

# **The Aesthetics of Orality in Ojukwu's Biafra War Speeches**

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## **Abstract**

One of the many apprehensions that attend the criticism of Biafra War literature is the certification of its artistic warrant, given the perceivable inclination to facts and historicity. Nonetheless, the war event has yielded all the genres of modern literary creativity, and for which criticism also is rife. Seemingly, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu's Biafra War speeches, which have been an inalienable condiment of this literary inclination, scarcely have a place in the discourse of African literature. However, it is possible to underscore the linguistic patterns often identified among distinguished Igbo orators such as are also bequeathed upon tortoise in the Igbo folktale tradition. Particularly noteworthy of the circumstances of Ojukwu's speeches is the underdog and survivalist placement of Biafra in the face of what was regarded as a civil war. That the better equipped Federal side had an unrestrained support of Britain had aroused sympathy from within and without the Biafra enclave and instructed the propensity of Ojukwu's speeches to the imperatives of survival. All these justify the correlation of the known conflicts in which the tortoise figure is often portrayed. It is in this regard that this work hypothetically implicates the Igbo oral literary tradition and the possibilities of appraising its consequence on the rhetoric of Ojukwu's war speeches. Therefore this work examines how the language forms in the speeches translate into modes whose figures do not diminish the verbal, yet aesthetic elements of orality.

## **Introduction**

Chukwuemeka Ojukwu's Biafra War speeches remain a phenomenal influence on what is prevalent today as Biafra War Literature. Extracts of these speeches have often been made to embellish the narratives on this subject matter. However, the language in use in these speeches maintains a balance between the oral and the written patterns of expression. In the discourse of language, the transition from the oral to the written mode generates multimodal levels of analysis which integrate the potentials of the oral tradition in the written medium. These speeches may be examined with particular recourse to such language theories as speech act, pragmatics and other levels of discourse – discourse analysis and even the extension in critical discourse analysis. In the core literary studies, there are possibilities of structuring discursive frameworks around such theories as Marxism cum revolutionary aesthetics, sociological criticism, new historicism, postcolonialism and even eco-criticism. Indeed, extensive research has gone in these regard. However, little has been done to appreciate the aesthetics and culture of orality within the texts of these speeches.

The texts containing the speeches for analysis in this work, are authored by Lt. Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Head of the then proclaimed Biafra nation. These two texts are – *Biafra: Selected Speeches with Journals of Events* and *Random Thoughts of C. Odumegwu Ojukwu*. Very many speeches were rendered at various points, but those that proceeded from the Biafran commander attracted a greater audience. They did not only give the required update on the war events, but they mostly stimulated the will of the Biafran people to keep up their struggle for survival. The assumption which propels this research is that there are forceful literary effects as there are ideological constructs in all the speeches as will be seen in the analysis here. They appear more succinct in recollecting patterns that are peculiar to the Igbo narrative tradition. These speeches are

considered to be unique because of their significance in the upshot of Biafra War literature, in both the creative and critical works. In Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of A Yellow Sun*, an instance recollecting one of the speeches is found here: "Fellow countrymen and women, you the people of Eastern Nigeria: Conscious of the supreme authority of the Almighty God over all mankind...I do solemnly proclaim..."(161-162). Some of these factual and historical echoes inundate both the autobiographical and fictional narratives on the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War.

In summing up his editorial, Emenyonu cites a previous work which had investigated the fictions and memoirs of the Biafra War. His judgment is that "the commitment in political terms overwhelms the artistic vision"(xiv). Ijeoma Nwajiaku who had embarked upon a comparative review of Chukwuema Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* and Adichie's *Half of A Yellow Sun* identified some of the sociological consequences of the Biafra war. Simply, Nwajiaku relates how much literary works have been derived from the war experience: "In the case of Nigeria, one could safely assert that the civil war remains a singular important event that has remained a source of inspiration for creative writing in the years following the event" (40). In this regard also, Charles Nnolim (145), views *Half of a Yellow Sun* as the kind of historical novel whose accounts are detailed and precise in recalling the horrors of massacres, mass starvation and the struggle for survival which marked the vicissitudes of the Biafran War. Perhaps, it needs to be observed that the Biafra challenge is comparable to the varied conflicts in the Igbo folktales.

Chimalum Nwankwo's estimation of Biafra War literature is that what has been produced is inadequate. He places the estimation of the inadequacy against the artistic recollection of war events in Zimbabwean writings, in which "agonies run like fresh springs in the fictions of its authors" (7). Furthermore, Nwankwo recollects Eddie Iroh's *Forty Eight Guns for the General*, Ossie Enekwe's *Come Thunder*, Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died*, and concludes that the works appear to

evade the confrontation of the battle front while dwelling on the excesses of General Yakubu Gowon. He mentions a few other works that are adjudged to be “robust”. These include: Elechi Amadi’s *Entrangement*, Cyprain Ekwensi’s *Survive the Peace*, Chinua Achebe’s *Girls at War*, Flora Nwapa’s *Wives at War* and Festus Iyayi’s *Awaiting Court Martial*. Clearly, these critics have paid less attention to the aesthetics of the Biafra War literature that are latent in the culture of orality.

In *Half of A Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda Adichie scintillatingly captures the personality of Ojukwu as well as the substance of his speech:

I came to ask you a question,’ he said. His Oxford-accented voice was surprisingly soft; it did not have the timbre that it did over the radio and it was a little theatrical, a little too measured. ‘What shall we do? Shall we keep silent and let them force us back into Nigeria? Shall we ignore the thousands of our brothers and sisters killed in the north?...Are you prepared? Are we prepared?...’(170).

What this presentation does is to generate the facts of the war in giving veracity to her fictional narrative. *Half of A Yellow Sun* also recollects a Biafra War song as a consequence of the aroused survival instincts and the spontaneous response to Ojukwu’s speeches: “Yes! Yes! Ojukwu, *nye anyi egbe!* Give us guns! Iwe di anyi n’obi! There is anger in our hearts!”(171). *Half of A Yellow Sun* presents sights at the relief centres where some more Biafran songs touch on the enormity of food scarcity (283).

In Olusegun Obasanjo’s *My Command*, the highpoints in the take-off and the progression of the war: the fall of Nsukka, Enugu, Bonny, Port Harcourt, Calabar and the extent to which the recapture of some of these towns kept up the charge of

the battle. Ironically, Obasanjo reveals the quintessence of the Ojukwu's submissions at the Aburi meeting. Obasanjo presents, somewhat inadvertently, the foresight and brilliance in Ojukwu's Aburi submission. Obasanjo's observation is that all the other participants, with the exception of Ojukwu, were naïve, inarticulate and unintuitive. This observation is captured here:

...although Ojukwu was given to overstatement and hyperbolic expression there was no doubt that, by the time he had secured arms and ammunition from French, Spanish and Portuguese sources while he had assurance of support by both France and South Africa. The Federal side, at that time, were getting their small arms from Britain, Italy and West Germany...(65)

Rose Adaure Njoku's account of the war which stretches through the events that preceded the war, the entire thirty months of war experience and indeed beyond the cease-fire recollects the desperation of the ill-prepared Biafran side:

...More and more civilians were streaming into the Army Headquarters asking for uniforms and arms to defend Biafra. Civil servants, lecturers graduates and undergraduates, students, teachers, traders and farmers became soldiers with little or no training. In front of the barracks of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at Abakiliki Road, you would hear them sing:

*Ojukwu nye anyi egbe*

*Anyi je gbagbue Gowon*

*(Ojukwu give us gun to go and shoot down Gowon)...*(109)

In *Rebels Against Rebels* Nelson Ottah takes a specific focus on the details of the execution of the four saboteurs on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1967. This emotive

occurrence remains one of the most significant events that bothered on the survival of the Biafran nationhood as well as the survival of art that pertain to the civil war. The identification with the poetics of orality, as the theoretical framework for this study, receives evocation in the propositions of Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike in their decolonization project. Part of what the troika assert is that a critic's obligation is to supply to the writer as well as to the audience "a well researched and well analyzed knowledge of things valued in traditional African orature, and why these are valued" (286). They also recognize that every orator requires to present certain basic ingredients of orality. In justifying their argument, they had gone ahead to cite Achebe thus: "The good orator calls to his aid the legends, folklore, proverbs & c. of his people; they are some of the raw material with which he works" (263). In the consideration that the oratorical force in these speeches came as a consequence of his study at Oxford University and the quintessence in historical studies, it becomes imperative to decolonize the linguistic forms and aesthetics by interrogating their leaning on the poetics of Igbo rhetoric.

### **Locating the Culture of Orality in Ojukwu's Speeches**

The word 'oral' has always been used to relate to the act of speaking and is often located in its primal position to writing. The parallelism in the primacy of speaking over writing succinctly resonates in the perception that the oral tradition has become a veritable source of raw equipment for the modern African literary tradition in writing. The term 'orality' has been in use in contemporary literary discourse as a derivation from oral literature. It ostensibly evolves as the term 'orature' did, but has received a wider acceptability in the criticism of modern African literary art. The assumption is that 'orality' serves a fitting significance not just in the adoption of the properties of the verbal art in writing but that it serves a greater purpose in preserving the African oral tradition. Therefore, with the

discourse on 'orality', there are possibilities of analyzing the processes and transformation of the original oral text in the written medium. It is in this regard that this work considers how the ingredients of traditional Igbo orality yield the communicative force in Ojukwu's war speeches. In this consideration, there is a requirement to examine the implications of orality and aesthetics in the texts of the war speeches, some with more or less adherence to their established and original forms of expression.

What has often been interrogated as oral literary traditions are often interlaced with the life, culture and ritualized festivals and festivities of a given people. The word 'culture' is often associated with the way of life of a people, particularly as it also relates to their social organization. The perception of culture is often tied to a certain geographical locale. In this regard, Schaefer views culture as "the totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects and behaviour" (65). Generally speaking, culture embodies the habitual elements that have the potentials for impacting positively or negatively on the lives and preoccupations of a people. In this light, culture may be seen to reflect the patterns adopted by groups in order to actualize their goals and aspirations. In the consideration that the art of literary criticism pertains to a given group whose inclination is to appreciate the degree of alignment or departure from the known precepts, it is valid to identify the approach by which this is done. Fuery and Mansfield observe that, "Language is the lifeblood of culture" (14). In this regard, language remains the vehicle through which the components of culture are seen.

Each artist, whether in the oral or written mode adopts the properties of specialized language. Usually, it is the kind of language that is structured to enforce emotional power. While language remains the basic equipment in the literary culture, it is often contrived to thrust measures of emotional appeal on the audience. While one

artist's style may be seen to differ from another, metaphors, euphemisms, ironies, rhetorical questions and varied allusions have become the key ingredients that are common in the culture of employing literary language. The configuration of Ojukwu's rhetoric becomes the subject of investigation in this work, with particular attention to how certain patterns of the oral literary expression, of the Igbo kind extend to the written medium, with some more or less refurbishment.

As a creative writer, Achebe accepts the English language as a burden, and with this consciousness embarked upon the project of domesticating it. Indeed, such craft draws a close attention to Wali's suggestions on "The Dead End of African Literature?". In its real consequence of provoking crucial interrogation, Wali appears to place a demand on the stakeholders, suggesting that "Literature after all, is the exploitation of the possibilities of language. It is the African languages that are in crying need of this development" (283). It is easy to see in Achebe's works, varied adoptions of the Igbo literary tradition. By the term 'varied', the multiple genres of this literary tradition as well as the seeming complexity in their contextual application are all significant in exploiting the elements of the Igbo language, indeed with all accompanying cultural implications. In this regard, Achebe's identification with the proverb as 'the palm oil with which words are eaten', is phenomenal. In the sphere of African literary creativity, as well as criticism, the view of the proverb as language delicacy with fitting correlation to given contexts cannot be overemphasized. Proverbial variations may be structured as the abridgement of certain folktales, parables or parodies, relating figures that draw from their original adaptation.

The components of the oral tradition as seen in Ojukwu's speeches may not be recognized in their original form. Rather, there is some kind of language engineering which ensures that the compatibility with Standard English usage is

made obvious. Therefore, whereas the narrative style in the Biafran War speeches is described as being parodic, there are components of the oral tradition which sustain the varied use of metaphor. These include: adopting certain patterns that are known to pertain to folktale, myths, proverbs, riddles and parables. In some instances, cursory allusions are made which are no less evocative. The parodic adoptions which occur in more or less degrees in the speeches are seen to be laden with the properties of orality. We shall examine how the components of orality; parables, proverbs, riddles, allusions to the Igbo folktale, myths; are made to carry literary effects as they express the specificity of the Igbo culture and patterns of communication, especially within the war speeches.

There are metaphoric adoptions in Ojukwu's speeches that assume the figure which Cuddon prefers to recognize as 'exemplum' (259). The adoption of proverbs is also seen, not usually in the known bipartite structure, but with some kind of transition. In such transitions, the basic symbols that form the core of the meaning are pinpointed. Cuddon's definition of the proverb as "A short pithy saying which embodies a general truth .... Common to most nations and peoples, it is a form of expression of great antiquity" (566), finds elucidation in the speeches under analysis here. While they do not exactly come in the traditional structure, their pertinence to the Igbo tradition remain pronounced. There is this instance of adopting a parable here: "This has been a people's war. Our people know that our struggle is a race for life. In such a race, nobody ever tires. We have a united people. We have a clear goal. We have a just cause." (Random Thoughts: 47). In this, we find a recapitulation of the Igbo proverb, *Osondu agwu ike* – No one gets tired in a race for life. The truth which is reiterated here relates in clear terms the Igbo penchant for the struggle for survival – *igba mbo*. And by affirming that the

Biafrans “have a just cause”, there is an emphatic pronouncement of the fundamental rights that are inalienable in a just society.

There are certain adoptions of the elements of the Igbo riddle in the speeches. We find a unique style in which Ojukwu’s speeches pose questions that are similar to the Igbo riddle game. Chukwuma demonstrates how the questions in riddles are presented, in what she regards as “The Variable Premise”. According to Chukwuma, there is “a puzzling element in the riddle. The Variable Premise is sometimes implied and sometimes mentioned or given” (115). Cuddon corroborates Chukwuma in defining the riddle as “an ancient and universal form of literature, in its commonest form it consists of a puzzle question” (611). There is this instance where the speeches bear the evidence that rhetorical questions are displaced with what we regard as ‘riddling questions’.

In a riddle, the contrivances and clues to each answer should make the ‘riddling questions’ more like an objective test – that is, having just one option. We find this kind of riddle effect created in this speech:

We have made so many sacrifices in the past, and I am sure that you all agree with me that we cannot continue making sacrifices indefinitely. We now have our back to the wall. One more push and we either have to fight back or be crushed. (selected Speech: 39)

There are pertinent suggestions on what the speaker aims at achieving in this speech without mentioning it directly. In pointing out that “we cannot continue making sacrifices indefinitely” and that, “we either have to fight back or be crushed”, the implication is made obvious here. Another kind of riddling device which the speaker adopted is seen in same speech here: “You will, therefore, have

to consider at this meeting the form of association which we want the Eastern provinces to have with the rest of the country. We have tried a unitary system of government in Nigeria; and we have also tried a federal system” (Selected Speech: 39).

In presenting the kinds of government that proved to have failed, “the unitary system” and “the federal system”, the speech does not go on to relate the confederation which had already been proposed, but the audience is allowed to make out the preferred option. It is in this logic that a riddle pattern is seen to have been adopted in the speech here. Simply put, riddles are questions which precede certain figures, indeed affirmations that give the audience a clue to the expected answer.

Also, allusions to the Igbo folktale take different patterns. Let us see this merger of Biblical allusion and the Igbo folktale symbols: “To us, war becomes a David-and-Goliath struggle – a struggle which David inevitably must win” (Random Th: xvi). The adoption of this Biblical allusion also stands as a parallel to the image of the tortoise and leopard/lion as found in the Igbo folktales. This is seen as a fitting rhetoric in the dire need to motivate the people to remain alive to the challenge. While the traditional symbol of the lion surges forth again, we see it not with the same hope but some form of litotes; “What does one do if one finds one’s arm locked in the jaws of the lion?... If we do not struggle for our independence, we all die. We have to balance slow death and the possibility of life. That is why we are fighting” (Random Th: 57).

This expression parallels how Achebe uses the character Ikem Osodi in presenting the ‘Tortoise and Leopard’ paradigm in *Anthills of the Savannah* (128). The style in Igbo rhetoric is revealed; how the people are led into the tradition of enforcing

the logic and thematic thrust in each context of speech performance. This brings out the vitality which allusions embody in narrative performances. According to Cuddon, “when using allusions, a writer tends to assume an established literary tradition, a body of common knowledge with an audience sharing that tradition and an ability on the part of the audience to ‘pick up’ the reference” (25). The use of allusions is not only symbolic but involves also, those forceful communicative elements that reflect the background knowledge which the artist shares with his audience. Ezenwa-Ohaeto observes that, “the witty rhetoric is sometimes enhanced by a connotative allusion to a folktale” (148). There is another example in the speeches here where there is an allusion to the Igbo folktale: “Ours is the classical story of the elephant and the ant. The elephant is driven frantic with ants all over its enormous bulk. The elephant has its powerful tusk but can find no respite...” (Random Th:144).

In each instance where these folktales are adopted, two contrasting characters are pitted against each other. Usually, the tales point to the myth of the political ethics among the Igbo. There are also variegated submissions of the myth of Igbo political ethics that make the presentation of Gowon’s dictatorship rather outlandish. In such presentations, the abuse of authority is revealed as an aberration, and that which the Biafrans had to reject. Edna Aizenberg discusses myth as being imperative in African literary discourse thus: “Myth is useful in exploring dictatorship because the dictator is the product of an unresolved search for forms of government in societies still negotiating the breach between tradition and modernity (510). In the instance of Biafra, it is the juxtaposition of the Igbo political heritage and the dictatorship of Gowon from which the people had to obtain their freedom.

Again, in analyzing the myth of dictatorship, Aizenberg shows how Achebe's works portray the Igbo aversion for the abuse of authority thus; "In fact, the voice of myth is significant in the examination of authority and its limits" (511). The myth of *Igbo enwe eze* is seen to run through the ideology behind the Biafra War speeches. The leader's responsibility towards his people is what presupposes *oha zere eze, eze ezere oha* (the people respect their leader, as the leader respect the people). Azuonye fittingly observes that "The true *eze* rules by divine grace and the commonweal and his goal should be to protect and care for all, not to exploit or plunder them and their land" (79). This has always been a fitting explanation for the proposition that the Igbo people never had kings. It is the attempt of the Biafran leader to justify his responsibility to his people that informs why his speeches take their coherent posture. Ojukwu achieves this by attempting to revoke the rationale in Gowon's intellect: "The foremost duty of a soldier is to protect the integrity of his country....As a non partisan member of his country's community, his path of duty is expected to be clear and objective, free from encumbrances" (Selected Sp: 77).

There is also the myth of the underdog which eventually becomes the hero through a steady pursuit of a desired goal. This draws from the portrayals in the Igbo folktales of the theme, 'slow and steady wins the race'. This theme is explored in such tales as, 'The building contest between the tortoise and lion', 'The race between the tortoise and the dog' and 'How tortoise married the king's daughter. Just as tortoise is the underdog in Igbo tales, the place of Biafra was constantly identified with this underdog image. This is particularly seen in the repetition in the speeches that Biafra was engaged in the war of survival. In the speeches Ojukwu also captured from time to time how Gowon had continuously failed in his bid to overrun Biafra after he had set a deadline for each of such assignments. In a

broadcast on the 30th of June 1967 Ojukwu said: “It is a month today since we took the irrevocable decision to assert our autonomy and sovereignty by becoming the Republic of Biafra. Gowon’s immediate reaction was to vow to crush us. Since then he has consistently described his decision as irrevocable” (Selected Sp: 203).

One year after, at the first anniversary of Biafran independence, Ojukwu recollects again the strength of the Nigerian force thus: “The massive military assistance which Nigeria received from Britain, Russia, and other countries encouraged Nigerians to build an oversized army for her ‘total war’ against us” (Selected Sp: 257). Nonetheless, he goes on to emphasize what should be the resoluteness and commitment of the Biafran people thus:

We are fortunate as a people to have developed a profound appreciation of the importance and dignity of labor. We believe that as long as a man does honest and useful work he is entitled to a fair appreciation and reward. Thus, the village farmer, the fisherman, the truck pusher, the artisan, the civil servant, the professional, the big business executive, the trader, and indeed every class of worker has an important part to play in the life of the community and should be proud of that part” (Selected Sp: 265).

In identifying with this class of people in the Biafran society, the speaker does not just relate the commonness of purpose in the struggle for survival, there is also the view of a resolute people. Here is an expression of the never-say-die attitude of the people. It is in this regard that we perceive the resoluteness, wisdom and longevity for which tortoise is identified in teaching the paths to survival, in a world where the jungle law is in active operation.

In 1969, Ojukwu said again:

The war continued with our enemies more than ever determined not only to wipe us off the face of our God-given earth but to do so with such brutality and in so short a time as to be a lesson to us for daring. Today, I am happy and proud to report that their miscalculations have persisted.” (Selected Sp:367).

This persistent presentation of the survival of the underdog, against the view of ruthless dictatorship which the animal kingdom bears of leopard in the Igbo folktale has been observed. It is in identifying with these images from the Igbo oral tradition that the view of this element of the culture of orality is evoked in this work. The application of these forms is well understood in the line of Okpewho’s view of the transmutation into a level where, “the oral tradition is turned to metaphorical or symbolic use rather than slavishly mirrored” (90). The transition is such that the recourse to the original text consciously reactivates the given context of each speech performance.

### **Rhetoric and Aesthetics in Ojukwu’s Speeches**

In spite of the fact that the Nigeria-Biafra event has yielded a vast body of literary writings, the consideration of Ojukwu’s War speeches in a literary discourse is predicated on the underlying aesthetics that mark the presenter’s rhetoric. It is on this basis that this work requires to elucidate how the contents of the speeches, as historical facts, are embellished with such artistic elements as would only be a derivation from the culture of literary expressions. To speak of aesthetics is to appreciate the figures in use in a work considered to be literary in form, and perhaps contents. Much of the propagandist charge against Ojukwu’s war speeches stemmed from the force in the rhetorical employment. In *My Command*, Obasanjo

does not fail in responding to the force which some of the speeches bore. It also shows how intensely the Federal troops were hit by the chattels of Ojukwu's rhetoric. Obasanjo says here:

...although Ojukwu was given to overstatement and hyperbolic expression there was no doubt that, by the time he had secured arms and ammunition from French, Spanish and Portuguese sources while he had assurance of support by both France and South Africa. The Federal side, at that time, were getting their small arms from Britain, Italy and West Germany... (65).

Regarding rhetorical strategies, Bonvillain says: "The power of language is not only that values, words, reveal attitudes of speakers, but also that words are used to create compatible attitudes in hearers" (62). The images that are adopted by the writer are those that are common to both the speaker and his audience. In this regard Bonvillain identifies the use of 'metaphor and metonymy' as the "complex processes of semantic extension and transfer" (63).

There is the need for the kind of logic, style and tact which marks out the war speeches. Language is enforced through the use of repetitions. Many of the stories that recollect the events leading to the crisis are repeated. Much more, the kind of repetition which obliterates the monotony and the constancy of given lexical items, is found in the repetition of ideas. This is seen in the choice of words that are synonymous with the lexical items they precede. We see these instances here: "Following wild and mischievous accusations and allegations" (Selected Sp: 52). In this phrase, the pairing of the synonyms: wild/mischievous and accusations/allegations, seems to give the full semantic implication as the synonym is applied in yielding the requisite support.

The trickster figure that is made to presage the character of Gowon is seen to assume a dimension that is visibly ironic. In the speech to the Consultative Assembly on 'Failure of Talks' we have this subtle indictment; "Lieutenant Colonel Gowon has now decided to take upon himself to draw up proposals for lessening tension and for constitutional reforms" (Selected Sp: 72). It is in the furtherance of this speech that the irony is made clearer thus: "Constitution-making is not the task of the soldier and all of us have publicly admitted that we were not trained to do that type of thing" (Selected Sp: 73).

Let us see some more of these instances of the adoption of certain kinds of repetitions. The semantic meaning of words are re-enforced by employing their synonyms. These may be single words, compound words or even ideas. Here are some examples: "private gains and self-enrichment" (Selected Sp: 55), "As I rightly pointed out in my letter to Lieutenant Colonel Gowon, the truth is that the public is becoming impatient, disappointed and frustrated" (Selected Sp: 82), "I find it necessary to put all the facts before you, indicating the issues, and difficulties and the dangers" (Selected Speeches 146:), and "in the face of all these unfriendly and destructive acts, deliberate and well calculated against this region"(Selected Sp: 72). Worthy of note in most of these instances is the pattern of climactic concatenation of synonyms which build up in the progression of consequence and meaning in the ideas presented. We may appreciate the adoption of climax in these groups of synonymous words and ideas Impatient/disappointed/frustrated, issues/difficulties/dangers, and deliberate/well calculated.

Rhetorical questions are also used frequently in the speeches as we find in these instances: "What are the International observer team observing? Is war a good thing? Have we reached such a level in our civilization that we really have to go

and watch whether killing is properly done?” (Random Th: 32), “...when will world statesmen awaken to the fact that the Biafran race is being systematically wiped out?” (Random Th:31). Observe that the intensity and force in these questions is in the presentation of a stretch of them in each given context of use. In the speeches, the speaker retains the attention of the audience by adopting a unique narrative style that involved merging the logical and emotive force with a view to yielding to the people’s expectation. It is the satisfaction of the people that there is a justification of the aesthetic beauty of each rendition.

Bonvillain’s observation is pertinent in this regard:

Language use has a manipulative aspect to it in the sense that speakers employ words in order to have an effect on hearers such as to convey information, ask questions, or issue commands. But the words chosen are often not neutral in their connotations. They have associated senses that presuppose culturally shared symbolic meanings” (63).

Again, Bonvillain identifies that “conceptual metaphor is employed in crafting works with literary evocation, in translating non-physical entities into concrete images or objects” (65). The several shades of metaphor that are seen to lend vigour to the language in use in the Biafran speeches become more forceful in understanding the context and performance of Ojukwu’s Biafra War speeches.

### **Conclusion**

In locating the Biafran War speeches within the domain of literary studies, this study has attempted to demonstrate the significance of the survival of these texts as sub-genres of the Igbo oral literary tradition. The discussion involves the exploration of the discernible patterns of the Igbo oral literary tradition in the

Biafran War speeches. Okoh had raised serious concern in this regard, following the consideration of the western parameters of literary certification. It is this concern that Okoh presents thus:

Indeed, the fact that the Aristotelian concept of drama lays much emphasis on *imitation, plot, dialogue, conflict, and suspense* which has given rise to so much controversy about the basic question of whether Africa has any dramatic traditions.

(141)

What is seen in Okoh's assessment as dramatic traditions relates to the models in the other generic classifications of the African literary forms – oral and written. It is the concern of this research to present a justification, in appraising Ojukwu's war speeches, which allays such apprehensions as have always been raised. Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike have argued that part of the process of decolonizing African literature is to avoid being coerced into accepting those parameters which are perceivably alien. Much as this stand is supported by theories on cultural studies, it must be observed that the key elements which Okoh pinpoints, and many more, are embedded in the Igbo oral literary tradition.

Emenyonu identifies pertinently how Achebe's submission of critical poetics reveals "an enchanting imagery"(xii). It is in Achebe's adoption of Igbo proverbs that the said imagery is revealed in a spectacular confluence of imaginative creativity and criticism. It therefore gives vehemence to the focus which he identifies as the central challenge confronting the works of literature that pertain to the Biafran War:

The imaginative work (a by-product of war), must still meet certain known aesthetic and critical standards by which it should be judged as a work of art....It is easy for the creative

writer to stray away or be derailed from the objective artistic visions because of partisan or passionate involvement in a cause. (Emenyonu: xii)

It is in this regard that this paper has attempted to discuss the pertinence of Ojukwu's Biafra War speeches in the literary discourse with specificity to how the potency of the Igbo orality provided the ingredients for the presenter's rhetorical employment. While some of the Biafra War novels and autobiographies have attempted to incorporate these speeches, they have been intended to lend credence to the historic-political events that had precipitated the Nigeria-Biafra challenge.

Even where critics venture into the discourse of the Biafra War aesthetics, they eventually find a soft landing within the spheres of the historicity of the event. With seeming difficulty, Nwahunanya attempts to locate what he captions 'The Aesthetics of Nigerian War Fiction'. The complication in this critic's burden is however glaring in his summation that – "Viewed strictly as artifacts, Nigerian War novels would be seen to reveal various degrees of artistic success, and this is often determined by the extent of each writer's weaving of history into art..."(296). Perhaps, it had been to expand the postcolonial picture from which Nwahunanya's probing had done of Biafra War novels. All the same, this approach recollects the aggregation of the simplistic enquiries into the literature that proceeded from Biafra.

More contemptible still, is the fact that the recourse to politics and history has impeded the full appropriation of the core literary theories in the criticism of Biafra War literature. It is in this light that the perspectives of orality and rhetoric in the speeches of Ojukwu generate this significant outlook and informs the imperative call for a foray into the deep-seated aesthetics within the broad corpus of Biafra War literature.

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## **Short Biography**

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