# Inside 'Rotten English': Interpreting the Language of Ambiguity in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*

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> The rise of states has inexorably led to the subordination of non-state societies, usually resulting in their disappearance or their incorporation to a greater or lesser degree into the dominant group. Non-state societies had once been in a position to live and let live because of their ability to fragment; but that asset proved to be a fatal liability in the face of the agglomerative tendencies of institutional and territorial states. (Dickason 1984, p. 278)

Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* is a product of the tensions between rival ethnic groups in Nigeria who ultimately struggle for control over the nation's wealth, resources and political direction.[1] The 'national question' or the question of 'citizenship' within a nation-state constructed from 'arbitrary block' beginnings resonates at the heart of the novel (Osaghae 1995, p.325; Ejobowah 2000, p.31; Booth 1981, p.23).[2] Ken Saro-Wiwa's identity as a member of the ethnic minority Ogoni people, along with his political activism and execution on their behalf, is inseparable from the content in *Sozaboy*. Saro-Wiwa recognizes the political role of his work: 'literature in a

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[1] Dedicated to my personal editor and friend Julia Anton.

[2] James Booth suggests that the tensions that arise between different cultural and ethnic groups in Nigeria are an inherent problem rooted in its creation, as he relates: 'The problem [the lack of national unity] is inherent in the very concept of "Nigeria", that "arbitrary block" carved out of Africa by the British, including within its borders peoples with cultures, histories and languages as different from each other as those of Britain and China' (Booth 1981, p.23).

critical situation such as Nigeria's cannot be divorced from politics […] literature must serve society […] writers […] must play an interventionist role' (Pegg 2000, p.703). As a result of this belief, *Sozaboy* possesses a sense of urgency. Saro-Wiwa becomes a 'martyr' who transcribes the struggles of the Ogoni people in the creation of the fictional Dukana people (Williams 1996, p.361). William Boyd reveals the connection between Ken Saro-Wiwa's identity as a member of the Ogoni tribe, which was forced to assimilate into the newly formed Biafran state, and his depiction of the Dukana people:

> Ken Saro-Wiwa is from eastern Nigeria, a member of the Ogoni tribe. The outbreak of the war in 1967 trapped him within the new boundaries of the Biafran state […] General Ojukwu was an Ibo, the dominant tribe in Eastern Nigeria. When he declared Biafra independent, 'Ibo' and 'Biafra' were not at all synonymous; like it or not, some thirty or so ethnic groups were included in the new country. Like it or not, these other tribes found themselves at war against Nigeria. (Boyd 1994, p.ii)

Boyd's description provides the historical context with which to position the Dukana people in relation to Biafra and Nigeria. Dukana, like the Ogoni tribe, becomes 'trapped' and is drawn into the conflict whether they 'like it or not'. Similarly, Sandra Meek suggests that Mene (Sozaboy) and the Dukana people are '[outsiders] in someone else's war' (Meek 1999, p.153). Unable to exercise their own self-determination and fearful of 'internal colonialism', they both exist in 'a crisis of identity', which reflects the 'political reality for the minority Ogoni in the Biafran war' (Harvan 1997, p.170;

Meek 1999, p.154).[3]   Importantly, Boyd implies that Dukana becomes an analogical reference for measuring the struggles of ethnic minorities during the Nigerian Civil War.

Sozaboy is an empowering voice for suffering ethnic minority groups in the 'fractured reality' created by the nation-state in post-colonial Nigeria (Walsh 2002, p. 112). Saro-Wiwa creates a voice for the voiceless by inventing a language which he terms 'Rotten English' and defines as 'a mixture of Nigerian pidgin English, broken English and occasional flashes of good, even idiomatic English' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p. Author's Notes). It is this mixture which allows 'Rotten English' to cross ethnic and cultural barriers and allows a critique of all parties involved in the Nigerian Civil War. Michael North confirms this position: 'Rotten English [is a] hybridized, syncretic language, [which proposes] a Nigeria that is not divided along ethnic and linguistic lines [and] allows Sozaboy to contradict, to speak against, the civil war at the level of form' (North 2001, p.109). 'Rotten English' creates a level playing field where minority groups are heard alongside majority groups in a 'relational' fashion (Britton 1999, p.11). Consequently, Saro-Wiwa explodes the centre/periphery model and offers a post-colonial version of English, which functions alongside 'standard English' in a non-hierarchal fashion. This process of displacement initiates a chain reaction in which Saro-Wiwa expands the parameters of Nigerian 'national literature' and counteracts the Nigerian government's 'national silencing' of 'ethnic particularism' (Onwuemene 1999, p.1056; North 2001, p.112; Onwuemene 1999, p.1055). As I will illustrate,

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[3] Ken-Saro Wiwa's *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni tradegy* presents a historical account of the oppression suffered by the Ogoni people at the hands of the Nigerian government and transnational oil companies. Claude E Welch Jr.'s *The Ogoni and self-determination: Increasing violence in Nigeria* (1995) presents an informative overview of Ogoni politics.

language takes on the associations of a central character in *Sozaboy*. Marshall McLuhan's famous quote, 'the medium is the message', reflects the correlation between the formation of this new language and a new power relation model between ethnic minorities and the nation-state (cited in Kappelman 2001). Inevitably, *Sozaboy* invites Nigeria to address its exploitative attitude towards ethnic minorities.

While much has been said about the politics of 'Rotten English' by such scholars as Michael North and Mary Harvan, the power of language has not been discussed in enough depth. I am interested in drawing fresh attention to the building blocks of the novel: words. Deconstructing 'Rotten English' reveals that it is best understood as what I call the language of ambiguity. Vague, meaningless words, including 'old, bad government', 'new government', 'trouble', 'sozas', 'Sozaboy', 'enemy' and numerous others recur throughout the work (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.1, 3, 40, 65, 94). These words, lacking in specificities, are 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. I will argue that there is an inextricable relationship between ambiguous terms and the victimization of Dukana in *Sozaboy*. This relationship is realized as a process, which develops over three interdependent phases. The first phase of the novel is centred on the words 'old, bad government' and 'new government'. Both of these parties are responsible for creating 'trouble' in Dukana (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.1, 3). In the second phase, both of these political powers become the common 'enemy' towards Dukana (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.94). Dukana's suffering becomes intertwined with Mene's transition into 'Sozaboy' as he and 'Manmuswak' confront an elusive 'enemy' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.65,95,94). The

third phase is the resolution of ambiguity, as both Sozaboy and Dukana become ghost-like figures, victims of 'war', leading to the conclusion that 'Rotten English' uses ambiguous terms while producing specific results. Only 'Rotten English', a language constructed from elusive terms, allows Saro-Wiwa to illuminate the vulnerable position of ethnic minority groups caught in the crossfire between the separatist Biafran state and the Yoruba-dominated Nigerian central government during the Nigerian Civil War (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.113).

## Phase I – 'Trouble' in Dukana

From the outset of *Sozaboy*, Saro-Wiwa relies on ambiguous terms while constructing a Dukanan identity in relation to the rest of Nigeria. The opening lines in the novel establish Dukana's powerless position:

> […] the old, bad government have dead […] Everybody was saying that everything will be good in Dukana because of new government. They were saying that kotuma ashbottom [customary court bailiff] from Bori cannot take bribe from people in Dukana again. They were saying too that all those policeman who used to chop big big bribe from people who get case will not chop again. Everybody was happy because from that time, even magistrate in the court at Bori will begin to give better judgement. And traffic police will do his work well well. Even one woman was talking that the sun will shine proper proper and people will not die again because there will be medicine in the hospital and the doctor will not charge money for the operation. Yes, everybody in Dukana was happy. And they were all singing. (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.1)

From the passage we can extract a triadic model with which to analyse Dukana's identity. Dukana remains the focal point of action

while the two dominating entities are the 'old, bad government' and the 'new government'. The words 'old, bad government' and 'new government' are ambiguous terms possessing no self-evident identity. By denying the specific historical identity of the 'old, bad government' and the 'new government' Saro-Wiwa begins his use of ambiguous terms in portraying the vulnerable position occupied by the Dukana people. They are unable to exercise their own self-determination and remain subject to the will of powerful majority groups, such as the government in 'Bori'. Despite their enthusiasm, there is no mention of whether or not the Dukana people have elected the 'new government'.  All we know for sure is two pieces of information.

The words 'old, bad government' are associated with the words 'bribe' and 'die'. These words carry negative connotations and convey the suffering of the people of Dukana under the rule of the previous government. By contrast, the words 'new government' form implicit connections with the words 'happy' and 'singing'. Repeated words 'well well' and 'proper proper' emphasize the positive connotations associated with the 'new government'.

Lodged between the 'old, bad government' and the 'new government' the Dukana people are assigned a uniform identity. The general terms 'everybody', 'they' and 'one woman' remind the reader that their suffering and optimism has been and is equally experienced by all Dukanans. Despite their enthusiasm, there is no tangible evidence that things are about to improve for Dukana, only a display of naïve faith, which positions them as victims.

Saro-Wiwa is involved in an interplay between ambiguous terms which produce specific results. Ambiguous terms are used to describe the key forces which affect Dukana, while Dukana's

suffering is always documented with precision. The 'new government' fails to meet the aspirations of the Dukana people and becomes the instrument of 'trouble' in Dukana. The ambiguous words 'new government' and 'trouble' form a correlation as the exploitative nature of the 'new government' is realized. The Dukana people become the 'new government's' financial victims when they are compelled to hand over their money, food and clothing to Chief Birabee on behalf of the 'new government'. Specifically, 'every man must bring three shillings and every woman one shilling' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.8). The collection process is difficult to bear for the Dukana people who struggle to survive on a daily basis. Duzia asks: 'How can porson like myself without house, without wife, without farm, without cloth to wear begin to give money, chop and cloth to government?' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.7). Duzia's following question highlights the exploitative nature of the 'new government': 'Now government dey give chop and money and cloth to person? Now person go begin give government chop?' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.7). Saro-Wiwa is specific about the negative affect of the 'new government' in Dukana. Men must bring 'three shillings' and women 'one shilling'. All of the villagers must bring 'chop', 'money' and 'cloth'. Although the 'new government' is not identified its demands and the subsequent suffering of the Dukana people is clear.

Ambiguous terms are responsible for disempowering the Dukana people. The reason for the collection is rooted in the ambiguous term 'trouble', as Mene relates:

> People were not happy to hear that there is trouble
> everywhere […] people were talking of how people
> were dying […] About how they are killing people in
> the train; cutting their hand or their leg or breaking their

head with matchet […] Why all this trouble now?'(Saro-
Wiwa 1994, p.3)

The violence and atrocities which are unfolding are only referred to
as 'trouble' that is being performed by individuals merely described
as 'they', which is taking place 'everywhere'. Mene refrains from
naming specific places and the identity of those forces committing
these violent acts. He questions why the 'trouble' is occurring in the
first place. All that is for certain is that this 'trouble' has impacted
Dukana in the form of a collection and has not yet taken on the
form of physical violence. The precise nature of the ambiguous term
'trouble' is not known but it exists according to the 'new
government', as Mene describes: 'government say there is plenty of
trouble everywhere' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.9). The Dukana people
only receive information that is permitted by the 'new government'
and are financially affected by its demands. Their lack of direct access
to information keeps them in a powerless position.

     Eventually, the word 'trouble' moves from their external
world and takes on a physical manifestation in the very heart of
Dukana. Following the collection by Chief Birabee, Mene describes
the events that unfold when the new government's 'sozas' arrive in
Dukana (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.40). Their actions are expressed by
Mene:

> […] more and more sozas begin to come to Dukana.
> Every time when they come they will cut all the plantain
> plus banana. Some time sef they will enter a porson
> house begin ask for chop. And if the porson do not give
> them chop, they will hala and hala and then begin to
> beat the women. Then afterwards they begin to make
> debt collector in Dukana. If I owe you money and
> cannot pay, then you will call soza for me. The soza will
> come and begin to bully on me until I give you the

> money. Then you and sozaman will share the money.
> But if after he have bullied on me I still cannot pay, then
> they will beat me proper proper till blood commot from
> my mouth and body and they will take me away to the
> soza people camp and prison me there. (Saro-Wiwa
> 1994, p.40)

Again there is a fluctuation between ambiguous terms and clearly
defined disastrous results. Ambiguous language is used to describe the
'sozas' arrival in Dukana. While these appalling acts of violence are
inflicted upon the people of Dukana, the precise identity of these
'sozas' and the name of the 'new government' they represent are
never mentioned. The 'sozas' are assigned a uniform identity notably
with their association with the words 'they'. The suffering
experienced by the Dukana people is clear. The 'sozas' 'cut the
plantain plus banana', 'beat the women', establish a fraudulent 'debt
collector' and send non-compliant individuals to 'prison'. It is clear
that the only 'trouble' the villagers of Dukana have experienced has
been at the hands of the 'new government' both in their call for a
collection of money, food and clothing and the physical violence
enacted upon them by the 'sozas' who represent that government.

'Trouble' develops, as it becomes apparent that the new
government's main objective is to profit from the Dukana people.
An officer from the new government army arrives in Dukana and
announces that 'all young men must go to make one important
meeting […] in Pitakwa [and that] Anyone who refuse to go will pay
fine' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.51). At first, because of Saro-Wiwa's use
of ambiguity, it is not clear what kind of 'meeting' 'all young men'
have been summoned to. Shortly, we learn that it is a military
meeting in the nearby village of Pitakwa. While in the stadium at
Pitakwa, Mene observes that many of the young men are 'paying
money to Okpara before they join army' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.52).

'Okpara' is never clearly explained and we are left to assume that he is the leader of the 'new government' army. However, the 'meeting' produces specific consequences for the 'young men' of Dukana as they find themselves 'paying money' in order to join the army. The new government army will profit either way, by collecting a fine for not attending the meeting or receiving a payment to 'Okpara'. The villagers of Dukana are at a financial loss regardless of their choice and become 'trapped' in the truest sense, as William Boyd defines it in his introduction to *Sozaboy* (Boyd 1994, p.ii). Faced with an enveloping conflict Dukana becomes the victim in the triadic model; pitted between the 'old, bad government' and the 'new government' who bring 'trouble' in equal measure.

## Phase II – Sozaboy and Manmuswak's Fight Against an Elusive 'Enemy'

Integral to Saro-Wiwa's project of positioning Dukana as victim in the Nigerian Civil War is the counterpuntal relationship between Sozaboy and Manmuswak. Examining their encounters reinforces my argument that ambiguous terms construct Dukana's role as victim. Their trajectories crisscross one another as they serve in both fighting armies in the name of survival. Consequently, the word 'enemy' becomes a matter of perspective in the novel. It is crucial to analyse the contradicting contexts in which the word 'enemy' appears. Like the general terms, 'new government', 'old, bad government', and 'trouble', the term the 'enemy' is not clearly defined, which is important to Saro-Wiwa's strategy of using ambiguous terms to position both armies as the 'enemy' in relation to Sozaboy and Dukana. This is a strategic maneuver by Saro-Wiwa who analogically embeds the fate of Dukana in Sozaboy's

movements. Both Sozaboy and Dukana lack the authority to assert their own destinies and instead must desperately attempt to survive by any means necessary in the face of more powerful forces.

Mene's transition into his new identity as Sozaboy becomes the starting point for analysing this connection. The Dukana people, desperate to curtail violence against their village, arrive at a naïve solution: enlist their men in the army. Mene is encouraged to join the army, leaving behind his individual identity as an apprentice lorry driver and adopting his new universal identity as Sozaboy, as described:

> […] from that time wherever I go people are calling me 'Sozaboy', 'Sozaboy'. Even I am famous in Dukana […] All the young young men are saying that I am tough man […] I was prouding plenty. When they call me 'Sozaboy' I will answer well well. Even I begin to tell people that my name is Sozaboy […] the people are looking at me like I am wonderful porson. (Saro–Wiwa 1994, p.65–68)

To be a 'soza' is to be 'famous', 'tough' and 'wonderful'. Mene's new identity as 'Sozaboy' provides him with the villagers' confidence and respect, grounded in the belief that Sozaboy will ensure the safety of Dukana because he represents a Dukanan presence in the 'new government' army. V. Adefemi Isumonah proposes that Sozaboy becomes 'a lifeline for his people' (Isumonah 2004, p.449).

From this transitional moment onwards, the ambiguous word 'enemy' takes precedence in the novel. Saro–Wiwa incrementally confuses the definition of the 'enemy' by constantly altering the dynamics in the relationship between Sozaboy and Manmuswak. Sozaboy's first encounter with the 'enemy' occurs while he is stationed with his comrade Bullet. They notice a member of the

'enemy' forces waving a white flag. Bullet greets the 'enemy' 'soza' while sharing a cigarette and a bottle of 'ginkana' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p. Glossary). Sozaboy is confused by their friendly exchange and begins to comprehend 'the enemy' in a disruptive manner, as Bullet explains:

> Oh yes. That man is the enemy […] Look Sozaboy, we are in war front […] And in the war front, there are all sorts of people. Drunkards, thieves, idiots, wise men, foolish men. There is only one thing which binds them all. Death. And everyday they live, they are cheating death. That man came to celebrate that fact […] while we live, we must drink. Because as you know, man must wak. (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.94-95)

The passage offers several crucial pieces of information that figure into the triadic model as a new set of ambiguous terms replace the previous terms. The two domineering parties in the triadic model have evolved, as the 'old, bad government' becomes the 'enemy' who is pitted against the 'new government', later referred to as 'our own sozas' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.166). The word 'trouble', the force between these two parties that is responsible for the suffering in Dukana, has developed concretely into 'war'. Like 'trouble', the identity of the 'war' remains shrouded in ambiguity. While the triadic model persists the binary division between the 'enemy' and 'our own sozas' [the new government sozas] is collapsed. Sozaboy and Bullet, members of 'our own sozas' are fighting an 'enemy' that is described as their equal. In fact, the 'enemy' is someone they 'celebrate' with. Sozaboy's naming of the 'enemy', 'Manmuswak', a slang amalgamation of the phrase 'man must wak', captures the equalizing process between the 'enemy' and 'our own sozas'. Every 'soza', and every 'man must' 'live', 'drink' and ultimately survive

during a war. The 'sozas' in both armies are conflated and over time will inflict an equilibrium of destructive forces against Dukana.

Their meeting compels Sozaboy to contemplate the meaning of the word 'enemy'. He questions: 'Manmuswak who is enemy is coming to give us drink and cigar and is talking like our brother. Is that how to fight for war?' (Saro–Wiwa 1994, p.98). Sozaboy's notions of war and the nature of the 'enemy' have become displaced because Sozaboy has been told that: 'there is one posron called Enemy that plenty people will go to kill' and that 'our sozas are doing very well. Killing the enemy like fly' (Saro–Wiwa 1994, p.54, 66). Sozaboy now associates the 'enemy' with the word 'brother', however, which clouds the nature of the 'enemy' further.

Importantly, Sozaboy recognizes Manmuswak as the same man he overheard condemning the 'enemy' earlier in the novel. The fact that he now fights for the 'enemy' throws Sozaboy in to a crisis:

> It is this Manmuswak who was saying that he will fight as dem tell am to fight [...] This Manmuswak is the same tall man! So he is the enemy now. And I was thinking how this man come join the enemy? [...] My confusion have started again. (Saro–Wiwa 1994, p.99)

Sozaboy's earlier claim that he will 'fight the Enemy to nonsense' has been replaced by a state of 'confusion' (Saro–Wiwa 1994, p.68). Sozaboy is left to ponder how Manmuswak can serve the 'enemy' after his condemnation of the 'enemy'.

Their following encounter confuses the ambiguous term 'enemy' further. After being captured and taken to 'enemy' makeshift hospital, Sozaboy is tended to by Manmuswak, who is described as saying:

> […] his work is war […] You can be anything when
> there is war […] He will fight if they just tell him to
> fight. Anytime. Anywhere. And he must obey because
> orders is orders […] He can fight and kill his own
> brother, he does not care. He can be a friend today and
> enemy tomorrow. (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.120)

Manmuswak is a character whose only allegiance is to the orders
given to him regardless of the army. Sozaboy describes Manmuswak
as 'a friend today and enemy tomorrow'. Sozaboy will cross such
lines as well in order to survive. Rather than remain a prisoner of
war he offers his lorry driving skills to the 'enemy' and becomes a
message carrier. Sozaboy concludes: 'So I am a fool all this time that
I am wanting to kill this enemy!' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.126). Now
that Sozaboy is aligned with an army that views the 'new
government' with which Dukana is aligned to be the 'enemy', the
ambiguous nature of the word 'enemy' is revealed. This is a word
that has now been used to describe both sides.

Confusion becomes Saro-Wiwa's mechanism, which is
executed using the ambiguous word 'enemy'. It requires the reader
to be attentive to Sozaboy and Manmuswak's unstable relativity. The
matter becomes even more complex when Sozaboy decides to leave
his role as a driver in the 'enemy' army and go in search of his
mother and wife. At a refugee camp, 'our own sozas' [new
government 'sozas'] ascertain Sozaboy as the 'enemy' and forcibly
take him to a 'new government' prison camp. Surprisingly, there he
encounters Manmuswak, who 'is again with our own sozas and no
longer with enemy sozas' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.166). He questions:
'how this Manmuswak can be fighting on two sides of the same
war?' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.166). His question illustrates the manner
in which both Manmuswak and his own actions collapse the binary

division between 'our own sozas' and the 'enemy sozas'. Ultimately, Sozaboy's and Manmuswak's relationship and service in both armies plays a crucial role in creating the ambiguous nature of the word 'enemy', as the 'enemy' is conceived through their actions.

In the same manner that the ambiguous word 'trouble' produces suffering in Dukana in the first phase of the novel, Saro-Wiwa reiterates this technique and reveals the suffering associated with the word 'enemy' in Dukana. Late in the conflict, Dukana has become empty and desecrated. Her people have moved to a refugee camp to obtain food, shelter and protection from the violence of the war. Only Duzia and Bom remain, and they explain:

> They [the sozas] used to enter the houses in the night and fuck our women by force, drink the pot of soup and take away the yams. They ask us to go to the swamp and cut the mangrove because the enemy sozas are hiding there […] soon […] the other sozas, the enemy, arrived. Bom saw them running and doing the same thing the other sozas used to do. Cutting the plantain and bananas and digging yams. Killing the goats and hen. (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.132)

Saro-Wiwa uses the ambiguous term the 'enemy' but is careful to explicitly describe the suffering experienced by the Dukana people. Duzia's remarks clearly reveal the atrocities performed by both the 'new government' and 'the enemy' 'sozas' against the Dukana people. The words 'fuck our women by force', 'take away the yams', 'cutting the plantain and bananas' and 'Killing the goats and hen' all specifically portray the oppressive actions perpetrated by both armies. Regardless of which army they serve, the 'sozas' are the instruments of violence against Dukana. As a result of this violence committed by the 'sozas' in both armies, the identity of the 'new government' and 'enemy' forces merge into one equally destructive force. As Meek

notes: 'the unstable category of 'the enemy' demonstrates that there is no clear division between sides, no good versus evil. War erases identity' (Meek 1999, p.153).

Saro-Wiwa links Sozaboy and Dukana through shared experiences.  They are caught in the middle of the conflict, they are victims of both armies, and they conclude that both sides are the 'enemy'. Sozaboy's experience in both armies allows him to conclude: 'I call all of them soza's now because I have seen that they are all two and two pence' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.139). This is similar to Duzia's statement that 'Sozaboy, […] all you sozas are the same thing' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.134). The 'sozas' are the agents of suffering for both Sozaboy and Dukana. They become the next link in the succession of forces acting on Sozaboy and Dukana, which began with 'trouble', developed into the 'enemy', and is executed by the 'sozas'. Regardless of the ambiguous word, the triadic model persists, as these words are associated with Dukana's role as the constant victim.


## Phase III – The Unambiguous Results of 'War'

The repercussions of the ambiguous word 'enemy' and the actions of the 'sozas' continue to resonate following the conclusion of the conflict. However, Sozaboy and Dukana's concern for the 'enemy', the 'old, bad government', the 'new government', 'trouble' and 'sozas' subside as all of these terms coalesce in the word 'war'.

Following the victory of the 'enemy', Saro-Wiwa reflects on the 'absurdities' of the 'war' from an informed perspective, as compared to when the word 'war' is first introduced in the novel while the 'war' is still being fought (Omotoso 1991, p.150). Although the identity of the 'war' remains ambiguous throughout

the novel, like the application of the ambiguous words 'trouble' and
the 'enemy', the results of the 'war' are very specific, as Saro-Wiwa
crystallizes the interconnected fate between Sozaboy and Dukana.
Sozaboy claims:

> […] war have spoiled my town Dukana, uselessed my
> people, killed many others, killed my mama and my
> wife, Agnes […] and now it have made me like porson
> wey get leprosy because I have no town. (Saro-Wiwa
> 1994, p.181)

Dukana was not saved by Sozaboy's involvement in the army and it
is now a village that has been 'spoiled' and 'uselessed' by the 'war'
between the 'new government' and 'enemy' forces. Sozaboy is
doubly 'spoiled' likening his condition to 'leprosy'; not only has his
village been destroyed by the 'war', but he is shunned and assigned
the status of a ghost. Duzia explains: 'Dukana people are saying that
although you have already dead, you have become a ghost' (Saro-
Wiwa 1994, p.179). Sozaboy is told by Duzia that 'everything has
changed' and instructed to 'go away from Dukana' because the
villagers have been instructed by the juju that 'unless we kill your
ghost, everybody in Dukana must die' (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.180).
Sozaboy and Dukana's relationship with the ambiguous term 'war' is
responsible for their condition as 'ghost'-like figures.

Once Saro-Wiwa has revealed the final outcome of the 'war',
Sozaboy can accurately conclude:

> War is a very bad and stupid game […] War is to drink
> urine, to die and all that uniform that they are giving us
> to wear is just to deceive us […] I do not like to fight
> useless fight. (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p.113-155)

The ambiguous 'war' that has enveloped Dukana throughout the course of the novel, now takes on clear associations with the words 'bad', 'stupid', 'die', 'deceive' and 'useless'. Sozaboy and the Dukana people were deceived into thinking they could save their village with a Dukanan presence in the army. Instead, many Dukanans have had to 'die' because of the 'war'. They remain the victims of 'war' throughout the novel. Ultimately, 'war' is a 'game' that Sozaboy and Dukana will inevitably lose because of their minority status in the conflict. Like Saro-Wiwa's Ogoni tribe, they are always on the brink of 'extinction' (Osaghae 1995, p.337).

## Ambiguous Words and Suffering: Creating A Voice For Ethnic Minorities

Dukana remains the consistent victim in the triadic model throughout the novel by virtue of its struggle to survive against adversity from all sides. Similarly, Sozaboy suffers at the hands of both armies after nearly being killed by both 'our own sozas' and the 'enemy'. The victimization of Dukana relies on ambiguous terms: 'trouble' characterizes the first phase of the novel, the nature of the 'enemy' the second, and the conclusion summarizes the consequences of the 'war' for the Dukana people. Saro-Wiwa's greatest literary achievement is his fluctuation between ambiguous words and specific results; the terms 'old, bad government', 'new government', 'trouble', 'enemy', 'sozas' and 'war' are all associated with Dukana's suffering. Only this style of language, 'Rotten English', the language of ambiguity, enables Saro-Wiwa to move from the realm of the ambiguous to the specific. He simultaneously positions Dukana as the victim in the Nigerian Civil War and wins the sympathy of the readership in the process.

In the mileu of political activism, *Sozaboy* successfully presents the struggles of an ethnic minority group during wartime to a world audience. In doing so, Saro-Wiwa empowers ethnic minority groups by challenging Nigerians to look upon the history of their nation and consider the subordinate status that has been assigned to ethnic minority groups. The ambiguous words that construct 'Rotten English' not only emphasize the ethnic minority struggles of the 1960s but form a dialogue with the context of the 1990s in which *Sozaboy* was written. Ethnic minorities, commonly referred to as 'oil minorities' in this era, found themselves the ongoing victims in a

companies who ensnared the Ogoni people in the 'politics of disorder' (Ifeka 2004, p.149). The reason for their continued oppression is characterized by Saro-Wiwa as a problem of numbers: '[There is a] problem with basing constitution purely on numbers when these small numbered communities produce the wealth of the nation' (Ejobowah 2000, p.37). Like Dukana, Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni people are raped of their natural resources and suffer as victims.

Ultimately, by using 'Rotten English' as the communicative language in the novel, Ken Saro-Wiwa proposes a Nigeria where all voices have an equal opportunity to be heard regardless of the degree of power they hold. He presents a strong case for the need to remedy the vulnerability of minority groups in Nigeria. This is a project which depends on creating associations between ambiguous terms and suffering while executing a constant fluctuation between the particular and the universal: Sozaboy embodies the fate of the Dukana people; Sozaboy becomes a thousand other sozas; and *Sozaboy* the novel, captures the predicament faced by ethnic minority groups during times of civil conflict in Nigeria and beyond. The horrible truth is revealed: 'war is war' and here are the results: death and the exploitation of minority groups (Saro-Wiwa 1994, p. 139).

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