric and stage technique" (Tapping 84). The point is that orality should not be strictly divorced from the textual—instead, critics should read with an eye towards the different ways in which oral traditions influence or appear in literary texts.

In the case of Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*, Erin James' article "Immersed in the Storyworld: Rotten English and Orality on Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*" provides a good starting point for discussing the relationship between the oral and textual mechanics of the text. James cites the text's frequent use of second person address, as Mene often addresses a "you," as well as "the repetition of formulaic phrases, the revelation of characters through dialogue and action, the episodic structure of Mene's tale, and his frequent use of proverbs and onomatopoeia" to argue that all of these oral elements "emphasize the idea that Mene shares the time and space of his narration with an audience" (James 423). Furthermore, James argues that these oral elements, including the second-person addresses, "allow Saro-Wiwa to create an intimate connection between narrating storyteller and narratee, in which all the participants in the text's narrative situation share the same environment" (James 439). Orality in *Sozaboy* can therefore be said to have a political goal, as it creates an imagined community of readers who are all complicit in the events of Saro-Wiwa's novel. Readers are made participants, which not only increases the text's rhetorical effectiveness, but fashions an audience for Mene's tale which is not bound by national borders or ideological positioning.

Another strategy linked to the oral quality of the text is Mene's suggestions that the reader already knows about different things he mentions. For example, early in the novel, Mene goes to the African Upwine Bar, where he meets his future wife, Agnes. As Saro-Wiwa writes, "We use to call this Diobu New York. I think you know New York. In America. As people plenty for am. Na so dem plenty for Diobu" (Saro-Wiwa 13). In a text without any explicit mention of Nigeria or Biafra (with one of the main clues that the novel is set in Nigeria being the setting of Pitakwa, or Port Harcourt in the text), Mene's comment on New York is a specific strategy to locate the audience in a milieu of people who "know New York." As James writes, this variation on the second person address which invokes the reader's knowledge requires "that the narratee perform

the knowledge they prescribe" (James 440). This demands a deeper level of engagement from the reader as it forces to actively participate in the knowledge-creation of the text. The narrator creates the textual knowledge, compels the reader to perform it, and then moves on. Orality in Saro-Wiwa's text therefore imagines a multi-faceted audience, and forces that audience to directly participate in the text itself.

Thus far, I have discussed the politics of Saro-Wiwa's choice to write in English in light of the existing debate on the language of African literature, as well as some of the oral elements of *Sozaboy*. However, it is not entirely accurate to say that Saro-Wiwa's novel is in English per se: "Sozaboy's language is what I call 'rotten English', a mixture of Nigerian pidgin English, broken English and occasional flashes of good, even idiomatic English" as Saro-Wiwa explains in his author's note preceding the main text of *Sozaboy*. There is a long tradition of incorporating Nigerian pidgin into literary texts, as Tony Obilade discusses in his article "The Stylistic Function of Pidgin English in African Literature: Achebe and Soyinka." Obilade argues that in some works, pidgin English functions as a "slot-filler" or as a "curiosity item" but in the works of Achebe and Soyinka pidgin English projects a "deeper meaning beyond the 'normal' linguistic reading" (Obilade 434). For them, PE (pidgin English) "is used for humor as well as for character portrayal," but interestingly, all the texts that Obilade mentions incorporate PE only at specific points in the text—in other words, PE is a noticeable, stylized rupture in the text that happens for a specific reason.

However, this is fundamentally different than Saro-Wiwa's project, which incorporates PE into a sustained literary experiment where essentially the whole text is the rupture. Chantal Zabus reinforces this very point in her article "Mending the Schizo-Text: Pidgin in the Nigerian Novel" where she tracks the evolution of literary PE through "embellishment and slot-filler" to "baby talk and bush talk," later "the medium of urban prestige and integration" to finally "the mode of inter- and intra-ethnic communication and eventually a mother tongue" (Zabus 120). Writing specifically on Saro-Wiwa's novel, she argues that here the "chinks between mother tongue and other tongue can now be freely filled with this post-Civil War linguistic stew" (Zabus 125). She calls attention to the fact that Saro-Wiwa's "rotten" English is not entirely PE, and not entirely standard English either. It is instead a distinctly literary creation that exists in the liminal space between the two. Instead of the distinct switching between PE and standard English that happens

in the works of Achebe and Soyinka, Saro-Wiwa's work immerses the reader entirely in a new linguistic mode.

Many scholars have commented on Saro-Wiwa's Rotten English, but Michael North's argument in his article "Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*: The Politics of 'Rotten English'" remains one the most salient and often-cited. As he writes, *Sozaboy* "actually proposes, in the very language that it uses, an alternative model of national self-representation" (North 99). North also discusses Mene's frequent tendency to address the unseen audience of his story as "brother," arguing that to "propose brotherhood and sisterhood within that language is to propose a Nigeria that is not divided along ethnic and linguistic lines" (North 109). Consequently, "rotten English allows *Sozaboy* to contradict, to speak against, the civil war at the level of its form, while it is exposing the horrors of the war in its content" (North 109). Rotten English is therefore more than just a literary experiment, it is a political project that creates a new kind of community in Nigeria, one defined not by ethnicity but by the common experience of a devastating civil war. Cyril Obi echoes North's point in his article "'War is War': Recreating the Dreams and Nightmares of the Nigeria-Biafra War through the Eyes of Ken Saro-Wiwa's Sozaboy." As he argues: "The novel can be located within a narrative of how ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta experienced the Nigeria-Biafra War" (Obi 231). Furthermore, Jeffrey Gunn adds to this discussion in his article "Inside 'Rotten English': Interpreting the Language of Ambiguity in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*." As he argues, Rotten English should also be understood as a "language of ambiguity," one which is "unable to support the binary notion of good versus evil and instead reveal the ability of all parties to exhibit horrific acts and remain susceptible to the damaging effects of war" (Gunn 4). This reinforces what I have already referred to as the liminal nature of Rotten English, and furthermore, it problematizes a more cursory reading of *Sozaboy*, like Dave Gunning's argument in "Finding a Voice" that Rotten English is used to "suggest the alienation of its narrator from the political situation around him" (Gunning 51). On the contrary, Rotten English locates Mene at the very center of a new kind of political community and constitutes an important critique of the war.

4.3 National Consciousness and a Minor Literature

Saro-Wiwa's Rotten English also has interesting implications when viewed in conjunction with Frantz Fanon's thoughts on national culture in his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon seeks to explain the role of the native intellectual in the formation of national consciousness, and

he tracks the native intellectual's progression through producing work for the oppressor "whether with the intention of charming him or denouncing him," and then the shift towards "addressing his own people" (Fanon 193). Once the native intellectual turns to his own people as an audience, then there is a national literature (Fanon 193). Here, Fanon's notion of a "literature of combat" becomes useful: "it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty" (Fanon 193). Fanon would probably locate Saro-Wiwa's novel in a literature of combat because of its subversive elements and its unique itinerary within Nigerian literature—it certainly opens new horizons when it comes to critiques of the Nigeria-Biafran War. However, the burden *Sozaboy* bears is even greater than that of Fanon's literature of combat, as Saro-Wiwa simultaneously creates the community he seeks to address as he addresses it. Whether or not the community Saro-Wiwa creates has any revolutionary potential, or even if it exists at all, *Sozaboy* contributes directly to the evolution of national consciousness.

Before concluding this section on the politics of Rotten English, I would like to turn briefly towards a theory of minor literature offered by Deleuze and Guattari in their study of Kafka. As they write: "The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari 18). Rotten English indeed does not belong to any specific territory but instead creates its own—even though the kind of pidgin English Saro-Wiwa incorporates comes from West Africa, Rotten English is not a language that anyone speaks in real life, so it is deterritorialized in the truest sense. Deleuze and Guattari's second point, that minor literatures emphasize the political, also holds true in the case of Saro-Wiwa's work. Saro-Wiwa writes from a minority perspective, and indeed lived as a member of a minority group, so it is no wonder that his novel has political ramifications within the Nigerian context. As Deleuze and Guattari argue: "The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it" (Deleuze and Guattari 17). Mene's deeply personal narration certainly does hold another story within it—the story of all the minority groups caught in-between sides during the Nigeria-Biafran War, as well as the story of every naïve young man volunteering to go off to battle. Finally, the collective aspect of Deleuze and Guattari's analysis quite clearly lines up with *Sozaboy*:

> It is a literature that produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism; and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility … The literary machine thus becomes the relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come … *literature is the people's concern*. (Deleuze and Guattari 17-18, emphasis theirs)

This is the same kind of community-formation that is Saro-Wiwa's literary project, and his work is indeed revolutionary in its own right—it is a work for the people, specifically minority groups who have been silenced for far too long. While Deleuze and Guattari's argument concerns Kafka's writing in German, their theory of a minor literature maps onto Saro-Wiwa's work quite readily, and reinforces the points made by North, Gunn, and others. To conclude with Deleuze's observations on style, "a great stylist is not someone who conserves syntax, but is a creator of syntax … a stylist is someone who creates a foreign language in his/her language" (Deleuze 95). Saro-Wiwa is therefore not only a stylist, but a political one.

My intervention within this academic conversation will be to explain how Rotten English serves as a vehicle for representing the trauma of war. Trauma is often considered something that is unrepresentable, something that must remain unsaid, or something which language is incapable of addressing. I argue that Saro-Wiwa's literary invention of Rotten English should be seen not only as an interesting experiment in language, but as an act that breaks down the artificial divide between trauma and language to tell the story of the Nigeria-Biafran War, or any other war in which minority groups are caught in the middle. The following chapter will include a close reading of *Sozaboy* from the perspective of literary trauma studies with an eye towards recent work in decolonizing trauma theory. In later chapters I will discuss the disparate ways in which the characters of Mene and Manmuswak embody trauma, and I will conclude with a view of Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* in a continuum with his later environmental work, in which I will bring together ecocritical theories of literature with literary trauma theory.

Section 5: Trauma and Representation

The problem of conceptualizing trauma has existed for quite some time in the field of psychoanalysis, as well as literary trauma studies. Most accounts that seek to define trauma begin with Freud, who in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* invents a hypothetical organism to illustrate how trauma affects the mind. As he writes: "Let us imagine living organisms in their

simplest possible form as an undifferentiated vesicle of irritable matter; its surface … is thus differentiated by its very position, and serves as the vesicle's receptor organ" (Freud 65). This organism in question is not necessarily an animal or a human being, it is more of an allegory for the mind. Freud continues: "We may use the term *traumatic* to describe those excitations from outside that are strong enough to break through the protective barrier; … the notion of 'trauma' cries out to be applied to such a case given that the resistance to stimuli is normally so effective" (Freud 68, emphasis his). Trauma is therefore a stimulus that comes from outside the closed system of the hypothetical organism, a stimulus which is powerful enough to break through the system's natural barrier.

Later definitions of trauma within the fields of psychology and psychiatry have expanded upon Freud's initial psychoanalytical framework. For example, the American Psychological Association defines trauma as "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster" ("Trauma"). This definition is fascinating because it locates trauma not in the event itself, but in one's emotional response to it. Another invaluable resource which helps illuminate how psychiatrists conceptualize trauma is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or the DSM. The DSM also shows how these definitions change over time, as new editions are updated and revised to accommodate new work in the field. Definitions of trauma within the DSM are located in entries that describe post-traumatic stress disorder. In the 1980 third edition of the DSM, PTSD's "essential feature" is said to be the development of symptoms "following a psychologically traumatic event that is generally outside the range of usual human experience" (DSM III 236).

Laura S. Brown seizes upon this idea of trauma being "outside the range of usual human experience" in her essay "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." As she explains: "The range of human experience becomes the range of what is normal and usual in the lives of men of the dominant class; white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men. Trauma is thus that which disrupts these particular human lives, but no other" (Brown 101). The most recent, fifth edition of the DSM released in 2013 seems to narrow down the definition of trauma (and address Brown's concerns), describing PTSD as a result of "exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (DSM 5 271). It is also important to note that individual psychiatrists and scholars create their own definitions for trauma. Juliet

Mitchell in her article “Trauma, Recognition, and the Place of Language,” for example, seeks “to define trauma from the perspective of the person who experiences it” which calls attention to the fact that trauma is experienced differently by different people (Mitchell 121). Dori Laub, in the second chapter of *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, calls attention to the role of the listener: “By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself” (Laub 57). In the field of literary trauma studies, Cathy Caruth loosely defines trauma in *Unclaimed Experience* as “the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (Caruth 4). By mentioning these definitions, I hope to underline the contested nature of trauma even within the more scientific fields of psychology and psychiatry.

However, these references also illustrate the fact that most definitions of trauma are linked to Western modes of thought as well as Western psychiatric paradigms. The DSM is produced by the American Psychiatric Association, Laub’s work mostly deals with the Holocaust, and Caruth’s textual examples in *Unclaimed Experience* are mostly drawn from Europe and European scholars. There is a concrete need to broaden the scope of trauma studies beyond hegemonic definitions which leave little room for other perspectives. Indeed, some of this work is already being done. In their introduction to *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy locate the origin of trauma studies in the early 1990s with figures like Caruth, Laub, and LaCapra (Bennett and Kennedy 3). However, they go on to outline their own project, which is to “move towards a study of memory that takes as its starting point the multicultural and diasporic nature of contemporary culture” (Bennett and Kennedy 5). As they observe:

> The focus on literary texts in general—and modernist literary texts in particular—as a source of testimony to both the traumatic events of the past and to the psychic experience of trauma has yielded many important insights. At this point, however, there is a danger that the field is being limited to a selection of texts that represent a relatively narrow range of traumatic events, histories and cultural forms, rather than engaging the global scope of traumatic events and the myriad forms that bear witness to them. (Bennett and Kennedy 5)

This point is particularly important in the context of *Sozaboy* and Saro-Wiwa’s effort to represent the trauma of the Nigeria-Biafran War through Rotten English. While Bennett and Kennedy’s work lies within the provenance of memory studies, more clinical articles like Ray G. Motsi and

Maake J. Masango's "Redefining trauma in an African context: A challenge to pastoral care" search for new definitions of trauma outside of a Western context. As they observe, "Africans view a person from a socio-centric perspective because a person is part of the bigger whole … The African view thus understands trauma to be a problem that affects the whole person and the whole community" (Motsi and Masango 1). Outside of memory studies and clinical psychiatry, significant progress has also been made in the field of literary trauma studies. One of the most important voices in this area is Stef Craps—his co-authored "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels" with Gert Buelens argues that "postcolonial trauma novels often denounce the pathologization and depoliticization of victims of violence, critique Western complacency in dealing with non-Western testimony, and call for the development of alternative modes of address" (Buelens and Craps 5). His later work *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* continues in that same vein: "By enabling us to recognize and attend to the sufferings of people around the world, an inclusive and culturally sensitive trauma theory can expose situations of injustice and abuse, and open up ways to imagine a different global future" (Craps 8). Craps' critical orientation towards trauma studies will provide the foundation for my discussion of trauma and representation in *Sozaboy*. The following sections will trace several key instances in the text when Saro-Wiwa represents trauma through Rotten English: the visceral depiction of the bombing raid on the soldiers' camp, the repeated tautology "war is war," Mene's search for his family through several refugee camps, and his two returns to his village.

5.1 War, Violence, and the Body

At the beginning of the novel, Mene is a young apprentice to a lorry driver working in Dukana and Pitakwa. After he meets Agnes, a woman working at the African Upwine bar in Pitakwa, and falls in love with her, they marry and live in Dukana together. When rumors of a conflict start swirling around the village, Mene is persuaded by Agnes as well as his village friends to become a soldier: "She will like to be my wife but she will marry me only if I am soza because she cannot marry any man who cannot defend her when trouble come" (Saro-Wiwa 59). Mene does not know which side of the war he will be joining, or why a war is being fought in the first place, but he joins up anyway. From that point in the novel, people start referring to him as "sozaboy."

Mene goes through rigorous training, befriends another soldier named Bullet, and goes on a few patrols, but his first direct experience of the horror of war comes when there is a bombing raid on the soldiers' camp. As Saro-Wiwa writes:

> So we were still looking at the plane as it came to pass round and round the camp, I saw that the plane drop something. 'E dey me like say the plane dey shit and I begin laugh. But my laugh no reach my belly because that thing from the plane just land near we camp and I hear very very big noise which come carry me for air throway for ground. (Saro-Wiwa 110)

What is striking about this passage is the disorienting effect of Rotten English, as well as the emphasis on bodily movement. When Mene looks at the plane dropping bombs, he likens the bombs to excrement and begins to laugh. However, in this moment it is not clear whether he says this out loud or only thinks it to himself: "'E dey me like say the plane dey shit" (Saro-Wiwa 110). Part of this confusion, at least for a reader unfamiliar with Nigerian Pidgin, is due to the use of the word "dey," which in Roger Blench's dictionary of Nigerian Pidgin English is defined as "to be" or "to exist" (Blench 8). This definition does not really aid (a Western) reader in determining whether Mene is speaking or thinking—there is a breakdown between thoughts and speech, and the reader experiences Mene's utterance in a direct, unmediated way. One of the key observations of famed war theorist Carl von Clausewitz is often termed the "fog of war"—as he writes: "War is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty" (Oxford Reference). In the moment when the bombs begin to fall, Mene's utterance, whether mental or verbal, is irrelevant and is lost in the fog of war. The word "dey" therefore serves a stylistic function beyond its immediate lexical meaning, as it obscures the exact details of the event while simultaneously reinforcing the milieu of Rotten English within the novel as a word from Nigerian Pidgin. It is a textual expression of the fog of war and in this scene denotes the breakdown of straightforward description.

Furthermore, the emphasis on bodily movement especially in the line "I hear very very big noise which come carry me for air throway for ground" denotes the fragility of the human body compared to the power of destruction a bomb has. It is not the force of the blast, or the shockwave which knocks Mene over, but instead a "very very big noise." The violence of war is rendered as elemental rather than technical—the bombing is a force of nature, and Mene experiences it on an extremely physical level. There is also a sense of disorientation in "carry me for air throway for

ground"—the word "throway" is defined in Saro-Wiwa's glossary after the main text of *Sozaboy* as "throw away," but just like the word "dey" in the previous quotation, even if a reader replaces "throway" with "throw away" the exact meaning of the line is still a bit opaque. Is Mene being thrown away like rubbish, or just thrown on the ground by the blast? Part of the reason why Saro-Wiwa's narrative technique is effective is because the events of the novel are filtered through Mene's body and mind. On a certain level, "carry me for air throway for ground" is closer to Mene's actual experience of getting knocked over by a bomb's blast than a more detailed or technically clearer account would be. The Rotten English in these lines is able to encapsulate the fog of war and the visceral, embodied experience of violence through its syntax and Nigerian Pidgin-inflected diction.

After the initial bombing, the soldiers' camp is destroyed:

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

The slaughter in this scene is ubiquitous, as the body parts of unidentified soldiers fill pits across the camp. The repetition of "pit and pit and pit" creates the image of a wasteland, of a visual field in which there is nothing else to see but pits, now the graves of dismembered soldiers. Furthermore, the specific body parts that Mene sees, especially "prick" and "blokkus" which are defined in Saro-Wiwa's glossary as parts of the male sexual organ, signify the existential dread Mene feels as he surveys the carnage. Throughout the novel, male sexuality is emphasized, particularly in Mene's relationship with Agnes—as she tells him earlier in the novel: "when you get your driving license and enter the army and you begin to fight like better man … then you can come back and show me that your man wey still dey stand like snake" (Saro-Wiwa 37). Mene's male identity for Agnes is tied to his ability to fight as a soldier, and to his "man" which refers to his phallus. The bombs that destroy the camp, in Mene's eyes, not only kill the soldiers but take away their manhood as well. In this scene, war is emasculating: "Oh, I just begin to cry like woman" (Saro-Wiwa 111). The experience of war which is filtered through Mene's experience and Saro-Wiwa's Rotten English is here rendered unflinchingly and urgently, without fancy metaphors or highbrow descriptive language.

Stef Craps discusses the importance of acknowledging various aesthetics and strategies for representing trauma in non-Western works in "Beyond Trauma Aesthetics" from *Postcolonial Witnessing*. He cites novels like Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and Abani's *Graceland* to argue that the "political urgency informing these texts may go some way towards explaining their reliance on a no-frills, realist aesthetic, which sets them apart from the emergent canon of trauma literature" (Craps 42). This is somewhat reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan's paradigmatic statement in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan 14). While McLuhan mainly focuses on electronic forms of media, it is easy to see the echoes of his idea in Craps' work, and I argue that it also applies to Saro-Wiwa's novel. The medium of Rotten English conveys the message that war is chaotic, confusing, and unmediated. However, the aesthetic of *Sozaboy* is more than a "no-frills, realist aesthetic" as Rotten English searches for an alternative mode of representing trauma. In the bombing scene, Saro-Wiwa's language emphasizes bodily movement and body parts, locating war as something that primarily affects the human body. Furthermore, through incorporating words from Nigerian pidgin that somewhat obscure the exact details and chronology of events, Saro-Wiwa reinforces the disorienting nature of war and presents Mene's account of violence as an unmediated reality.

5.2 Tautology and the Broken Logic of War

While I maintain that Saro-Wiwa's text has internal consistency in terms of its use of Rotten English, there is one line, repeated throughout the novel, that is a rupture in the logic of the text—the phrase "war is war" (Saro-Wiwa 75, 80, 83, 128, 139, 163). Tan Papa, one of Mene's fellow soldiers, asks him if his wife will still want him if he is maimed in combat: "Only he was asking whether my wife will still marry me if my hand cut. 'Because war is war, you know,' is what he said at last" (Saro-Wiwa 75). This confuses Mene, "What is this war? Is it not soza and soza, gun and gun?" (Saro-Wiwa 75). Before Mene has experienced combat, he conceives of war as a battle between individuals and their weapons, but Tan Papa, an old soldier, sees war as a sort of autonomous being, something that is self-evident. The statement "war is war" is a tautology, which is usually a repetitive statement or one which is so obvious as to be irrelevant. In *Sozaboy*, I argue that this repeated tautology encapsulates Saro-Wiwa's approach to representing trauma. It is nonsensical, which is something it shares with trauma (and war) in general. As Caruth explains in

Unclaimed Experience: "Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it" (Caruth 94). While I take issue with Caruth's phrasing—I think framing trauma as something impossible to know is a bit too forceful—her argument illuminates the power that Saro-Wiwa's tautology has. In a certain sense, even though it is tautological, "war is war" is perhaps the truest statement one can write about war. It works against glamourous or overly melodramatic accounts of war, and grounds Mene's experience of an illogical conflict in an illogical phrase. Furthermore, as Chijioke Uwasomba argues in his article "War, violence and language in Ken Saro-Wiwa's Sozaboy," the tautology "captures the foolishness and bestiality of war" (Uwasomba 22). Uwasomba goes on to note that in general, the language of *Sozaboy* "is a deliberate choice … to reflect the dastardly war and the disorderly state of the setting of the novel. This bold attempt at language experimentation brings to the fore violence in all its manifestations" (Uwasomba 22). The tautology "war is war" certainly expresses the meaningless violence and utter incomprehensibility of the war.

The multiple repetitions of the phrase also indicate how Mene internalizes Tan Papa's words. From his initial conversation with Tan Papa, Mene remembers his words: "Those who are going away are laughing. Those who are coming in, some are crying. Is this a good thing at all? Then I remembered what Tan Papa used to say. War is war" (Saro-Wiwa 83). Later in the novel, Mene repeats the phrase to the reader himself: "I think you understand me. Because war is war and I am sure that this Manmuswak and the soza boss and all the sozas sef are just like my rifle … To kill or be killed" (Saro-Wiwa 128). Mene transitions from hearing the tautology, to remembering it, to repeating it to the reader himself. Just as Mene becomes accustomed to the truth of the tautology, so too does he become desensitized to the trauma of war. Furthermore, the phrase is repeated throughout the novel by different characters. It originates with Tan Papa, who tells it to Mene, but it is also repeated by Manmuswak, a shadowy figure in the novel who frequently switches sides throughout the conflict, and finally it is repeated by a prisoner of war sharing the same cell as Mene after he is captured. These iterations of the phrase illustrate the pervasiveness of the idea within the novel, as well as the emphasis which Saro-Wiwa places upon those words. Finally, the sentiment behind "war is war" has several implications when it comes to literary trauma theory.

Trauma theory, whether in terms of Freud's "excitation," Caruth's "wound," or definitions of PTSD found in the DSM, normally conceives of trauma as a single, terrible event—there is usually less emphasis placed upon the idea of trauma as an extended collection of events. Stef Craps traces Maria Root's concept of "insidious trauma" to explain how "traumatization can result insidiously from cumulative micro-aggressions: each one is too small to be a traumatic stressor, but together they can build to create an intense traumatic impact" (Craps 26). While this discussion focuses mainly on the trauma of everyday racism, I argue that the same idea of cumulative or "insidious" trauma can be applied in the case of war, which in *Sozaboy* is reinforced by Saro-Wiwa's repetition of "war is war."

For Mene, the trauma of war is not only a result of the visceral violence he experiences, as in the bombing scene. It is a combination of being apart from his mother and his wife, the physical strain of going on patrols and fleeing from enemy soldiers, the psychological pain he feels as he searches for his lost family, and the everyday acts of cruelty he witnesses. War is not just a fight between men with guns, or the destruction caused by a bomb: "war is war." It is an all-encompassing collection of events and experiences represented by Saro-Wiwa's tautology. Through the many repetitions of "war is war," Saro-Wiwa urges the reader to see war as a pervasive, nebulous aggregation of trauma, not as a single violent event. Contained in the milieu of Rotten English, this tautology should be viewed as part of Saro-Wiwa's project to represent trauma in an alternative language.

5.3 The Refugee Camp and Bare Life

Furthermore, the trauma of war is not only experienced by Mene or the other soldiers in the novel, but by civilians as well. After the bombing raid on the soldiers' camp, Mene runs away and eventually travels through several refugee camps in search of his wife and mother. His first stop is the camp at Nugwa. As Saro-Wiwa writes:

> My dear brothers and sisters, I will not try to tell you how I was moving from one camp to another. Or what I saw in the camps that I went to. Because, true true as Zaza have talked, this camp is proper human compost pit and all these people they are calling refugees are actually people that they have throway like rubbish. Nothing that you can use them for. They have nothing in this world … Just like something inside cinema or inside bad forest in dream. (Saro-Wiwa 148)

At the beginning of the quotation, Mene addresses his audience on a personal level. He prefaces his words by saying that he will not explain how he traveled in between camps, or what he saw in those camps. However, as Mene continues, he actually does explain what he saw in the camps, "all these people with long long hair, and big big belly, and mosquito legs" (Saro-Wiwa 148). The children have "big big belly like pregnant woman" and people are "killing and chopping lizard" because there is no food (Saro-Wiwa 148-149). Even as Mene perceives a duty to his audience to protect them from these harrowing images, he presents these images anyway. It seems that the importance of the harsh reality contained in Mene's experience outweighs any responsibility to protect his audience. He forces his audience to look, because he is forced to look, which is also part of Saro-Wiwa's project in the novel as a whole.

There is also a sense that the camp is an unreal place, "like something inside cinema or inside bad forest in dream" (Saro-Wiwa 148). Since Mene (and most people in general) are accustomed to seeing horrors on the television screen or in their dreams, to be confronted with human suffering in reality is traumatic. Suffering belongs in fiction, not in real life, which is why Mene struggles to make sense of this reality and questions God: "Oh, God no gree bad thing" (Saro-Wiwa 151). Mene questions why God would "gree" or agree to the terrible things he sees in the camp, and his account of the suffering people, who remain voiceless in this scene, is a harsh indictment of war's impact on non-combatants. Giorgio Agamben's explanation of bare life and the state of exception in his work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* provides useful insight into the biopolitics of the camp, and the role these voiceless victims play in *Sozaboy*. As Agamben writes:

> If it is the sovereign who, insofar as he decides on the state of exception, has the power to decide which life may be killed without the commission of homicide, in the age of biopolitics this power becomes emancipated from the state of exception and transformed into the power to decide the point at which life ceases to be politically relevant. (Agamben 142)

Under the conditions of modern biopolitics, the Greek distinction between *zoē*, the biological fact of life, and *bios*, the form or potential of that life, is dissolved—*zoē* enters into the sphere of politics where it does not belong, which for Agamben is "the decisive event of modernity" (Agamben 4). The state (formerly the sovereign) is able to exert control not only over the form of life, but the biological fact of life itself. The people Mene encounters with their bloated bellies in the "compost pit" of the camp only possess bare life. Their former way of life, as well as their

potential has been erased by the war. Their lives are no longer relevant, and they have been excluded. The camp is therefore the emblematic site of biopolitical control, both in Saro-Wiwa's novel and Agamben's work: "The camps are thus born not out of ordinary law (even less, as one might have supposed, from a transformation and development of criminal law) but out of a state of exception and martial law" (Agamben 167). This directly relates to Mene's observation about the next camp he travels to "True, true, this Urua is not just camp. It is new town, new dirty town born by the foolish war" (Saro-Wiwa 150). The camp at Urua has a massive population and even its own internal economy. It is a town born by both the war and the state of exception in the absence of ordinary law, and its inhabitants are excluded from the fabric of normal society. Indeed, in many ways normal society has been suspended totally by the violence and destruction of the war. The refugee camps in *Sozaboy* are places of exclusion and biopolitical control. Furthermore, the lives of the camps' inhabitants are not relevant in a political or social sense, hence Mene's description of voiceless refugees, "throway like rubbish" (Saro-Wiwa 148).

The Rotten English in this camp scene—Mene's personal address to the reader, the repetition of descriptions like "big big belly," and his comparison of real events to something "like inside cinema or inside bad forest in dream" all work towards creating an aesthetic for representing trauma (Saro-Wiwa 148). The trauma of camp life is something that Mene does not directly experience, only witnesses, which is why it is important for him to position his audience before describing what he sees. During the bombing raid in the previous section, there is a breakdown in the language of the text as Mene directly experiences unmediated violence. As a result, some of the exact details of the bombing are obscured in the confusion of war. Here, when Mene observes camp life, he describes it in a strikingly clear-eyed fashion, which begins when he directly addresses his audience. In this sense Mene's language as a direct victim and his language as a witness differs, which denotes on a textual level the effects of witnessed trauma and trauma which is directly experienced. Furthermore, Mene's account of hungry children with "big big belly" is a depiction of starvation without elevated language or lofty metaphors. The children's bellies are not "swollen" or "distended," they are simply "big big." For Saro-Wiwa, the utility of simple language when it comes to representing suffering is clear. His words, filtered through Mene's narration, let these harrowing scenes speak for themselves. Finally, Mene's comparison of the refugee camp to something "inside bad forest in dream" is a culturally specific reference. Recall Achebe's description in *Things Fall Apart*: "Every clan and village had its "evil forest." In it were buried all

those who died of the really evil diseases … An "evil forest" was, therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness" (Achebe 113). Mene's "bad forest" exists in a similar context as Achebe's—while Achebe's novel takes place in Igboland before the state of Nigeria was created, *Sozaboy* takes place in a Nigeria torn apart by civil war. Across generations of literary texts, the evil forest remains an important signifier for places of trauma and suffering. By incorporating this comparison between the camp and "a bad forest in dream," Saro-Wiwa roots Mene's interpretation of the refugee camp in a specific cultural context (Saro-Wiwa 148). In summary, Saro-Wiwa's use of Rotten English in Mene's personal address to the reader, Mene's use of clear, simple language when he witnesses the camp (as opposed to the more confusing language he uses when experiencing trauma himself) and his culturally specific comparison of the camp to an evil forest, all reinforce the refugee camp as a locus of biopolitical control and as a site of trauma.

5.4 Perpetual Return and Mene's Ghostly Itinerary

Much of Freud's thinking on trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* starts with what he calls the repetition compulsion, "we may say that the patient does not *remember* anything at all of what he has forgotten and repressed, but rather *acts it out*. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it" (Freud 36, emphasis his). The compulsion to repeat is especially prevalent in traumatized or neurotic subjects, but it is also present in others as a simple "predisposition to fate" (Freud 60). Importantly, Freud also refers to these repetitions as an "eternal recurrence of the same" (Freud 60). This is reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzche's theory of eternal recurrence which first appears in his book *The Gay Science*:

> What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you … The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!" (Nietzche 273)

The fact that the idea of repetition or return figures so prominently in both Nietzche's and Freud's work denotes the narrative resonance of the "return" in philosophical and psychoanalytical work. Whether or not Freud's observed repetition compulsion or Nietzche's theory of eternal recurrence are demonstrated to be true, both ideas demonstrate the propensity for thinkers to look for ways of understanding trauma—for Freud, this is the trauma that his patients have experienced, and for

Nietzche, this is the trauma of everyday existence. I suggest that Saro-Wiwa's novel also searches for ways to understand trauma, this time through an aesthetic-literary paradigm rather than a philosophical or psychoanalytical one.

The idea of perpetual return is relevant in the context of Saro-Wiwa's novel because Mene returns to his village of Dukana twice throughout the text, and each time, he is thought to be a ghost by the village's remaining inhabitants. After the cataclysmic bombing of the soldiers' camp, Mene escapes into the wilderness until he is found by Manmuswak, a mysterious figure who seems to be involved everywhere in the war, "his work is war" (Saro-Wiwa 120). Mene is then made to work as a driver for the opposite side of the conflict, and one day he decides to drive his truck to Dukana without permission to potentially see his family. As Saro-Wiwa writes: "Oh, God of mercy. When I see my home town Dukana, I could not talk … when I see my own home town, I begin cry" (Saro-Wiwa 129). Mene's insistence that he "could not talk" is similar to his reaction to the refugee camp, where he addresses the reader, "I will not try to tell you" (Saro-Wiwa 148, 129). But in both cases, even though he may not be able to speak in the moment, he still tells his story to the reader. Mene quickly learns that Dukana is not completely deserted as he encounters his old friends Duzia and Bom hiding under a tarpaulin in an abandoned hut. He tries to speak to them, but they think he is a ghost: "Sozaboy have already dead," says Duzia (Saro-Wiwa 130). Mene replies: "Duzia, look at me. I am not dead. I am Sozaboy. Your Sozaboy. Touch me" (Saro-Wiwa 131). Duzia and Bom are still skeptical of Mene's corporeal status, but they talk to him anyway: "Sozaboy, juju, I will talk to you. If you are ghost, or you are living porson as you talk, I will still talk to you because what my eyes have seen, my mouth cannot talk it" (Saro-Wiwa 132). Duzia's words here echo Mene's, as both men acknowledge the inexpressibility of what they have seen before they talk about it. This illuminates one of the paradoxes of trauma in *Sozaboy*—characters acknowledge that it is impossible to capture their experiences in words, but they do so anyway. They evidence the human capacity for communicating that which is impossible, which works against the idea that language is incapable of fully expressing traumatic events.

After Mene's first return to Dukana, he travels to several refugee camps looking for his wife and mother. At one camp he finds some of the villagers he knows from Dukana, but they turn him in to the soldiers guarding the camp and he is taken prisoner. The war is coming to a conclusion, and Manmuswak takes the prisoners to be executed. In the middle of the execution he runs out of

ammunition and Mene escapes into the bush along with a few others. When Mene arrives in Dukana, his family home is nowhere to be found: “No sign that house was in that place. Ah-ah. What does this mean? And I cannot see anybody at all. Wonders will never end” (Saro-Wiwa 172). Mene tries to speak to the other villagers who have also returned to Dukana after the war, but they ignore him or run away from him. He finally meets Duzia, who tells him about the situation in Dukana. A sickness is ravaging the village, and the people think that it is Mene’s fault:

> “Yes. The juju said that your ghost is moving round killing everybody because when you were killed in the war, they did not bury you proper. And anybody that they do not bury proper in the ground with drink and dance after he have already dead, surely his ghost must move round like porson wey no get house until they bury him like proper man.” As Duzia was saying this thing, I am telling you I was shaking with fear. (Saro-Wiwa 180)

Both occasions on which Mene returns are marked not by joyful reunion, but by despair. After becoming a soldier to prove his value to his wife and to his village as a whole, his existence is effectively erased by the idea that he is a ghost. The villagers’ notion of what is “proper” informs their decision to ostracize and exile Mene. Just like a body belongs in a grave, a soldier belongs on the battlefield. Mene has become a soldier without a war to fight, so he no longer has any place in the village of his upbringing. After he comes back for the second time he is forced to leave the village and never return. The novel ends with Mene’s final address to the reader: “But now if anybody say anything about war or even fight, I will just run and run and run and run and run. Believe me yours sincerely” (Saro-Wiwa 181). The repetition of “run” here indicates the inescapability of war and violence in the world of the novel, but on a deeper level it also refers to Mene’s inability to ever forget the traumatic events he has experienced. Freud’s stage of “working through” does not seem to be available for Mene, as the novel ends before any sort of resolution. But perhaps Mene’s narration itself represents the possibility of working through trauma, as he personally addresses the reader throughout the text and seems to look back on events from the vantage point of the future even as he recounts them.

My analysis in this third section has focused mainly on quite granular textual examples, like the use of Nigerian Pidgin, tautology, and specific cultural references. For this reason, Mene’s two returns presents a particular difficulty because it is a larger narrative choice rather than a more specific decision in regards to language. It therefore becomes necessary at this juncture to demarcate the limits of Rotten English within the text. Is Rotten English only present in small

choices of diction or syntax, or is it a more far-ranging aesthetic framework? In other words, does Rotten English extend to larger events within the narrative, like Mene's two returns? Viewing Rotten English as a collection of granular linguistic choices that combine to create a literary aesthetic is certainly valid, and does lead to interesting conclusions. However, I argue that the political project of Saro-Wiwa's work, as well as Rotten English's capacity for representing trauma, necessitates a view of the language of *Sozaboy* as more than syntax and diction. By this argument, it is therefore pertinent to also look at plot points, like Mene's two returns, and the role of different characters in the novel, which I will discuss in the next section.

Section 6: Perpetrator Trauma and Traumatic Embodiment

Throughout the novel, the refrain "war is war" appears more than once, but there is an important variation on this theme uttered by Manmuswak. As Saro-Wiwa writes: "Manmuswak laugh one kain laugh. With plenty tooth for him mouth. He told me that his work is war. And war mean many things to soza like himself. You can be anything when there is war" (Saro-Wiwa 120). Manmuswak's utterance, that his "work is war," is a key change to the repeated tautology "war is war." These two phrases emblematize Mene and Manmuswak's orientation towards war in the text—Mene's "war is war" stresses the illogical nature of war, as well as its incomprehensibility, while Manmuswak's "work is war" signals his pragmatism and his willingness to use war in an instrumental way. This difference indicates the need to look more closely at the two characters, and their relationship to one another. Furthermore, Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham calls attention to the names of these characters, "sozaboy" and "Manmuswak" in her article "'Work is War': The Biafran War and Neoliberalism in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*." As she writes: "The term whack is a linguistic destabilizer of the meanings of war and neoliberalism, providing us with alternative meanings tied to life and survival" (Perera-Rajasingham 16). In other words, because "whack" does not directly relate to violence, but instead to eating, it frames combatants as survivors and not as solely victims or killers (Perera-Rajasingham 16). For Perera-Rajasingham, Mene's moniker "sozaboy" "holds within it refusals to becoming entirely subjected to the logics of war and neoliberalism, for Mene is abstracted to a pidgin term rather than to "soldier boy"" (Perera-Rajasingham 16-17). As she concludes, reading these two characters "help us see how survival and resistance are possible" (Perera-Rajasingham). To extend her argument, I posit that reading

these two characters also points to the different ways in which trauma manifests within Saro-Wiwa's text.

While Mene is buffeted back and forth by the violence and trauma of war, Manmuswak seems to use war for his own benefit, and to truly enjoy the violence he inflicts on others. However, there are reasons to view both characters as traumatized subjects. In this section, I will begin by reading Manmuswak's character from the perspective of perpetrator trauma, paying special attention to his capacity to change roles throughout the text. I will then proceed to discuss the ways in which Saro-Wiwa writes Mene's trauma by focusing on the transformations of his physical body throughout his journey to become a soldier and afterwards. In *Sozaboy*, Saro-Wiwa offers two visions of trauma in the characters of Mene and Manmuswak, and problematizes the easy dichotomy between victim and perpetrator.

6.1 Manmuswak and Perpetrator Trauma

In her extended study of perpetrator trauma in "Of Monsters and Men: Perpetrator Trauma and Mass Atrocity," Saira Mohamed questions "the predominant characterization of trauma as the province of victims" (Mohamed 1167). She cites two main reasons for this, "first, trauma is recognized only on the part of individuals or communities viewed as legitimate and worthy of attention; and second, the connection drawn in the humanities between trauma and reclamation of voice" (Mohamed 1167). Her main argument is that trauma "is not merely the province of the victim," and that scholars of mass atrocity and trauma in general must pay more attention to perpetrator trauma (Mohamed 1168). In Saro-Wiwa's novel, the clearest example of perpetrator trauma is apparent in the character of Manmuswak.

Manmuswak first appears in the African Upwine Bar in Diobu early in the novel. Shortly after Mene meets Agnes for the first time, he notices a "tall man" (Manmuswak, but unnamed at this point) in the bar speaking to one of his companions, a "short man" (Saro-Wiwa 17). The two men are having a conversation about the recent news of war, and they discuss the merits of fighting or not fighting in the war to come. As Manmuswak explains: "What they talk, we must do ... Myself, if they say fight, I fight. If they say no fight, I cannot fight" (Saro-Wiwa 17). When his companion asks him if it is a "good thing" to fight, Manmuswak replies: "I like to fight. Yes. It is good thing to fight. If somebody take your thing by force, if'e want byforce you to do something wey you no

like to do, then you fit fight am" (Saro-Wiwa 17). Manmuswak's strikingly simple and unnuanced view of the world is matched by his minimalist description in this scene. He is just a "tall man" harboring straightforward ideas about the ethics of war. It is possible that Saro-Wiwa chooses to describe Manmuswak in these terms because Mene does not get a good look at the man, but this scene also could be a reminder that perpetrators of violence look just like everyone else—there is nothing special that distinguishes them from any other person, and in this way, evil can hide in plain sight (and behind unnuanced ideas of following orders as a justification for fighting).

The next time Manmuswak appears in the novel, Mene is a soldier who has not seen any combat yet. Mene and his friend Bullet are in the forest with some other soldiers, and they see a white handkerchief in the distance. It is Manmuswak, who approaches and holds a conversation with Bullet. He gives him some alcohol, which Bullet shares with the rest of the soldiers. But Mene is uneasy: "But there was something which was worrying me for mind. I think I have seen that man before. I sure say I have seen that sozaman before. Oh God, where have I seen that sozaman before? That tall man with plenty tooth" (Saro-Wiwa 94). As in the bar scene, Manmuswak's description is minimal—he is still tall, but this time he also has "plenty tooth" (Saro-Wiwa 94). Interestingly, Mene describes him as a "sozaman" as opposed to a "sozaboy" like himself, which denotes that Manmuswak is either older than Mene, has more experience than Mene, or perhaps has a different status entirely when it comes to soldiering. It is not clear whether Manmuswak has been a soldier before, but he certainly understands how to navigate between different spaces on the battlefield. He is still faceless, and as Bullet explains to Mene: "And in the war front, there are all sorts of people ... There is only one thing which binds them all. Death. And everyday they live, they are cheating death. That man came to celebrate the fact" (Saro-Wiwa 94-95). Bullet reminds Mene that because of the precarity of their position as soldiers at the front line "while we live, we must drink. Because, as you know, man must wak" (Saro-Wiwa 95). This phrase, "man must wak" means "man must eat," and from that point forward the tall man is referred to as Manmuswak. By giving the soldiers gifts of alcohol, Manmuswak is able to win their trust. He begins to sow discord in the camp, however, by insinuating that the soldiers' commander is hoarding cigarettes and food. After informing the soldiers of this, "he began to go away, small small like tall snake passing through the bush, making small noise" (Saro-Wiwa 97). The image of the snake in this line clearly denotes Manmuswak's capacity to betray others, and while his acts thus far have not been directly violent, his rumors about the commander eventually lead Bullet to murder him while

on a routine patrol. After the catastrophic bombing of soldiers' camp, Mene reflects on this terrible chain of events: "I just think that that Manmuswak is proper cunny man. Na him come confuse all of us. Na him come spoil the war. And now all my friends don die or sometimes Manmuswak don take some of them make prisoner of war" (Saro-Wiwa 113). At this point in the novel, Manmuswak is little more than an agent of chaos, a "cunny man" who uses his powers of persuasion to turn people against one another. He uses the war for his own benefit and navigates skillfully across the battlefield, leaving destruction in his wake.

After the soldiers' camp is destroyed, Mene runs into the wilderness and wakes up in a hospital. The man "chooking" him, or injecting him with medicine, is Manmuswak: "So he is good-time-man drinking *tombo* and dancing; then he is soza making cunny to scatter one camp and kill everybody; and now he is nurse, smiling and chooking porson" (Saro-Wiwa 119). The use of the word "chooking" lends some ambiguity to Manmuswak's actions—per Saro-Wiwa's glossary "chooking" is defined as piercing or injecting, but it is not clear whether Manmuswak's actions are noble or nefarious. Manmuswak could be "chooking" Mene because he cares about protecting human life, or because he wants to keep Mene alive to use him for his own purposes. Given the role Manmuswak has played in the novel so far, it is safe to assume that his motives are not entirely altruistic. As Saro-Wiwa writes: "He told me that his work is war. And war mean many things to soza like himself. You can be anything when there is war. He say that he can carry gun and dead body. Chooking needle and grenade" (Saro-Wiwa 120). From these lines, it is apparent that Manmuswak has assumed wholeheartedly the role of a soldier and he views both healing and killing as part of the same project. While there has been no evidence of anything traumatic happening to Manmuswak in the novel thus far, I argue that his claim that "work is war" is a concrete attempt to make sense of his own actions, which is a hallmark of a perpetrator's attitude towards atrocity. In Mohamed's aforementioned work on perpetrator trauma, she describes what she calls rationalization: "The vast majority of defendants who speak about their crimes do so in terms that aim to rationalize their acts—to justify them as the right thing to do or to excuse them as forgivable or understandable in light of the circumstances" (Mohamed 1185). Manmuswak rationalizes his actions by framing his role as that of a worker. If it is his job to kill and cause destruction, it is only right that he continues to do so. In other words, "I killed those people" becomes "I was just doing my job" under Manmuswak's logic. The fact that he devises an entire logical framework to understand his actions denotes that on a deeper level, he recognizes the harm

he is causing others. While the tautological refrain "war is war" represents the illogical nature of war, Manmuswak's assertion that his "work is war" is his own attempt to make war (and his role in it) understandable.

After Mene recovers in the hospital he becomes a driver for Manmuswak, working for the other side of the war. He decides to escape to look for his family, which is when he returns to Dukana for the first time, and travels through the refugee camps. At the refugee camp that holds some of the villagers he knows, they turn him in to the soldiers running the camp and he is taken into custody as a prisoner of war. It is unclear whether they turn him in for effectively deserting his original side in the war, or for working as a driver for the enemy (and Saro-Wiwa's refusal to name the different sides in the war obscures the details of Mene's experience even further). After some time in confinement, Mene and his fellow prisoners hear news that the war will be over soon. They are taken outside to be executed, and their executioner is Manmuswak. As Saro-Wiwa writes: "And now this Manmuswak is again with our own sozas and no longer with enemy sozas. Or *abi* na which side the man dey now? At first I could not believe my eyes because I cannot understand how this Manmuswak can be fighting on two sides of the same war" (Saro-Wiwa 166, emphasis his). Manmuswak's ability to switch sides in war is perhaps his most important attribute, as it illustrates the notion that neither side in this war is particularly moral—there are perpetrators on both sides.

This also complicates an orthodox understanding of perpetrator trauma, as the "perpetrator" is often assumed to be on the "bad" side of the war—the "good guys" are less often viewed as perpetrators. As Mohamed explains: "Even when perpetrators' stories are heard, reactions to them are colored by assumptions about good and evil, ordinary and abnormal, capacity and incapacity for choice and feeling" (Mohamed 1209). Mohamed also points out the problems with viewing perpetrators as monsters and not as humans. As she writes, "the impulse to dehumanize, however natural and common, and the refusal to understand, however valid its motivation, should be resisted in the study of mass atrocity" (Mohamed 1211). In the context of Saro-Wiwa's work, Manmuswak is initially portrayed as a human with non-human qualities. He seems to appear everywhere and to be immune to the violence and destruction he facilitates. Furthermore, while Manmuswak's role in the novel is initially that of an enemy agent of chaos, the fact he navigates between sides demonstrates that both sides of the war are responsible for immoral acts. Or, at the

very least, it demonstrates that immoral actors like Manmuswak exist on either side of the conflict. After Manmuswak executes several prisoners, he runs out of ammunition: "Then I heard Manmuswak say, "oh God, no more ammo." When I heard that, I just opened my eyes. And I saw Manmuswak throw down his gun and then make sign of the cross and run away" (Saro-Wiwa 167). In this moment, Manmuswak truly becomes human. Up until this point in the novel Manmuswak has been a figure on the outer edge of humanity—he has no ideology, no real personality, no other motivation than violence. He switches sides with ease, killing and healing with the same attitude. But when he runs out of ammo, crosses himself, and flees, his mystique dissipates and he transforms into a scared man. The war is over and he has no work anymore. As a consequence, he loses the framework for justifying his actions and becomes vulnerable to the psychological consequences of his "work."

Throughout Saro-Wiwa's novel, Manmuswak provides a way of thinking about perpetrator trauma. He occupies the almost archetypal role of a cold-blooded killer in most of his appearances—in the African Upwine Bar, the forest before the bomb attack, and in the hospital, he seems to have an unlimited ability to navigate between sides of the conflict and to avoid injury or death. Mene has frightening dreams of him, and it is difficult to ascertain his motivations outside of the statement that his "work is war" (Saro-Wiwa 120). At these points, Manmuswak is close to the perpetrator as "monster" in Mohamed's framework. Manmuswak finally becomes human in his final scene when he appeals to god and runs away. He loses the framework for justifying his actions, and is confronted with the reality that the war is over and he must finally reckon with the fruits of his labor.

6.2 Mene and Embodied Trauma

In order to understand Mene's transformation from civilian to soldier in the novel, it is necessary to discuss Michel Foucault's notion of the docile body in his work *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault traces the evolution of the soldier in the 17th century as someone who could be "recognized from afar" to the 18th century, in which soldiers have "become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed ... constraint runs slowly though each part of the body, mastering it" (Foucault 135). In this context, disciplinary power is used to create docile bodies on an individual level: "If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the

body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination" (Foucault 138). Even though Foucault reckons with a different historical time frame and cultural context than that of Saro-Wiwa's novel, his argument still illuminates the process of soldier-making.

Mene's initial training is a fitting example of Foucault's disciplinary power. After he pays a man to reserve his spot in the army, his training begins with "running and sweating" as well as lessons in timeliness: "Always if porson come late even by one minute he must beat him well well" (Saro-Wiwa 71). Mene also learns how to control his body according to the orders he receives: "All of us in one straight line. Then the San Mazor will just shout '*Quashun*!' and all of us will move our right leg and stamp it on the ground '*gbram*'. No other movement at all" (Saro-Wiwa 71, his emphasis). This is disciplinary power on the micro-level, as the soldiers' ability to follow orders is assessed solely through the movement of their legs. Their bodies are being measured and assessed while they are simultaneously socialized as soldiers. Ironically, Mene and the other soldiers do not even understand what some of these verbal commands mean: "This "*Qua Shun*'! and '*Tan Papa dere*' were very confusing at first. We cannot understand what they mean" (Saro-Wiwa 72, his emphasis). They learn to match their bodies with the words they hear, and the fact that these words are incomprehensible reinforces the idea that through their training, the soldiers are learning the language of discipline. As Emily Apter observes in her book chapter "War and Speech," Rotten English is "a language that transliterates the psychic damage of war" and "becomes the carrier of the stress marks and psychic cavities of stymied hopes, starvation, violence, humiliation, and paralysis" (Apter 145). One can also extend this idea to phrases like "Tan Papa dere." Apter writes: "The phrase "Tan Papa dere" (translated as "stand properly there") is an immobilizing command, marking the enduring partnership between colonial paternalism and military psychology in postcolonial Nigeria" (Apter 145). To extend Apter's argument, the change of "proper" to "papa" denotes the paternal qualities of the soldier giving the command, and conversely the childlike qualities of the soldier receiving the command. The hierarchy of the family is transposed into a military context through this language of discipline.

The soldiers also learn how to march, and the "left right, left right" rhythm of their movements appear not only during their training, but also during combat operations and when Manmuswak marches the prisoners out to be executed at the end of the novel (Saro-Wiwa 72, 82, 167). The soldiers' training has implications not only in the realm of power and hierarchy, but also in terms

of socialization and group dynamics. They move together "left right, left right," but they also eat together and live together—in one scene, they even feel together. After the soldiers receive news that "the Enemy is tired for the fight and so therefore all the training we are getting cannot be used at all," Mene cries with them: "I think I have to join the boys to cry" (Saro-Wiwa 79). This scene marks the final stage of Mene's socialization as a soldier. While thus far he has learned basic soldiering skills like marching and running, the fact he recognizes that he too must "join the boys to cry" means that he has embraced the life of a soldier fully, even on an emotional level (Saro-Wiwa 79). The disciplinary power which is part and parcel of the process of creating soldiers thereby exercises control not only over the limbs and muscles of the recruits as they march back and forth, but also over their tear ducts. The act of crying is a physical act, but it is usually rooted in strong emotions. Mene goes to cry with the other soldiers not because he is being coerced, but because disciplinary power has invaded his body to the fullest extent. Ironically, the boys cry because they are told they will have no chance to fight the enemy, but when that fight eventually comes, Mene begins to understand the true horror of war.

Another important moment in the text which exhibits Saro-Wiwa's focus on the physical body is of course the aftermath of the bombing attack, at which time Mene sees "soso human flesh in small small pieces! Finger, nail, hair, *prick*, *blokkus*" (Saro-Wiwa 111, emphasis his). The use of the word "soso" emphasizes the ubiquitousness of the dismembered bodies across the battlefield, just as "small small" foregrounds the level of carnage that has taken place—so many bodies have been destroyed ("soso"), and their destruction has been extremely thorough ("small small"). Furthermore, the words "prick" and "blokkus" appear in italics in the original text to highlight these body parts in particular (both component parts of the male anatomy). Mene's training as a soldier has been an entirely masculine undertaking from the beginning, so to emphasize these specific body parts is to call attention not to the fragmented human body but more specifically the fragmented male body. Masculinity and life itself are placed upon the same stage, and the destruction of one is as important as the destruction of the other. It is also clear that just as the masculine parts of the soldiers have been scattered across the battlefield, the homosocial bonds which united Mene with his compatriots have been dissolved forever. After the bombing, Mene runs away until he is exhausted and collapses: "I don't know how long I die. But I think I die for very very long time. When I wake up, I no fit carry up my hand sef" (Saro-Wiwa 113). Through Mene's narration, Saro-Wiwa likens his period of unconsciousness to a kind of death in order to

inscribe Mene's body in a particular way. Mene is not dead in the same physical sense as the soldiers killed by the bombs, he is only unconscious, but because he is alone in the forest without any compatriots or any other people, his dying is a kind of social death. Initially joining the soldiers gave Mene a new kind of social life, filled with the pride of wearing a uniform and the excitement of holding a weapon. But when Mene flees, he sheds his uniform: "I remove my soza uniform, remain just in my knicker and I begin run" (Saro-Wiwa 112). Sandra Meek calls attention to this motif of dressing and undressing in her article on the military and African postcolonial identity, arguing that "Saro-Wiwa uses the dress motif to symbolize Sozaboy's increasing awareness about the true nature of the military. Sozaboy undergoes a literal and symbolic dressing and stripping as he first accepts the propaganda ... then becomes bitterly disillusioned" (Meek 154). He forsakes any association with his compatriots in order to avoid potentially becoming a prisoner of war, and as he "dies" and collapses, his un-clothed body signifies his social death. This scene is in stark contrast to the previous one, in which Mene and the other soldiers cry together. While in that earlier scene it seems as if Mene's socialization as a soldier is complete, the violence of the bombing dissolves those emotional bonds.

Importantly, the trauma Mene experiences is also linked to his ability to speak. When Mene has finished recovering in the hospital and encounters Manmuswak again, he lies about being a soldier. The truth comes out when he is betrayed by his own body: "I told the soza captain I cannot shoot, that I am not soza at all since I was born. No sooner have I said this than I hear a voice behind me shouting *Quashun*! ... I immediately stand attention and stand at ease too like good soza" (Saro-Wiwa 123). The soza captain and Manmuswak know that Mene is truly a soldier because the disciplinary power inscribed in his body has left its traces. They lock Mene up in a small hut which serves as a prison, and tell him that they will cut his tongue out if he lies again (Saro-Wiwa 124). Mene dreams about this possibility: "I used to stay there and see as Manmuswak will come to me with long sharp knife in one hand and then he will hold my tongue with the other hand ... Then he will actually carry his hand up and then—cut my tongue from far inside my mouth" (Saro-Wiwa 124). It would be fair to say that Mene mostly fears the pain of having his tongue cut out, but in the context of Saro-Wiwa's story that employs Mene as both narrator and focalizer, the loss of the ability to speak would destroy any potential retelling of the novel's events. Without the ability to speak, Mene would be unable to explain his trauma to the reader, and Saro-Wiwa would consequently not be able to convey his message in the same

manner. The weight of *Sozaboy* is carried through the medium of language—without Mene's tongue, Saro-Wiwa would have to turn to a technique other than Rotten English, a language which is reinforced and sustained by both Saro-Wiwa's writing and Mene's physical voice. The body is therefore an integral part of Saro-Wiwa's project, as Mene's body bears the evidence of his trauma and his tongue transforms that trauma into language.

The importance of the physical body is also evident in Mene's attempts to convince the villagers of Dukana that he is not a ghost. When he returns to Dukana for the second time at the end of the novel, he meets his old friend Duzia: "I walked to him. "Give me your hand and let me hold you," is what Duzia said. I gave him my hand. "Now bend down and touch your toes." I bend down and touch my toes" (Saro-Wiwa 177). Duzia needs proof that Mene is alive, and Mene's voice is not sufficient. Duzia needs to touch him to be convinced of his physical existence, and Mene complies because he feels a need to prove he is alive—in a certain sense his story is only true if he is alive to tell it, and at this point, it seems as if Mene's entire purpose for remaining alive is to tell his story. Trauma marks the body, whether dead or alive, but one needs a voice to convey that trauma to future generations, which points to Saro-Wiwa's overarching project in *Sozaboy*.

In summary, Saro-Wiwa's treatment of Mene and Manmuswak reveals the importance of considering the ways in which trauma is inscribed in the body and the dynamics of perpetrator trauma respectively. Manmuswak's ability to switch sides during the conflict complicates any straightforward understanding of a perpetrator as a "bad guy," because he commits acts of violence on both sides of the war. Furthermore, Manmuswak's almost supernatural immunity to harm and his subscription to the idea that his "work is war" denote the configuration of the perpetrator as a monster—but when the war is over he flees, revealing his fragility and humanity. Saro-Wiwa's treatment of Manmuswak is the clearest representation of perpetrator trauma in the novel. Paying close attention to the character of Mene, on the other hand, yields interesting insights regarding how trauma manifests in the physical body. By discussing disciplinary power, masculinity, and the importance of having a voice, it becomes clear that Mene's physical body is an important site for the inscription of trauma within the text. Finally, Mene's denial that he is a ghost at two different points in the text reinforces the notion that a living voice is the most important medium for conveying one's trauma to others.

Section 7: Trauma and the Environment

Ken Saro-Wiwa is not known primarily for his novel *Sozaboy* or his other written works, but instead for his environmental activism and unflagging support for the Ogoni people. While this thesis has dealt with the nuances of language and trauma in *Sozaboy*, there is also a concrete need to locate Saro-Wiwa's novel within his larger life's work—specifically, his tireless campaign for human rights and environmental issues. Most scholars who have written on Saro-Wiwa and *Sozaboy* mention Saro-Wiwa's later environmental work (Nicholls, James, Perera-Singham), but I want to go further. I suggest that the trauma of the Nigeria-Biafran War conveyed through Rotten English is not separate from the environmental concerns presented in the novel. Instead, it is necessary to read trauma and the environment as part of the same textual system. Incorporating ecocritical perspectives to read *Sozaboy* is an opportunity to bring together theories of trauma and the environment in order to adequately apprehend the intersections between human and ecological traumas within the novel. This section seeks to "green" trauma theory to read *Sozaboy* with an eye towards the ways in which the traumatized landscape and ecology of Nigeria echo throughout the work.

Before going any further I would like to recall the story of Tancred and Clorinda. Earlier in my work, I traced the different iterations of the story in the work of different scholars and theorists, to include Freud, Caruth, Leys, and Craps, all of whom bring up slightly different concerns. For the purposes of my work, the iterative process starts with Freud, who uses the story as a poetic example of the repetition compulsion. Caruth, on the other hand, calls attention to the configuration of the wound and the voice in order to make an argument about the representability of trauma. Leys critiques Caruth's reading by asking questions about victimhood and culpability within the story. Finally, Craps points to the submerged racial dynamic in the story to emphasize Clorinda's role as a non-Western Other and Tancred's role as a European crusader. In his recent book chapter "Climate Trauma," Craps also argues: "The poem and its various readers are quick to trope away from environmental destruction, turning it into an image for human suffering" (Craps 281). According to Craps, readers of Tasso's story are likely to unquestioningly relate the "harm to the natural world (a cut in a tree)" to the "violence and trauma inflicted on and suffered by humans" without any thought for the role the environment plays in the scene (Craps 281). Starting from this observation, I want to move away from the entrenched focus on human trauma

in the story, and center Clorinda's tree as a site of environmental trauma. To briefly reiterate, after mistakenly killing his lover Clorinda in battle, Tancred travels to an enchanted forest where he strikes a tree with his sword and hears the voice of his beloved emanating from the wound. The tree contains the spirit of Clorinda, and the wound/voice reminds Tancred of what he has done—but why does Tasso, the author of the epic, choose to locate Clorinda's voice in a tree? If his goal is to magically force Tancred to recall the murder which he committed, this would be as easily accomplished by having Clorinda's voice float on the wind, or echo in Tancred's mind. However, I argue that using a tree as the vessel for Clorinda's spirit not only adds a visceral physicality to the scene, but also locates her trauma in a continuum with the non-human environment. The tree is alive, and so is the wound. Moreover, the tree is rooted in the ground and even though Tancred strikes it with his sword, it remains standing as a monument to Clorinda's death. The environment is thereby implicated in human trauma, and the tree is not just a stand-in for Clorinda, it is a separate, living being. This episode foregrounds what should be regarded as an ecocritical question: How does the physical environment answer for, or feel the residual effects of, the trauma humans inflict on one another? This question will animate the rest of my argument in this section.

7.1 Critical Backgrounds

A comprehensive overview of ecocritical theory is beyond the scope of this thesis, and will not be entirely necessary for the analysis that follows. Nevertheless, I will outline some of ecocriticism's key concerns in order to raise the issues which I think are most important in the context of Saro-Wiwa's novel. Ursula K. Heise provides a concise itinerary of ecocriticism in her article "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism." As she writes, ecocriticism has a triple allegiance "to the scientific study of nature, the scholarly analysis of cultural representations, and the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world" (Heise 506). As a field, ecocriticism is difficult to categorize or explain as it stretches across multiple disciplines, and as Heise goes on to write, "ecocriticism coheres more by virtue of a common political project than on the basis of shared theoretical and methodological assumptions" (Heise 506). This intersection between politics and theory within ecocriticism is highly contested, but it is clear that the field is occupied with complex questions of sustainability, representation, and ecology itself. Dana Phillips searches for the "truth" of ecology in her article "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology." She urges "that the "ecocentrism" of literature *not* be understood to hinge on

how well literature represents the natural world" and furthermore, she warns against "contradictory terms of realism" (Phillips 587). Phillips argues, critiquing Lawrence Buell's focus on realism and positivism in his environmental praxis (which allows him to reject theories he does not like), that instead "ecocriticism needs a rationale that will enable it to use the "resources" of literary theory while retaining some respect for the force of theory's 'premises'" (Phillips 585). In other words, an ecocriticism divorced from theory has no capacity for transformation, and becomes stagnant in its focus on realism and unwillingness to embrace abstraction.

In the age of climate change, ecocriticism becomes even more urgent, and there is a need to go further than discussing representations of nature and realism. One of the most important voices in ecocriticism today is Rob Nixon, whose highly influential article "Neoliberalism, Slow Violence, and the Environmental Picaresque" discusses *Animal's People*, a novel by Indra Sinha that imaginatively represents "the occluded relationships that result both from what I call slow violence and from the geographies of concealment in a neoliberal age" (Nixon 444). Nixon's work is perhaps the best example of a literary ecocriticism which is unapologetically political: "At stake here is the role of neoliberal globalization in exacerbating both uneven economic development and the uneven development of official memory" (Nixon 461). His politically-conscious reading practice echoes through much recent ecocritical work, including the edited volume *Regreening African Landscapes* which focuses on the African continent. As Ogaga Okuyade points out in his introduction to the text, there is a "conscious relationship between environmental and human rights in African cultural art forms" (Okuyade xiii). This relationship between the environmental and the human from a "rights" perspective is certainly political, and it underlines the need for new ways of understanding the environment beyond the realist aesthetics emphasized by earlier ecocritics like Buell. Finally, these political concerns necessitate an (even more) interdisciplinary turn in ecocriticism.

In many ways, this is already happening. Critics like Mei Mei Evans in "Queer(y)ing 'Nature'" bring queer theory into a dialogue with ecocriticism, and Lance Newman makes a similar move with Marxism in "Marxism and Ecocriticism." Other scholars have brought feminist and postcolonial concerns into their ecocritical studies, and this work continues today. I would also like to bring special attention to Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, who seek to infuse ecocriticism with affect theory in their book chapter "Toward an Affective Ecocriticism: Placing

Feeling in the Anthropocene.” As they write, “affect is ecological “by nature,” since it operates at the confluence of environments, texts, and bodies—including nonhuman and inanimate bodies” (Bladow and Ladino 8). Their work signals the interdisciplinary possibilities of ecocriticism as well as the importance of the body as a locus of affect and environmentality (and as I will later suggest, trauma). New terms like “ecological grief” can address an issue that Craps points out in his introduction to a special issue of *American Imago* (vol. 77, no. 1) which is that “psychological scholarship has been slow to address environmental issues”—hence the need for an effort to build bridges between different disciplines and methodological orientations (Craps 4). In “Climate Trauma,” Craps continues from a trauma theory perspective, noting: “Calls to rethink trauma from a broader conception of life or even inanimate matter, to give it a new materialist or post-humanist extension, challenge trauma studies to move beyond human exceptionalism and exemptionalism” (Craps 282). This is the beginning of a more globally inclusive vision of trauma, and I argue that Saro-Wiwa’s *Sozaboy* belongs within this paradigm.

7.2 Re-Locating **Sozaboy** *in an Ecocritical Context*

Much of Saro-Wiwa’s written work, apart from *Sozaboy*, has already been discussed through an ecocritical lens. In his book chapter “Pipedreams: Ken Saro-Wiwa, Environmental Justice, and Micro-minority Rights,” Nixon brings his environmental critique to the Ogoni example: “Saro-Wiwa understood that environmentalism needs to be reimagined through the experiences of the minorities who are barely visible on the global economic periphery” (Nixon 112). For Nixon, Saro-Wiwa’s “belief in an instrumental aesthetics” which is manifest in works like *A Month and a Day*, enabled him to “articulate the literature of commitment in expressly environmental terms (Nixon 109). Feghabo Charles Cliff brings more attention to *A Month and a Day* in his book chapter “Isidore Okpewho’s *Tides* and Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *A Month and a Day*: A Kinesis of Eco-Activism from Theory to Praxis” which appears in *Regreening African Landscapes*. For Cliff, this work “marks a new beginning in African literature vis-a-vis the praxis of eco-activism in literature” (Cliff 61). It also “reveals a symbiotic relationship between the people of the Niger Delta and their environment,” which is a sentiment appearing in another of Saro-Wiwa’s works, his book *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* published in 1992 (Cliff 71). As Saro-Wiwa explains:

> To the Ogoni, the land on which they lived and the rivers which surrounded them were very important. They not only provided sustenance in abundance, they were also a spiritual inheritance. The land is a god and worshipped as such ... This respect for the land means that forests are not merely a collection of trees and the abode of animals but also, and more intrinsically, a sacred possession. Trees in the forest cannot therefore be cut indiscriminately without regard for their sacrosanctity and their influence on the well-being of the entire community, of the land. (Saro-Wiwa 12)

This conception of the land in spiritual terms reinforces the absolute sacrilege of Shell B.P.'s actions in Ogoniland, which included gas flaring (leading to pollution and acid rain), oil spills, and the pollution of various bodies of water (Saro-Wiwa 81-82). Moreover, Saro-Wiwa posits that "the oil of the Ogoni and other minorities in the delta provided part of the hidden agenda of the Nigerian Civil War" (Saro-Wiwa 84). Even though *Sozaboy* is ostensibly a novel of the Nigeria-Biafran War, Saro-Wiwa's dedication to environmental issues, both through his works *A Month and a Day* and *Genocide in Nigeria*, as well as through his lifelong activism, provides ample reason to return to *Sozaboy* with an ecocritical eye.

7.3 Ecological Trauma: Birds, Beasts, and Bombs

From the beginning of the novel, Saro-Wiwa treats the environment as an integral part of village life in Dukana. When "everybody in Dukana was happy at first," the villagers celebrate by "eating plenty maize with pear and knacking tory under the moon. Because the work on the farm have finished and the yams were growing well well" (Saro-Wiwa 1). The war has not reached Dukana yet, so the villagers are celebrating together and telling stories as they enjoy the fruits of their harvest. The phrasing of "the work on the farm have finished" also reinforces the idea that everyone participates in cultivating the earth, as the grammatical agent or agents who complete the work do not appear in the sentence—the work is simply finished, and the individual worker is not relevant because the entire village does the work. Furthermore, this passage illustrates the symbiotic relationship between the villagers and their environment. Just as the villagers are "happy," the "yams were growing well well" (Saro-Wiwa 1). There is a new government in power, which is part of the reason why the people are celebrating, and one woman says "that the sun will shine proper proper" because of the new government (Saro-Wiwa 1). This idyllic scene is echoed in the beginning of "Lomber Four" or the fourth chapter. As Saro-Wiwa writes: "It was beautiful new moon for Dukana. You can see all the plantain and banana as they are standing

straight and tall inside the moon. No wind at all" (Saro-Wiwa 36). Even though at this point in the novel "there is trouble for the country," that trouble has yet to disrupt the peace in Dukana (Saro-Wiwa 36). The image of the plantains and banana plants standing "inside the moon" probably refers to the plants being illuminated by the light of the moon, but the use of the word "inside" locates the plants and the moon in a kind of continuum with one another (Saro-Wiwa 36). While the plants are not literally "inside" the moon, Saro-Wiwa's Rotten English points towards a kind of ecological cosmology, in which celestial bodies like the moon are connected with plants on the ground, and both are in harmony with the people of Dukana. However, all of this changes once the war invades Mene's narrative and reaches the village.

One of Mene's dreams provides the first hint that the natural world might have a part to play in the upcoming conflict. As trouble comes closer and closer to Dukana, Mene dreams that the entire village gathers in a church amidst a call for general conscription. Mene is seized by some soldiers, but he runs away and tries to swim across a river to escape: "I was swimming all this time, oh. Then I reach the other bank again and I climbed it and got into the bush. The bush catch my leg and wound me for body. My body all full of wound. Blood. The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Saro-Wiwa 48). In this scene, the religious image of the blood of Christ signifies that Mene is a kind of sacrifice—just as Christ is believed to have died for the sins of man, Mene suffers for his people, and the thorns on the bush evoke the image of Christ's crown of thorns represented in religious iconography. The fact that he is one of the only men from Dukana who goes to fight in the war reinforces the idea that his enlistment is a kind of sacrifice for his people. However, the wounds he suffers from the bush are not human-inflicted, like Christ's wounds, but instead are inflicted by nature itself. The bush that "wound me for body" is transformed into a malicious actor who harms Mene because he runs from his fate and from his future as a soldier (Saro-Wiwa 48).

These events frame nature not as a passive observer but as an active participant in the lives of humans, which is a theme that continues throughout the novel. Furthermore, the true significance of Mene's dream is revealed in the events that follow. After Mene climbs out of the river, he runs back to the village and returns to the church, but no one is there. He then goes to his mother's house, but no one is there either. The only people he sees are part of a big group of soldiers singing songs and marching, but then he wakes up and realizes that it was all a dream. The disappearance of the village people and his mother in his dream prefigures Mene's return to

Dukana after the war has ended, when he realizes that his mother and Agnes have been killed. His dream-wound from the bush is therefore linked to a psychic wound he has not yet experienced, namely the deaths of his mother and Agnes.

After Mene's training as a soldier is complete, he must travel in a canoe with the rest of his group to a site in the forest where the will make camp. As Saro-Wiwa writes:

> We entered the mangrove. The toads were singing everywhere. But I do not hear the sound of any bird. Only toad. I am telling you, this thing fear me small. Because toad singing is not sign of good omen. And you know how bad this toad singing can be. Like say porson die. And by this time, every place come dark again because of the tall mangrove and other trees. The daybreak never reach inside the mangrove. (Saro-Wiwa 82)

The artificial darkness of the forest stands in sharp contrast to the village woman's observation at the beginning of the novel that the "sun will shine proper proper" because of the new government (Saro-Wiwa 1). To continue, the singing of the toads sound to Mene like "say porson die" which lends this scene a sense of foreboding (Saro-Wiwa 82). Given that this site in the forest is where the cataclysmic bombing attack happens later in the novel, it seems that Mene is right to view the music of the toads as a reason to worry. Interestingly, Mene's thoughts about his own situation are influenced mostly by the environment in this scene, rather than more logical concerns like his relatively low level of training as a soldier, or his lack of knowledge about their battle plan. Mene is not worried about the future because he is fighting in a war he does not understand, he is instead worried because the toads are singing. This reinforces Saro-Wiwa's observation in *Genocide in Nigeria* that the Ogoni people have a symbiotic relationship with the land and their physical environment. While Mene may not be Ogoni (as the name "Ogoni" is never mentioned in the novel), the fact that Saro-Wiwa mentions the Kana language in *Sozaboy*, which is one of the Ogoni languages, makes it reasonable to apply the Ogoni philosophy of the land to the events in *Sozaboy*. In many ways, the toads in the forest speak a clearer truth to Mene than most of the other characters in the novel. While other characters confuse him with "big grammar" or outright lie to him, the toads have a simple message—death is coming.

Just before the bombing of the soldiers' camp, Mene's friend Bullet murders the captain of the soldiers. They are on a boat patrol through the swamp, and Bullet shoots the captain in the back as he looks through his binoculars. As Saro-Wiwa writes: "The waves did not disturb us again. By

this time the water have full the mangrove. No mudskipper or crab again. Even the birds for the tree did not sing again" (Saro-Wiwa 108). Mene only sees one vulture who "began to follow us as we were moving through the creeks to the camp" (Saro-Wiwa 108). The presence of the vulture, an animal which is usually linked with death, stands in contrast to the absence of other swamp creatures like mudskippers and crabs. The natural world surrounds the soldiers and seems to be watching the boat patrol, and it sends an agent of death to follow the men back to their camp. The vulture witnesses Bullet's betrayal just as the other soldiers do, but he does not pass judgement, only follows them to the camp because he knows more death is on its way. The inclusion of certain animals, including the vulture, signals different meanings within the text. While the singing toads give Mene a general feeling of dread, the hungry vulture signifies the loss of life that is about to occur. In this way, the two animals form a kind of continuum of submerged meanings within the novel and sometimes foreshadow future events. The next morning is when the bombing attack occurs, and Mene survives, fleeing the site of carnage. Alone in the forest, Mene is taken care of by nature: "The water I dey drink na the dew wey settle for leaf for early morning. Then sometime I will find the root of cassava. I will chop it just like that. Then I find plenty fruit" (Saro-Wiwa 115). He drinks the dew that collects on leaves, and the vegetables he is able to find, and he manages to survive. Here, nature takes on more of a positive role and provides food and water for Mene. All of these moments reinforce the fact that the natural world in *Sozaboy* is not a passive, disconnected observer of human events, but rather a force that introduces meaning in the text and is intimately involved with human affairs.

This trend continues when Mene returns for the first time to Dukana: "Nobody. All the houses were just there. Some of the doors are closed, others the doors are open. But nobody at all. Even one porson ... No noise. Even no bird is singing or talking in Dukana. Impossible" (Saro-Wiwa 129). The abandoned village he sees is quite different from the Dukana of the beginning of the novel, when the villagers were happy and celebrating. Mene is unable to comprehend a Dukana without people or the sound of birds singing, which is why he exclaims: "Impossible" (Saro-Wiwa 129). He enters his old house, but finds nothing: "Not even cockroach or rat" (Saro-Wiwa 129). It is one thing for the birds to be silent in Dukana, but even the undesirable animals like cockroaches and rats are nowhere to be found. Dukana has been abandoned by the animals, and it is being reclaimed by plant life: "Only plenty grass everywhere. Everywhere. Even some of the road have begin to close because of grass. Soso grass" (Saro-Wiwa 129). The presence of grass discourages

a reading of the village as decayed—even though there are no animals or people, there is still life in Dukana. Even during an extremely destructive war, the natural landscape is able to survive, showcasing a kind of quiet resilience that lends a modicum of hope to this scene. For if the grass remains, maybe one day people will return to Dukana. Later in the novel, after Mene escapes execution at the hands of Manmuswak, he hides in the bush. He hears people on the road saying that the war has ended, but he remains in the wilderness: "Then after two nights and two days and true true I do not hear the sound of gun again, only birds singing in the tree for morning time and in the night just cricket making noise, I think that true true praps the war have ended" (Saro-Wiwa 169). At this point in the narrative, Mene no longer trusts the word of other people. Instead, he trusts his ears and the fact that the birds have started singing again. During the scenes in the novel that take place during the war, there is a noticeable lack of birdsong. While Mene might see vultures or hear toads singing, birdsong is usually explicitly absent during the war. However, once the war has ended, the birds start to sing again. The birds, and some of the other animals within the novel (like the cockroaches and rats) seem to understand the difference between a time of war and a time of peace, which is all the more reason for an ecologically-minded reading of *Sozaboy*.

When it comes to trauma in the novel, understanding the physical environment of *Sozaboy* is critical. As I have already discussed, the physical environment and the people in the novel participate in a symbiotic relationship. What affects one group certainly affects the other, and the same is true in the case of war and trauma. The clearest example of this is perhaps the bombing attack: "Everywhere was full of pit and pit and pit" (Saro-Wiwa 111). Some of these pits were dug by the soldiers for fighting positions, but most of these pits in the earth are caused by the exploding bombs. The land itself is literally a participant in the conflict—it protects the soldiers when they are in their fighting positions, but feels the damage of the bombs as the soldiers do. The attack dismembers the soldiers around Mene, but it scars the earth as well. In this sense, the trauma of the attack is visited both on the soldiers and on the land. The pits in the earth are ubiquitous, "pit and pit and pit," and the loss and trauma Mene experiences when he sees his dead compatriots can be seen as "pits" in his psyche, as the mental scars of the attack persist throughout the rest of the novel. Furthermore, this point relates to Brendon Nicholls' contention that within the novel, "the environment may be positioned like an unconscious" (Nicholls 57). Nicholls reads the environment in the novel as a collection of appetites, and as he argues: "The simplification of international geopolitics and national civil war to the basics of appetite highlights the redundancy

and disposability of the human in the applications of military power" (Nicholls 66). He cites specifically the comparisons Saro-Wiwa makes between refugees in the camp and different animals. For example, people "suffer and die like hen and ant and goat" and children have "mosquito legs" (Saro-Wiwa 145, 148). For these refugees the war means hunger, but for the men who profit from the conflict, war means plenty: "So these bellymen are friends of the sozas and of the politicians and the traders. And they are all trading in the life of men and women and children. And their customer is death" (Saro-Wiwa 156). Two of these bellymen are Pastor Barika and Chief Birabee, who are "very fat like pig" in the camp where other villagers are starving (Saro-Wiwa 158). The reduction of politics and human greed to animal appetites reinforces Nicholls' idea of an environmental unconscious in the novel—war and strife reduce people to their base instincts and reveal the "disposability of the human" (Nicholls 66).

These observations work against the arguments of scholars like Alexander Fyfe, who in his article "The Textual Politics of the Land in the Writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa" contends that Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* and his memoir *On a Darkling Plain* "treat the war in prose, but in neither text is the topic approached in terms that relate directly to the land" (Fyfe 82). Even though the land and the environment in the text may be submerged, or "unconscious" as Nicholls would put it, that does not mean that *Sozaboy* does not have specifically ecological concerns. I argue that is impossible, or at least counterproductive, to divorce Saro-Wiwa's fiction from his environmental work. As Jennifer Wenzel argues in her article on what she calls petro-magic realism:

> Ken Saro-Wiwa's status—as a writer (and publisher) of fiction and television series, as an activist for the Ogoni people, and, after his death in 1995, as a symbol of, if not a martyr to, the constitutive element of petro-violence in the Nigerian state—offers a spectacular example of the intersections among literary publishing, petroleum extraction, and the production of the Nigerian nation-state. (Wenzel 458)

In a modern context of continued environmental degradation and capitalist resource exploitation, there is a concrete need to reconceptualize *Sozaboy*'s place in not only the Nigeria-Biafran War canon, but also in the global canon of environmental literature. Mene's voice cries out against the violence and trauma of war, but his character also provides a model for an ecologically-traumatized subject. When he returns for the second time to his village at the end of the novel, he is forced to leave under threat of death because the villagers believe he is a ghost, bringing disease and bad luck to Dukana. As Mene departs for the last time, he reflects on his experience during the

war, “I was just thinking how the war have spoiled my town Dukana, uselessed many people, killed many others, killed my mama and my wife ... and now it have made me like porson wey get leprosy because I have no town again” (Saro-Wiwa 181). For Mene, the war has rendered the land of his village inaccessible to him. His old house is gone, and he is not welcome in Dukana anymore. Bombs have destroyed terrain, people have been displaced, and the overall impact of the war has been felt by both the land and the people on it—not in separate terms, but in the same terms. Much like the war, environmental exploitation of the kind Saro-Wiwa campaigned against spoils towns, renders people useless or dead, and creates refugees. It takes away peoples' livelihoods and fundamentally alters the way they must live in the world. Just as war is caused by humans, so too is environmental degradation—and just as Mene is rendered homeless and set adrift by war, the Ogoni people were displaced by Shell B.P.'s scramble for oil. Consequently, the environment is implicated in the trauma Saro-Wiwa conveys through Rotten English, necessitating an ecocritical reading of trauma within the text.

Conclusion

This thesis begins with the idea that Ken Saro-Wiwa's Rotten English in *Sozaboy* deserves sustained attention from the perspective of trauma theory and ecocriticism. Specifically, I seek to position Rotten English as an extremely effective textual strategy for representing trauma, and in doing so, broaden the scope of literary trauma studies beyond the European modernist canon. I also incorporate perspectives from ecocriticism to contribute to ongoing critical conversations on ecological trauma, and to encourage an (even more) explicit interdisciplinary turn in literary studies.

I ground my methodology in theories of representation and criticism espoused by Aristotle, Northrop Frye, Roland Barthes, and several others. Narrowing my object of study to the field of African literatures, I draw upon the work of Eldred D. Jones, Kenneth Harrow, Abdul Janmohamed, and Christopher Miler to explain different methods of reading African texts, as well as the shortcomings and fallacies of these methods. I then turn to Mbembe's notion of the planetary library, which I argue is in line with Frantz Fanon's thinking on history and belonging, to explain how I plan to read *Sozaboy*. For a more detailed explanation of my methodology, I cite the work of I. A. Richard and Barbara Herrnstein Smith on close reading, and Jonathan Kramnick's thinking on the task of criticism in general. To avoid a misguided reading of Saro-

Wiwa's novel in a one-to-one relationship with society in Nigeria, I subscribe to Ato Quayson's critical orientation in his work *Calibrations: Reading for the Social* which stresses transformation, process, and contradiction rather than a search for fundamental truths.

Additionally, I give a critical overview of literary trauma theory which starts with Sigmund Freud and continues through Cathy Caruth and Ruth Leys, concluding with Stef Craps. The section that follows critiques common "canons" of works on the Nigeria-Biafran War that privilege novels written by Igbo authors and do not often include books by minority authors like Saro-Wiwa. I link this idea to Godwin Onuoha's study of discursive hierarchies in the post-war Nigerian state to argue that centering Saro-Wiwa's minority account of the war is both politically subversive and necessary. My next section discusses the politics of Rotten English and incorporates the contentious debate on the language of African literatures, which includes the voices of Achebe and Thiong'o as well as Saro-Wiwa. I also bring in ideas of orality, pidginization, and the uses of Rotten English for community building, citing Michael North's seminal article on the topic. To conclude my section on Rotten English, I discuss Fanon's notion of a "literature of combat" as well as Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a minor literature.

My first section of close reading focuses broadly on trauma and representation in *Sozaboy*. In particular, I concentrate on the literary representation of war, violence, and the human body. I also mention the repeated tautology of "war is war," and discuss the refugee camps in the novel from the perspective of Agamben's concept of bare life. I conclude this section by analyzing Mene's two returns to his village of Dukana, when he is taken to be a spirit or ghost. My following section explores perpetrator trauma and traumatic embodiment through the character analysis of Manmuswak and Mene. I describe how Manmuswak's ability to change sides throughout the novel problematizes assumptions about perpetrators being the "bad guys," and how Mene's transformation from civilian to soldier provides a way to think about the embodiment of trauma through disciplinary power. Finally, my last section explores the possibilities of a combined ecocritical/trauma theory reading of *Sozaboy*. I suggest that an ecocritical perspective on *Sozaboy* is necessary in light of Saro-Wiwa's environmental advocacy throughout his life, and furthermore, that such a perspective provides an opportunity to extend on recent work which blends ecological questions with trauma theory. In an era in which humans are increasingly affected by climate change and ecological disasters, there is a need to pay closer attention to the ways in which the

environment is implicated in human trauma, and vice versa. In *Sozaboy*, war affects both humans and the physical environment. While my work does not establish an extensive theory of ecological trauma as a result of war, it does reinforce the possibilities of a combined ecocritical/trauma theory perspective.

In conclusion, this thesis does not aim to be an exhaustive work on Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*. There are many fascinating issues the text raises which I did not have the space to discuss in my work, including Zaza's tale of "Hitla" which calls attention to African involvement in the second World War, the gender dynamics in Agnes and Mene's relationship, the hospital dormitory as a space of disciplinary power and bodily control, and the significance of the ritual used to drive Mene away from Dukana at the end of the novel. I also hope that scholars with linguistic expertise on Nigerian Pidgin English eventually conduct more in-depth studies on Rotten English, as my lack of experience in that area is one of the shortcomings of this work. However, this thesis is one of the only extended studies of Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* from the perspective of language and trauma. I am explicit about the ideological implications of viewing Rotten English as an innovative means of representing trauma, and what that means for recent efforts within literary studies to decolonize trauma theory. This thesis also seeks to privilege Saro-Wiwa's voice within the canon of Nigeria-Biafran War novels, which many scholars have overlooked in favor of the typical Igbo accounts of the war. Furthermore, my last section which blends ecocriticism and trauma theory provides a unique framework for discussing ecological trauma within Saro-Wiwa's novel, even if I stop short of establishing a robust theory of eco-trauma. If this thesis does anything to elevate the status of Saro-Wiwa's oeuvre within academia and encourage more people to read *Sozaboy*, then my goal will have been realized.

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