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**THE WRITER AS THE CONSCIENCE OF HIS SOCIETY:
A STUDY OF FESTUS IYAYI'S HEROES**

**PISARZ JAKO SUMIENIE SPOŁECZEŃSTWA:
NA PRZYKŁADZIE HEROES FESTOS IYAYI**

Abstract

This article discusses the role of the creative writer as the conscience of his society using Festus Iyayi as an example. The study focuses on the themes and narrative technique of Iyayi's Heroes to present the author as a literary artist who exposes the corruption and other forms of social evil perpetrated against the common man and the society generally. Studies show that Iyayi's Heroes is one of the literary works written on the Nigerian civil war fought between 1967 and 1970. Iyayi's novel, however, is said to be different from other literary works on the war on account of its neutral perspective on the crisis. This is what informs the choice of the novel for this study. In the novel, Iyayi projects himself as the conscience of society highlighting the deceit, corruption, class-consciousness, insensitivity and avarice to which the common man and the society are subjected by the ruling class using the façade of fighting a civil war. The outcome of this study establishes Iyayi as a conscientious patriot who uses the genre of the novel to highlight the wrongs of Nigerian society with a prescription for social reform.

Keywords: Creative writer, novel, Festus Iyayi, the conscience of society, Nigerian civil war, corruption, class consciousness, greed, avarice, the antidote

Streszczenie

W artykule omówiono rolę pisarza jako sumienia społeczeństwa na przykładzie Festus Iyayi. Badanie koncentruje się na tematach i technice narracyjnej Heroes Iyayi, aby przedstawić autora jako twórcę literackiego, który obnaża korupcję i inne formy zła społecznego popełniane wobec zwykłego człowieka. Badania pokazują, że Heroes Iyayi to jedno z dzieł literackich napisanych na temat Nigeryjskiej wojny domowej toczącej w latach 1967–70. Mówi się jednak, że powieść Iyayi różni się od innych dzieł literackich o wojnie ze względu na neutralną perspektywę kryzysu. To właśnie zdecydowało o wyborze powieści do niniejszego artykułu. W powieści Iyayi projektuje siebie jako sumienie społeczeństwa, podkreślając oszustwo, korupcję, świadomość klasową, nieczułość i chciwość. Zwykły człowiek i społeczeństwo są podporządkowane klasie rządzącej za pomocą fasady toczącej wojnę domową. Wynik tego badania ustanawia Iyayi jako sumiennego

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patriotę, który wykorzystuje gatunek powieści do uwypuklenia krzywd społeczeństwa nigerijskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: *Kreatywny pisarz, powieść, Festus Iyayi, sumienie społeczeństwa, wojna domowa w Nigerii, korupcja, świadomość klasowa, chciwość, chciwość, antidotum*

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Statement of the problem in general outlook and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks.

This article examines the role of the creative writer as the conscience of his society using Festus Iyayi as an example. Iyayi published *Heroes* (1986) to expose to Nigerians and the world generally the deceit, corruption, avarice and class consciousness which he believes were responsible for the birth and sustenance of the Nigerian civil war fought between 1967 and 1970.

Literature is a societal mirror. It reflects the culture, values, and problems of a given society within a creative mode (Ogunjimi, 1994). The literary artist is, therefore, a mediator between society and its people (Satre, 1950). The mediatory role of the creative artist is dynamic as captured in Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1972) where he notes that

A writer responds, with his total personality, to a social environment that changes all the time. Being a sensitive needle, he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society.

The Nigerian civil war has produced a plethora of literary works including Iyayi's *Heroes* (Ogude, 1991). The major events of the Nigerian crisis, according to Oladitan, (1979),

... are well known: the military coup of 15 January 1966, the mass killing of the Ibos in the northern region, followed by another coup in July of the same year; the creation of states in the following year and the secessionist attempt which culminated in the thirty-month civil war which ended in January 1970.

Oladitan, (1979) stresses that there has been a variety of approaches in the narratives of the cause and effect relationships of the war. This view has found corroboration in Emenyonu (1991) who emphasizes that most of the writings on the Nigerian civil war come from writers from the former "Republic of Biafra" and their accounts "... generally, focus on the excruciating Nigerian might and the indefatigable Biafran resilience. Nigeria's crude brute force is contrasted with Biafra's subtle and crafty intelligence". Iyayi's *Heroes*, on the other hand, says Emenyonu, (1991), "... presents a totally new perspective of the war from other writers". Emenyonu maintains that Iyayi in *Heroes* does not depict any support, overt or covert to any of the warring factions. The narrative neutrality is what motivates the choice of Iyayi's novel for this study.

Exposition of main material of research with complete substantiation of obtained scientific results. Discussion.

Social Problems Criticized in *Heroes*
Ogungbesan, (1979) reports Wole Soyinka saying in 1967 that "When a writer in his

society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally or

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withdrawing to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon”. Festus Iyayi’s *Heroes* places the author as the conscience of the Nigerian society considering the social issues criticized in the novel. In *Heroes*, Iyayi depicts the civil war as resulting from a deliberate plan by the Nigerian political and institutional leaders to plunge the country into an unnecessary waste of human and material resources for the purpose of satisfying their penchants for greed and avarice. The course of the war, as depicted in the novel, crystalizes that class consciousness is very much behind the most crisis in Africa and other parts of the world.

Right from the onset of the story in *Heroes*, Iyayi describes the civil war as a fight between two brutal and powerful elephants for more space with the grass around them taking their weights and blows. In other words, Iyayi sees the war as a façade for the fraudulent and diabolical acquisition of more money and power, created and fuelled by the ruling class and their acolytes, using the masses as tools.

In the novel, we are told that the ruling class ... wanted a war so they could steal more money and get more power. But they had to sell the war to the people. And as always, the tribe provided the raw material. Politicians who stole our money, hundreds of millions of naira, businessmen who robbed our country blind drove the country to war to cover up their crimes. (p.169).

The themes of greed and fraud in *Heroes* become apparent when we read that as soon as any of the fighting forces capture a city or a town; their first ports of call have always been the bank. “It doesn’t matter that they are the branches of the Central Bank” (p.148). They use grenades to blow up the vaults and steal the money therein. This robbery cuts across both the federal forces and their Biafran counterparts. The activi-

ties of Major, later Brigadier and subsequently, General, Olu Otunshi in the novel concretize the belief that the war is created to provide an avenue for fraudulent means of self-enrichment. Olu Otunshi is the commander of the federal forces in the Mid-western war fronts. He sells the federal arms and ammunition to the enemy Biafran camp and pockets the returns. He equally sends out his troops without adequate weapons and ammunitions to dangerous war zones on the eve of their paydays and gets as many thousands of them as he could, killed so as to pocket their salaries. And we learn that Otunshi carries out this inhuman act in collusion with the army paymaster. For those soldiers who manage to escape the bullets of the enemy, Otunshi orders for their summary execution after falsely declaring them war deserters.

Iyayi also tells us in the novel that the distribution of the relief materials donated by the international agencies to the war victims is awarded as contracts to the wives and friends of the generals and officers commanding at the fronts. In this way, relief materials like blankets and milk never get to the intended beneficiaries. Instead, they end up “... being sold in the open markets in Lagos and Kaduna and Kano” (p.148). Chief Sule Adodoyin in *Heroes* is also awarded the contract for the distribution of drugs donated by the international agencies to the war victims but instead of distributing the drugs, he opens large drug stores all over the country where the donated drugs are sold. In a nutshell, Iyayi is telling us that the ruling class and its collaborators use the war as an avenue for amassing wealth for themselves.

Class consciousness is another major social problem to which Iyayi draws our attention in *Heroes*. The rich ruling class on each side of the divide uses their respective masses as tools of war having brainwashed them into

believing that they are fighting a just war. It is noticed in the novel that the political class who had caused the war in the first place do not suffer from it. Iyayi says:

The generals and the politicians and the religious leaders and the businessmen send their children away from the country to make sure that they do not suffer from the war. But the workers and the farmers and the poor people remain and yield up their children to the war (p.63-64).

Class distinction is also exhibited even among the military men. Senior military officers sit in their posh offices in Lagos and dish out orders to younger officers in the battlefields. In the novel, we learn that while the crisis is consuming the lives of ordinary Nigerians in their thousands, the Nigerian Head of State is celebrating his wedding with great funfair.

At the war fronts, while fighting soldiers die as a result of negligence, the paucity of weapons and poor battle plans on the sides of their commanding officers, a cultural display and funfair are taking place in a stadium for the entertainment of some senior officers. Hundreds of soldiers are made to guard the stadium while the festivities are going on. The differences in their living quarters also exhibit a sharp class distinction between the officers and the soldiers. While senior officers like Otunshi live with their wives in Reservation Areas with well-furnished quarters, the soldiers, on the other hand, live in makeshift camps with benches, where available, for beds.

At Benin City, as we learn in the novel, only ten soldiers guard an airport where federal government war weapons are kept while a hundred soldiers guard the house of the state governor. Because of the paucity of soldiers to defend it, the airport was destroyed by the enemy plane. The fortification of the governor's house at the expense of the airport suggests that the security of a

single member of the ruling class supercedes that of the society.

The episodes depicting the Nigerian Head of State celebrating his wedding amidst death and carnage, military officers living in GRAs with their wives, preferential security provisions to the governor all at the expense of the common man and the fighting soldiers tells us a lot. It tells of the hopelessness of our sociopolitical situation under false leaders that are only preoccupied with their own vanity and material comforts. The likes of Olu Otunshi who are only preoccupied with the business side of death and whose deadly deals are tacitly endorsed by the leaders at the top give us the horrid picture of a never-ending cycle of corruption.

Economic poverty and paucity of social awareness are depicted in *Heroes* as the main factors that had rendered the masses vulnerable to social exploitation. In the novel, we come across several fighting soldiers like Patrick, Olu, and Kokobi, Sergeants Kesh Kesh, Musa and Audu who admit that they had enlisted into the army during the war either as a result of unemployment and poverty or due to the strength of war propaganda and lies sold to the masses by the ruling class. Patrick, Olu, and Kokobi say that they had enlisted into the army because they were not employed and the war provides them with employment. For Sergeants Kesh Kesh, Musa and Audu, they enlisted into the army to fight the Biafrans because they were informed by their political leaders that Ibo people from the east wanted to deny their northern region access to petroleum resources discovered in that part of the country.

The execution of the war, as portrayed in *Heroes*, is characterized by betrayal, distortion of the truth through propaganda, intrigue and outright falsehood. There are

several instances in the novel where civilians and military men are forced to tell lies or distort the truth about the war going on in their localities. Even before the approach of the federal forces into the Midwestern region, for instance, we witness the difficulties faced by journalists in carrying out their daily duties. Osime Iyere, for instance, finds it difficult to...write his feature page in the newspaper because everything had to be on the war and everything printed on the war had to favor the Biafrans. If the Biafrans lost a city and it was clear that was the truth, the newspaper had to report the opposite (p. 2).

And when the federal troops take over the region from Biafran occupation, the same cycle of mendacity continues. They decide to publish in a newspaper, what appears to be a precautionary advice to the Ibos living in the Midwestern region: "To avoid further embarrassment and possible molestation, all Ibos resident in the city were to report to the garrison headquarters at Ikpoba slope by the river and be registered" (p. 9). Ostensibly, the aim of getting all the Ibos in the city registered is to avoid mistaking the civilians for Biafran military men. The advert, however, turns out to be a deceitful method of isolating the Ibos from the rest of the population for elimination. This is how Mr. Ohiali, Iyere's landlord and other Ibo civilians are shot to death.

When Iyere protests to the federal army commander on the murder of his landlord, he is shown some pictures depicting acts of cruelty perpetrated by the Biafran forces. The pictures display Biafran soldiers inserting sharp sticks into the vagina of civilian women of northern Nigerian origin with the long sticks coming out of the women's mouths. The pictures also depict scenes where children and other civilians were cut in pieces with cutlasses by the Biafrans. This chamber of horrors convinces Iyere

that neither the federal nor the rebels have any claim to any sense of proportion and human decency.

The military men on both federal and Biafran sides tell lies to journalists covering the war. For instance, while transporting the remains of his landlord back to his village of Oganza, Osime Iyere is instructed by the federal troop in Benin City to tell any Biafran soldier he might meet on the road that "... there are at least two divisions here. You tell them there are trucks and armored cars and carriers and machine guns. You tell them we shall be in Asaba tomorrow morning" (p.70).

But there are no such armored cars, carriers and machine guns available. When Iyere wants to know what to tell the federal troops at Asaba, he is instructed to say that the Benin troops are waiting for reinforcements.

When the anticipated reinforcements do not show up, the federal soldiers camped at Asaba, sixteen in all, are ambushed and ten of them are killed. Sergeant Audu in the novel tells Osime Iyere how hard they had fought but their officer, a captain, had betrayed them by running away before the battle had started. Ironically, "In recognition of his bravery," the same captain, who had betrayed his men to the enemies, is promoted to the rank of a Major the following day, while sergeant Audu and the surviving soldiers are not even commended for their bravery.

In the same vein, we learn that Corporal Kolawole had been a sergeant but after a disagreement with a Major on matters of tactical procedure, Kolawole has been demoted. Apparently, Kolawole's battle plans appeared to be better than that of the Major. But the Major felt that his ego had been slighted and Kolawole was punished for daring to argue with a superior officer. The

Major had forced his own plans on the soldiers. As a result, Sergeant Kesh Kesh tells Osime Iyere that “We lost three hundred men in that battle and many more were injured on account of following the Major’s procedures”(p.121). The Major was promptly promoted to the rank of a Lieutenant Colonel. It becomes transparent from this episode of the story that the ruling class in Iyayi’s *Heroes* gives rewards for betrayal and punishment for patriotism.

As noted earlier in this study, both theme and narrative techniques are effectively utilized in the portrayal of the Nigerian crisis in the novel. The physical setting of *Heroes* is the defunct Midwestern region of Nigeria while the time is the period between 1967 and 1970. Some recognizable locations in the setting of the story are Benin City, Onitsha, Oganza, Nkesio, River Niger and Asaba, while references are made to Nigeria, Lagos and Biafra on almost every page of the novel. Recognizable names of political and military leaders of the time like Gowon and Ojukwu are referred to severally in the novel. Notable Nigerian Commanders at the war fronts like Brigadiers Murtala Mohammed and Obasanjo are also mentioned in the novel all of which give the story a realistic Nigerian perspective.

A linear plot structure is used in telling the story. Significant flashback narrative techniques are occasionally employed to link the past to the present. The second person omniscient point of view and an occasional stream of consciousness are craftily integrated into the narrative structure to give the novel its social realist outlook. In order to make the story look real, the author guides us through its course by allowing an unnamed narrator to tell us what is happening and at the same time leading us through the thick of the events by placing Osime Iyere, a Political correspondence with the

Daily News as our guide as he follows the chain of events relating to the war.

The omniscient narrator tells us about the cause and course of the war and Osime Iyere’s gradual growth of perception of the crisis. In order to differentiate between the narrator’s accounts and Iyere’s thoughts, Iyayi artistically incorporates foregrounding technique by italicizing Iyere’s thoughts, while the narrator’s voice is left in the normal print fonts. The use of this narrative technique makes it easy for the reader to know which part of the narration is that of the narrator and which part relates to Iyere’s perception and thought.

The use of flashback narrative techniques in the novel has proved useful in linking up the past to the present. Without the use of the flashback, it would not have been possible for readers of the novel to know the remote and immediate causes of the crisis as the story in the novel begins when the war is already in its third year. For instance, it is through a flashback, in the form of Iyere’s recollections that we learn about the events of three years prior to the war:

Three years ago, we had peace. Three years and it almost seems like twenty years since the radio broadcast the news without stopping to give more details about the number of people lost or captured. The war was stupid but even more stupid were the reasons are given for it, the reasons that led up to it. Why couldn’t the people, the leaders, have been more honest with each other? Why did they have to be dishonest to cause a war? (p.13).

The use of this flashback is significant in that it sheds light on the cause of the war which Iyayi attributes to dishonesty on the parts of some Nigerian political leaders of the time.

Through Iyere’s recollections, Iyayi draws our attention to the divisive and destructive nature of colonialism. The Nigerian civil

war is portrayed to have had its roots in the divide-and-rule control tactics employed by the erstwhile colonial powers. It is depicted in the story that the British colonialists had sown the seed of ethnic hatred between the various ethnic nationalities of Nigeria for ease of control. We also learn through Iyere's recollection that the colonialists had also planted their stooges in political power when they were leaving the scene to ensure continuous exploitation of the country by proxy.

In another significant flashback, Iyayi makes a sarcastic comment on the traditional leaders of the society like the emirs, chiefs and Obas and their roles in the exploitation of national resources to the exclusion of their subjects. Iyere, in the company of the state government had paid a visit to the Oba's palace before the invasion of the state by the Biafrans. The Oba had kept his visitors waiting for about an hour. The Oba's secretary apologizes on behalf of his principal, explaining to the august visitors that the Oba had been defecating in the lavatory. Iyayi, through Osime Iyere, sarcastically scoffs the parasitic traditional institution:

First of all, his royal highness has to get rid of all those robes and beads, unless perhaps they now make a special hole through the robes. And then considering that his royal highness reaps where he does not sow, that he has the food of hundreds of millions of others in his stomach, and the blood of hundreds of millions of slaves on his head, he should stool for hours. He should get the stench of his parasitism and treachery firmly in his nose and eyes. He should suffocate in both (pp. 97-98).

Generally, the use of linear plot structure and the omniscient narrative enables the reader to follow the progress of the events in the story from a narrator that knows all. Thus we are able to follow Iyere through

the thin and thick of the events and his interaction with the soldiers as he moves from one place to the other. The flashback narrative techniques bring us up to date with the remote and immediate causes of the war.

The artistic uses of a stream of consciousness narrative provide additional information about the perceptual growth of Iyere the central character and historical events relating to Nigeria before the war. On a general note, the plot structure and point of view provide the answers to questions bordering on why certain events occur. In short, it provides the cause and effect which enhances the realism of the story.

In the novel, Iyayi creates convincing characters and situations that have close resemblances to actual life. Osime Iyere, the central character of *Heroes*, is a political correspondent with the *Daily News*. It is through this character that we witness the unfolding events in the novel. At the beginning of the story, he appears to be naïve about the ideology behind the war. With growing awareness, however, we begin to witness changes in his perception of the crisis. The cold-blooded murder of Mr. Ohiali, Iyere's landlord and prospective father-in-law by the federal troops and the inhuman treatments of women and children by the Biafrans sharpen his view about the reality of the situation. Before then, his view had been that of a war between the recalcitrant evil Ibo rebel forces bent on subverting the unity of the country and the decent loyal federal troops determined to preserve the oneness of the nation.

The gruesome murders galvanize Osime Iyere into action to get first-hand information about the cause, course, and effects of the war and publish it to the public. His shattered relationship with Ndudi is equally restored as a result of Iyere's perceptual growth. He begins to understand that the war is beyond the simple analysis of bad

Ibo rebels versus good loyal federal troops. As he follows the fighting soldiers to the war fronts and witnessing the tribulations they go through in the hands of the enemy as well as in the hands of their commanding officers, Iyere now assumes the role of a teacher, educating the soldiers as to the real reasons why they were pushed into a war, the cause of which they hardly understood. The most telling effect of his crusading education is witnessed in the changes of the attitude of the federal soldiers towards their Biafran counterparts.

While briefing the troops under his command in preparation to taking the villages of Oganza and Nkesio, Sergeant Kesh Kesh warns his soldiers that the villages should be taken "with little or no casualty" as "... the Biafran soldiers are not our enemies really." To emphasize the importance of his address to the troops, Sergeant Kesh Kesh maintains that his troops should " go to these villages not to kill them but to persuade them. We go there to persuade them to lay down their arms. What happened in the camp after the attack on the bridge must not happen here" (p.243). Sergeant Kesh Kesh is referring to what had transpired following the defeat of the federal forces by the Biafrans. After the disastrous defeat of the federal troop on the bridge, while attempting to take Onitsha, the soldiers are made to ventilate their anger on Biafran prisoners of war, killing one hundred and eighty-seven of them.

Iyayi may have artistically incorporated the enlightenment campaign by Iyere into the story to underpin the role of education in the development of individuals. Mc Lellan, (1970) believes that... men were by nature good and all equally rational; the cause of human misery was simply ignorance, which resulted partly from unfortunate material circumstances, and partly from a deliberate suppression or distortion of the truth by

those in authority, whether civil or religious, to whose obvious interest it was to perpetuate the deceptions under which mankind labored. One of the chief means of destroying this state of affairs was education; another changed in man's environment (p.15).

Iyayi appears to share Mc Lellan's belief as this philosophy is artistically incorporated in Heroes.

The character of Olu Otunshi is a typical example of the vicious Nigerian predator class that preys on the underprivileged of the society. He is an example of the insensitive dictatorial egomaniac with no sense of proportion. He sends out his troop on a suicide mission on the eve of their payday to get as many of them killed so as to pocket their salaries. He also sells Nigerian weapons and ammunition to the Biafran army even though he knows that the same weapons and ammunition would be used against his troops. By supplying the enemy side with weapons, Otunshi does not only corruptly enrich himself but he also prolongs the war for his selfish material gains. Otunshi's egomania manifests in his propensity for sadism. He orders for the summary executions of the soldiers who had escaped death in the hands of the reinforced enemy. He also shoots and kills a Major under his command for simply looking at his wife. We witness a great deal of the callousness in the war through the activities of this character.

Other minor but significant characters in the novel include Sergeant Kesh Kesh whose character may stand for the ordinary soldier who is driven into the war out of sheer patriotism. Before his contact with Iyere, Sergeant Kesh Kesh was convinced in the denial-of-oil-theory propagated by Nigerian political leaders as being responsible for the war. His understanding of the situation, however, sharpens dramatically

as a result of his interaction with Iyere. The other rank and file soldiers include Corporal Kolawale, Obilu, Patani, Otun, Emmanuel, Ikeshi and Yemi whose characters stand for the disadvantaged Nigerians who had enlisted into the army as a result of poverty and unemployment.

The diction of *Heroes* reflects the conscientization message in the story. While discussing the varieties of language, Broughton et al, (1980) note that the English language relies largely on its structure and semantic properties to convey meaning. According to them, the ways in which we use our language can be divided first of all into two broad aspects: (i) the factors determined by the context, and (ii) the factors determined by the mood and purpose of the speaker. Every time we speak, we operate from a complex of choices, involving the selection of vocabulary... (pp. 30-31).

This means that every discipline has its unique set of linguistic items which characterizes that discipline – what Crystal and Davy (1969) refer to as features which are restricted to certain social context. Iyayi's *Heroes* examines themes relating to war; it is, therefore, significant that the language employed in the novel is dominated by linguistic items that characterize military operations. Military related linguistic items are meant to psyche the soldiers for easy manipulation into killings and destructions. On almost every page of the novel, we come across words and phrases like 'capture', 'rebels', 'liberators', 'execute', 'gallant forces', 'orders from above', 'captured territories', 'swiftest operations' and several other vocabulary used in the military parlance thereby enhancing the realism of the novel's thematic preoccupation.

There is also a great deal of the uses of imagery and symbolism in the novel. Images and symbols, according to Palmer, (1986), could be used to indicate what a novelist

thinks of a situation or of a character for the purpose of manipulating the reader's attitude. Iyayi metaphorically describes Gowon and Ojukwu, the war leaders as two powerful elephants fighting for the controls of more space and territories. Elephants are massively built wild animals with an enormous capacity for destruction. Images of wind and rain are also used in the story to symbolize destruction. Before the approach of the federal troop to the Mid Western region, Osime Iyere had planted some corns in the courtyard of his house. Ironically, the rainfall that is expected to make the corns grow and produce grains for the nourishment of the society becomes the source of their destruction and herald of famine. In a language loaded with images, the narrator describes the rain and its destructive effect this way:

He heard it on the rooftop like horses' hooves and he shuddered involuntarily but thought nothing of it until he heard it driven against the window panes by the wind. The wind! The pellets of rain hit the window panes like bullets and then the wind howled very sharply, violently, and all of a sudden, he could not lie on the bed anymore but sat up, the sweat breaking out on his face (p.4). As for the corns, the narrator says that the rain could have been a welcome development if only it had poured gently without the accompanying destructive wind. The wind is so destructive force that could "... take the corn then and pull it from its roots or break it in its middle, snap it up and afterward the corn would be lying flat on its back, its backbone is broken, paralyzed and helpless" (p.4).

Iyere finds it difficult to comprehend why one part of nature should treat another with such cruelty. Watching the aftermath of the rain, Iyere philosophically concludes that "The wind acted like a butcher, slaughtered

my corn, my everything” (p.6). The association of the wind with a cruel butcher comes on the eve of the liberation of the Midwest from the Biafrans by the federal troops. What follows the arrival of the federal troops is the concrete expression of the destruction of human beings encapsulated in the images of the wind and pellets of rain. The images of the two elephants fighting for space, rain and wind, all combine to give us the mirror reflection of the prevailing political situation from which the only disaster is its logical culmination.

Towards the end of the story in *Heroes*, Iyayi draws our attention to the possible doomed future of Nigeria. Following his own escape from death in the hands of the military police having been accused of demoralizing the fighting federal troops, Osime Iyere ... was frightened for the soldier that would emerge from the war. It

would be a man who had learned a great deal of cruelty, for whom life meant nothing, for whom betrayal and treachery were commonplace. He was frightened for himself for now and for the people that would survive the war. Would it ever be possible to write the real history of this war, to capture the pain, the animal intensity of the cruelty, the razor-sharp sense of humiliation following the defeat, the self-centredness of the majority of the generals, their harlotry and open treachery?

Iyayi does not leave us only with the bleak picture of society; for having painted what he considers the reality of the situation, he goes on to make the prescription of ‘The Third Force’, a Marxist mass movement that would neutralize the current political arrangement in the country, an idea which Soyinka also prescribes in *The Man Died* (Ogude, 1991).

Conclusions

This article has examined the role of the literary artist as the conscience of his society using Festus Iyayi as an example. Iyayi’s *Heroes* is discussed in this study as a critical comment on the Nigerian civil war fought between 1967 and 1970. A plethora of literary works have emerged after the war to explain its causes, course, and effects but Iyayi’s novel is said to be different from the rest on account of its narrative neutrality. The narrative neutrality of Iyayi’s story informs the choice of the novel for this study. In the novel, Iyayi depicts the war as a fall-out of the elite’s propensity for corruption, greed and avarice. It is depicted in the story that Nigerian political and institutional leaders who had looted the resources of the country want the war to cover up for their previous atrocities and to amass more wealth for themselves. Therefore, they

brainwash the gullible masses into supporting their selfish cause.

To demonstrate that corruption, greed, and class-consciousness are the real reasons for the birth and sustenance of the war, Iyayi artistically incorporates in the story scenes and episodes where fighting soldiers and their commanders break banks belonging to the federation and the steal the money therefrom.

To further concretize that greed and avarice are the moving force behind the war Iyayi creates in the story the scene where Olu Otunshi, a commander of the federal forces at the war front send out his troops to the war front without adequate weapons so as to get as many of them as possible killed. He does that so as to pocket the pay packages of the dead soldiers. The soldiers that escape death from the enemy are summarily

executed by Otunshi on the false excuse that they were war deserters.

Otunshi does not only kill his troops to steal their pay packages. He also sells the arms and ammunitions entrusted to him to the enemy side for the purpose of self-enrichment. By providing the Biafran rebel forces with arms and ammunitions, Otunshi does not jeopardize the lives of the federal troops but equally prolongs the war to maximize self-aggrandizement.

The relief materials and drugs donated by international humanitarian agencies to the war victims never reach the intended beneficiaries but are sold by the war generals and their collaborators for profit. To reinforce the realism of his story, Iyayi names specific locations like Lagos, Kano, and Kaduna where the relief materials are sold in the open markets. Chief Sule Adedoyin is mentioned as one of the contractors facilitating the sales of the donated materials.

Class consciousness is also depicted in the novel as one of the major social problems of Nigeria. To demonstrate that the ruling class of Nigeria only cares for its base avarice and comforts at the expense of the common man, Iyayi inculcates into the story a

scene where the Nigerian Head of State celebrates his wedding in great funfair while the rest of the country is engulfed in the destruction, rape, carnage, and death as a result of the war.

Class distinction is exhibited even among the military men fighting the war. While the commanders at the fronts live in posh houses in the Government Reservation Areas, the soldiers who are children of the poor masses live in makeshift camps with benches for beds. While the soldiers die from treacheries of their commanders, senior officers are being entertained to cultural displays and general merriment.


In a country where the leaders care only for their own material comforts to the detriment of the masses and are ready to throw the country into baseless civil war to achieve those ends, Iyayi implies in *Heroes*, only doom is the logical national outcome unless the masses are organized to fight for their rights. The organization process is encapsulated in the Third Force prescribed by the author of *Heroes* – the force that is expected to neutralize the present status quo

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