

BREAKING THE SILENCE: AN APPRAISAL OF SOME NIGERIAN FEMALE WAR WRITERS

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Abstract

The study appraises Flora Nwapa's *Never Again*, Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*, Chimamnda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*, in a bid to portray the consequences of war on women, their roles and to investigate the effectiveness of women writing about women's experiences. This paper used the feminist and psychoanalytic theories in appraising the writers and the characters created by them, to determine how effectively they have captured the bitter experiences of women and the traumatic effects of war on the feminists' psyche. The thematic analyses of these works show that violent conflicts have far-reaching devastating effects on women and children. It is also discovered that female writers are better positioned to present women centered experiences more effectively than male writers. The study recommends that more female writers should get involved in the task of exposing situations that leave indelible marks of physical and psychological torture on women.

Keywords: War, gender-based-violence, social dislocation, starvation, resourcefulness.

Introduction

The world is constantly changing and unconsciously people tend to adapt to the positive or negative and retrogressive patterns of behaviour influenced by societal changes. When these patterns of behaviour begin to manifest in a society, literary artists start portraying them in their works. War is a conflict situation that manifests in the society and impacts on patterns of behaviour and human conditions. The Nigerian Civil War began on 6th July 1967 and ended on January 12th 1970 when the Eastern Provinces declared their Independence and Nigeria initiated an unrelenting military campaign to reverse the Biafran secession. The war unleashed untold hardship, social and economic dislocation, moral decadence, hunger, suffering, and poverty on the people within the eastern region. The outcome of this war had a profound effect on the course of Nigerian history. It also brought a new inspiration of writing on these themes, which have been shown by some creative writers.

As a result, many Nigerian novelists, both old and new recreated the war experiences in their literary works but the experiences recreated seem to be one sided because their novels appeared to be dominated by stories that focus exclusively on the male experiences of battle and of their return while the experiences of women were neglected. Hence, this paper examines the issues raised in Flora Nwapa's *Never Again*, Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*, Chimamnda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*, in a bid to perceptibly shift attention from male experiences and heroism in war period to female experiences and their roles by rejecting their representation as weak, fragile, unintelligent and solely dependent on men for personal needs and for survival. To buttress this point, Emecheta in

the Foreword to her novel *Destination Biafra*, affirms that, 'It is different from my other books, the subject is as they say, 'Masculine', but I feel great sense of achievement in having completed it' (vii). The authors used in this discourse undermine patriarchy's belief in female weakness through its portrayal of women's strength by giving them a voice, an identity and an emotional entity especially in conflict situation. They have decided to break the silence by narrating in their own words their experiences during the war.

Flora Nwapa in 1975 broke the jinx when she wrote *Never Again*, though her novel was not highly acclaimed. Buchi Emecheta later came up with *Destination Biafra* in 1980, which was more detailed, and in 2006 and 2011, ChimamandaAdichie and AkachiAdimora-Ezeigbo broke the icy silence and re-visited history with elaborate and detailed account of Nigerian – Biafra Civil War. They explored those areas most women are reluctant to explore. Ogbazi avers that 'Women ...have insisted that their voice must be heard on crucial historical and national issues; that their voice must complement those of men for any story to be holistic' (20). They have decided to express their feelings from the female stance and have remained visible instead of invisible by providing their own accounts. The female writers also embrace and partake in the struggle for reconstruction of an ideal society with social and economic equality, through their literary output. No society is static; therefore, it can be constructive or destructive. According to Acquaye et al, they believe that if a society changes, culture also changes in all countries and new ways of life generally are different from those of few years ago. This change has really affected female writers because they have largely contributed to the growth of Nigerian war novels. Female writers can now write firmly on any subject area including war subject. Achebe in his book *There Was a Country* states that,

The literary harvest from Africa today owes a great debt to female African intellectual forerunners. These griots, orators, and later writers played an indispensable role in recording, molding and transmitting the African story. By boldly mixing numerous African and western literary traditions in a cauldron, seasoning them with local colour, and spicing their tales with the complexity of the human condition, modern women wordsmiths have deepened our understanding of our world. Florence NwazuruahuNwapa (Flora Nwapa) belongs to this important school of Africa female literary progenitors. (112)

Buchi Emecheta, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, and ChimamandaAdichie have also joined the literary giant that inspired them by producing literary works of international acclaim. The works of these notable writers are critically appraised; they highlight how effectively they have recreated the war situation from the female perspective. The novels used help the researcher to re-evaluate the contributions of women to the conflict and extend the work done by their male counterparts through rendering in a deeper manner some of the issues of the conflict about women they ignored. They try to find a way to define the female experience, expose patriarchy, and save women from being the other. Therefore, the issues to be examined in this study are to appraise the consequences of war on women as depicted by the writers, and to investigate the effectiveness of women writing about women's experiences.

To discuss this topic well, the theoretical perspectives are the Feminist and Psychoanalytical theories. Feminist theory aims to understand gender inequalities and focuses largely on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. It provides a critique of these social and political

reactions and focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. Themes like discrimination, patriarchy, stereotyping, victimization, sexual abuse, oppression and many others are explored in feminist theory.

Generally, feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women. Their ultimate goal is to change the world by promoting gender equality and to increase our understanding of women's experiences both in the past and present and promote our appreciation of women's value in the world. They see sexism as dysfunctional because it deprives the society of one-half of its creative work force. They also share the opinion that any gender should not be more important than the other; everybody should be treated equally irrespective of their gender. They wrote to redeem the disparaged image of women by giving them significant roles in their works. They characterize women as willful and capable, thereby contrasting the image of a woman as subservient and inferior.

Feminists are out to express their feelings and sufferings during war from their own side with their own voice and not doing it through men. Their literature is a protest committed to the tasks of challenging traditional and accepted male ideals about the nature of women and about how they feel, act and think as it has to do with war narratives and the way women participation is portrayed - active or passive in a bid to deconstruct these stereotyped single stories and lend a voice to the female personality. To this, Marie Umeh as was cited in Ogbazi adds that without the female voice, no complete picture of the Nigerian Civil War will be recorded in Nigerian literary history (17). In other words, the need for the authors used in this work to present their experiences and the experiences of their people motivated them to write their novels.

Many feminist writers seem to unconsciously draw on elements of psychoanalytic theory because they find them useful in examining issues relevant to the women's experiences. Psychoanalytical theory is the personality theory, which is based on the notion that an individual gets motivated more by unseen forces that are controlled by the conscious and the rational thought. This literary criticism emerges specifically from a therapeutic technique which the Viennese neurologist Sigmund Freud developed for the treatment of hysteria and neurosis at the end of the nineteenth century. Ann Dobbie writes that according to Freud, the human behaviour is formed through an interaction between three components of the mind that is the id, Ego and Super ego. All of Freud's work depends upon the notion of the unconscious - the part of the mind beyond consciousness which, nevertheless, has a strong influence upon our actions. Linked with this is the idea of 'repression', which is the 'forgetting' or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unaccepted desires or traumatic past events so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into realm of the unconscious. A similar process is that of sublimation whereby the repressed material is 'promoted' into something grander or is distinguished as something noble.

Initially, traditional psychoanalytic criticism was based on id-psychology the basis of which was the invasion of the id or the unconscious and its impulse to seek expression in a work of art. Later on the emphasis shifted from id to the ego and the psychology was called ego-psychology. The criticism based on ego-psychology was developed using a theory of creativity given by an American psychoanalyst Ernst Kris. Freud in some of his works had emphasized how fantasies of childhood could provide the imaginative base of the writer's work.

Psychoanalytical theory helps to explore the hidden meaning of a work. This psychological approach to literature is based on Sigmund Freud's theory of psychological analysis. It helps to interpret literature, its problems and artistic creation that is, it attempts to study the nature of human mind and its activities including artistic and literary activity. To Freud, artistic activity is essentially related to the secret gratification of infantile or forbidden wishes repressed in the unconsciousness. There is a tendency of the pleasure principle in every human being to find substitute gratification through play, fantasy, dream and literary activity. Freud writes:

There is a path that leads back from phantasy to reality- the path that is of art. An artist is once more in rudiments an introvert, not far removed from neurosis. He is obsessed by excessively powerful instinctual needs... But he lacks the means of achieving those satisfactions. Consequently, like any other man he turns away from reality and transfers all his interests and his libido too, to the wishful constructions of his life of phantasy, whence the path might lead to neurosis. (Freud, Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis 423)

Freud believes that all people have fantasies, the intention of which is wish-fulfillment. A writer is distinguished from a neurotic in the sense that whereas, a neurotic has got impaired his ability to cope with reality and fails to create a formal fantasy and sinks into chaos, an artist has the ability to sublimate and neutralize the conflict and make it communicable. The writer works on his repressed wishes and creates fantasy on this basis and through formal techniques transmutes a private fantasy into a socially valid and acceptable form.

Thus, according to psychoanalytical approach, a work of art is a concealed expression of the unconscious desire of the author. The nature of a creative work can be understood if the psyche of the author is known. The biographical details, the analysis of early childhood experience of an author help to understand his works. This was clearly portrayed by the authors used in this discourse because their experiences of the war and experiences of their relatives during the war as was narrated to them pushed them into writing about it.

The researcher also employed psychoanalysis to study and understand the behaviour of literary characters, though, they are not real people and therefore do not have psyches that can be analyzed but they are the writers' creation. Furthermore, this practice has been defended by many psychoanalytic critics such as Lois Tyson on two important grounds that is, "when we psychoanalyze literary characters, we are not suggesting that they are real people but that they represent the psychoanalytical experience of human beings in general" (29). Again, it is just as legitimate to psychoanalyze the behaviour represented by literary characters as illustrations of real life-issues. In other words, the characters are the portrayal of the authors' psychology; therefore, this analysis will be seen from the authors and the characters concept.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory has greatly influenced the scene of the 20th century in both literature and ways of life. His ideas of psychoanalyses has continued whether acknowledged or not to influence writers in Africa and elsewhere. The value contribution of psychoanalytical approach to literature to our understanding and appreciation of literature should be crystal clear from the above discussion. It has made us aware of the latent and hidden meanings in literary works. It is based on these observations that the researcher adopts the feminist and psychoanalytical theories.

Human Suffering and Social Dislocation in *Never Again*, *Destination Biafra*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Roses and Bullets*

The novels used in this discourse recreate the emotional trauma and violence that women and children had to go through during the Nigerian Civil War. They paint vivid pictures of the suffering and monumental destruction of lives and property and direct attention on people who had to abandon their stations, families, property and future endeavours to prosecute the civil war. Like most books about war, Nwapa, Emecheta, Adichie, and Adimorah-Ezeigbo in their novels explore powerful themes and raised issues about the human condition, including focusing their stories to reflect the themes of social dislocation, destruction of lives and property, breakdown of family ties, deprivation and abuse of women. They attempt to highlight the ugly effects of Nigerian/Biafran War on the people of eastern region especially women and children.

For these writers to return to the past, with all its pain and suffering, they are depicting that the story of the Nigerian Civil War is incomplete if it does not portray the victimization, maltreatment and brutalization of its most vulnerable victims (women and children). They illustrated in their narration the condition and situation of women as endangered species during the Nigerian Civil War by giving a detailed description of sufferings, untold hardship and hunger the war unleashed on the people. They apparently painted a clear picture of hunger, deprivation, mass killings, immorality and suffering occasioned by the war. Throughout the novels, there were tales of woes. The experiences of the female characters further buttress this fact.

Deprivation and Abuses on Women

War disrupts academic activities of any society. Schools were closed down, or used as refugee camps. The immediate result of this closure of schools was early marriage and sexual immorality, which gives rise to unwanted pregnancies. This is because an idle mind is the devil's tool. In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika married Eloka in spite of her parents' objection and antagonistic behaviour towards her because she was idle. If not for the war, she would have been in her school at Elelenwa thinking of how to make her future bright.

Starvation is one of the negative effects of war and these female writers wrote extensively on the effects of starvation on the people especially the women and children. Baby, one of the characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* almost died of mal-nutrition due to poor feeding. The situation had degenerated so bad that Baby was begging to be given lizard to eat,

A hawker walked into the compound with an enamel tray covered in newspapers, holding up a browned lizard on a stick... 'I want some, Mummy Ola, please,' Baby said. Olanna ignored her and continued to brush her hair. 'Those things are not good for you,' Olanna said... Baby began to cry. Olanna turned and looked at Ugwu in exasperation and suddenly they were both smiling at the situation: Baby was crying to be allowed to eat a lizard.'(352)

Even Nwapa in *Never Again* complained through the protagonist Kate that the quality and quantity of their meals degenerated. She sold almost all her wrappers to feed the family.

Emecheta wrote that she did not revisit her home country until after the civil war. She followed the crisis closely from Britain while many of her relatives were still in Nigeria. Some were massacred along with the other Igbo people and some died of starvation, but those who survived have contributed to *Destination Biafra* as eyewitnesses. She succeeds in presenting victims of the war in her writing to show the psychological effects of the war on the people as of that time. Such situations according to her, made her to start thinking about writing a book concerning the war. According to her, 'it simply had to be written' (vii). Her compulsion is explained in the dedication to the work thus: 'I dedicate this work to the memory of many relatives and friends who died in this war, especially my eight-year-old niece Buchi, who died of starvation. We also see young schoolgirls who are pregnant for soldiers because they had the food. Hunger made many women to be willing victims.'

In *Half of a Yellow Sun* Father Marcel was accused of impregnating a girl (Urenwa) at a refugee camp where he was helping Kainene to share crayfish and other food items. When Kainene discovered it, she sent him away. Ogbazi affirms that, '... some of the women... who experience sexual exploitation in form of rape or sexual manipulation owe their experiences to their lack of security, food and /or protection. The men who abuse them knew this and took undue advantage' (26). Eberechi's parents in *Half of a Yellow Sun* pushed her to an army officer for sex because the war brought starvation and many people were forced to compromise their faith and integrity.

Apart from deaths recorded during wars, so many other dehumanizing and chaotic situations developed such as sexual harassment, social dislocation, breakdown of family ties, destruction of lives and property. The federal forces and even the Biafra army raped and violated women, in unthinkable ways because this type of situation always has negative influence on people. The reason being that the soldiers are often under the influence of alcohol and drugs. For them, they believed that in war, all is fair. The behaviour of troops in warfare varies considerably, both individually and as units or armies. In some circumstances, troops may engage in genocide, war rape and ethnic cleansing.

United Nations frowns at the violation of human right especially that of the women in conflict situations. In other words, attaining equality between women and men and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women are fundamental human rights and United Nations values. This was vividly stated in Article 1 of the United Nations General Assembly resolution on the Elimination of Violence against Women held on 24th February, 1993. Thus,

For the purpose of this Declaration, the term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (3)

This resolution established that women have to be free from violence, but women around the world nevertheless regularly suffer violations of their human rights throughout their lives, and realizing women's human rights has not always being a priority.

In war situations, violence against women takes severe forms. During the past decade, much international attention has been paid to the link between gender based violence and conflicts. Conflicts have far – reaching effects on women's enjoyment of their human rights, whether civil and political or economic and social.

Manjoo, Rashida and Calleigh McRaith are of the view that,

Despite increased global efforts to combat gender violence in conflict and post conflict settings, women continued to be subjected to gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict settings such as rape, sexual slavery, kidnapping or trafficking, forced impregnation or miscarriages, and sexual abuse such as forced nudity, strip searches and other publicly humiliating and violating acts in conflicts and post conflict.... (11)

This shows that nothing has been achieved in stopping sexual violation of women during violent conflicts. To support this, Rehn, Elizabeth and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf observe that, studies have shown that while men and boys are also victims of gender-based violence, women account for the vast majority of those affected. With war, things were never the same, families were separated, friends torn apart, death, hunger (starvation) and immorality became the order of the day. In this situation, women are often the victims of sexual abuse and it often manifests in the society especially during war. At this, Vlacבוד Marie and Lea Biason comment that:

Recent conflicts have highlighted the systematic and specific targeting of women for sexual violence. Rape, sexual assault, forced prostitution, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy and other forms of sexual violence are used as a method of warfare. Sexual violence may be part of a calculated policy to attack the heart of a society, to demoralise and dishonour the opponent. The manner of the sexual violence is often such as to maximise the humiliation of the victim and their family and community, and to ensure a level of powerlessness and fear that will remain entrenched in the individual concerned. (14)

The literary writers used in this paper write on the role of sex in war situations, how women in war situation are violated by marauding or bored soldiers, and how women exchanged sex for safety, favours, and food. They seem to show that army officers take narcotics and alcohol to help them withstand the stress and sight of what they witness and as such they may end up behaving unreasonably. To this, Ogbazi writes that, 'oftentimes, it is the women who bear the brunt of different levels and forms of wickedness and depravities in conflict situations' (27). With rape, a woman's life changes because she has been violated and Adimora- Ezeigbo and Pape in *Body Sexuality and Gender: Versions and Subversions in African Literatures* refer to rape victims as violated bodies while Emecheta refers to them as 'The Tainted Women'.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the writer described rape issue clearly, because as a woman she knows the psychological effects of that social problem on women. She described Ugwu and his friends after a successful attack on the vandals, went to drink in a bar. During their drinking and smoking spree, they raped a bar girl.

The bar girl was lying on her back on the floor, her wrapper bunched up at her waist, her shoulders held down by a soldier, her legs wide, wide ajar. She was sobbing, 'please, please, *biko*'. Her blouse was still on... Finally, he looked at the girl. She stared back at him with a hate. (Adichie, 365)

These are Biafran's manhandling Biafran's, which is to show that conflict situations breeds distrust and evil. The look the bar girl gave Ugwu haunted him for a long time. When he went to his village after the war, he discovered that five vandals (federal forces) had also raped his sister

Anulika on her way to the stream. Nnesinachi who narrated the story lived with one of the officers to avoid being raped and had a baby for him. She says, 'They said the first one that climbed on top of her, she bit him on the arm and drew blood. They nearly beat her to death. One of her eyes refused to open well since' (421).

In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika was abducted and locked up in a room in the Barracks because she was accused of killing Sergeant Sule Ibrahim, who went to circumcise himself so that he will marry her. In the room, three soldiers sprained her ankle and raped her.

She struggled to free herself but they held her and pushed her to the ground. She screamed and one of them clamped a rough hand on her mouth. Divesting himself of his clothes, the sergeant grabbed her legs and prised them open... I go fuck you, ashawo. You kill Sule. He be better man pass all your rebel brothers. Dat thing you no give Sule, I go take am today. Ashawo!... Make you do your own , he said, pointing to one of the soldiers. (495)

In addition, Ginika was drugged and raped when she went with a friend (Janet) to an army camp because of the antagonistic behaviour of her mother-in-law. As a result, she got pregnant for the unknown soldier which destroyed her marriage and led to the final tragedy in the novel.

Orabueze et al posit that in *Roses and Bullets* Adimora-Ezeigbo explores:

The dilemma of women, whom the men see as the booties of war in every armed conflict situation. This opinion is borne out by Eloka's recollection of the value of women during war. Eloka remembered Captain Akudo, who was addicted to sex with teenagers. To him women are beautiful objects to be ravished and thrown away. They taste differently when they are quite young. (496)

Eloka's reflection has thrown into light how women especially teenagers can be a sex-object in war situation that is being sexually exploited without them knowing the men's true intentions.

In *Destination Biafra*, Debbie told the story of how she was raped by countless number of Nigerian soldiers when she was going to Biafra to negotiate for peace. Debbie narrated her ordeal thus,

She could make out the figure of the leader referred to as Bale on top of her, then she knows it was somebody else, then another person ... she felt herself bleeding, though her head was still clear. Pain shot all over her body like arrows. She could hear her mother's protesting cries. But eventually,... Debbie lost consciousness. She was still spread-eagled when she became aware that it was morning... Her legs were like huge pieces of lead. (134)

When Stella Ogedemgbe and her daughter Debbie finally reported to an army officer what happened to them. He replied that it is war, which means that anything is acceptable in war situation. The worst of it is that whenever a woman is raped, she is stigmatized and never receives any marriage offers because nobody (men) will like to have any contact with her.

Debbie was again raped by Col. Lawal who when he discovered that she had been raped before was angry that he had soiled himself. This goes a long way to expose men's reasoning. Instead of outrage at the rapist, they instead treat the victims of rape as if they had committed an abomination by being raped. Even their house help Dora who got pregnant for an unknown Nigerian soldier felt luckier than Debbie who had been raped. When Alan Grey wanted to take Debbie to England out of pity, she refused referring back to the stigma she will carry for the rest of her life. Thus she says: 'Why, why should you want to take me along, with you? To start patronizing me with charity all over again? You forget I have the plague, you forgot that I was raped' (258).

Again, in *Destination Biafra*, the women were asked to remove their cloths to verify whether they are all women and as result they were exposed to cold and mosquitoes. In fact, this is the height of humiliation and man's inhumanity against man. 'The women stripped their clothes off. Thoughts of modesty did not come into it' (171). As if the soldiers were not satisfied, they had to touch, squeeze, slap and even probe to make sure that they are really women. To support this Hancock affirms that, 'disclosure of sexual assault is risky and can result in estrangement from family, mistreatment of children and social exclusion' (3).

The detailed analysis of the scenario of the rape in the novel is what Ann Marie Adams has described as 'portions of the war that other narratives only gloss or allude to' (295). The agonies felt from the brutalization of the women in the novels could possibly only be vividly captured by women writers whose membership of the same gender inspires her with the necessary insight needed to present the inner feelings of women in the light of their experiences from their point of view. The depiction of the weird brutality of women in the novels can be seen as an attempt by the writers to address the gendered bias of discourse on the war, as exemplified essentially in the novels written by male writers.

Destruction of lives

The lives of many were torn apart by the civil war that broke out between Nigeria and Biafra. The novels *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Destination Biafra* clearly portray the northern massacres of 1966, whose graphic descriptions and distressing memories are well branded into the novels. It shows that innocent people like Nnaemeka, Regina, Eunice, Kainene, Olanna's Uncle and aunt, were killed in thousands or disappeared forever without trace. They experience rape and other inhuman atrocities before being maimed. The psychological and physical consequences of war are extensively and graphically portrayed in the novels. The novels take the reader to the battlefields to witness the horrors of war and bring him/her back into different homes and lives to highlight the consequences.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie discusses the pogrom that led to the movement of the Igbo people to the east. Olanna, the protagonist implores Mohammed to help her rescue her relatives so that they can travel to the east together during the Northern riot. When Olanna got there, she discovered that they had all been murdered.

She stopped when she saw the bodies, 'Uncle Mbaezi lay face down in an ungainly twist, legs splayed. Something creamy- white oozed through the large gash on the back of his

head. Aunty Ifeka lay on the veranda. The cuts on her naked body were smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips. (147)

Richard also narrated his own experiences where the Hausa people were killing the Igbo by shouting Nyamiri! And Araba, Araba. Many able-bodied young men and women were killed in the war front or murdered as Emecheta(1980) writes in *Destination Biafra* that young boys, men and even unborn babies were slaughtered without mercy. Due to this, many women were widowed and children left fatherless or orphaned.

Again, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a woman was carrying the head of her daughter in a calabash. This is seen when Olanna, the main character, gazed into the bowl,

She saw the little girl's head with the ashy-grey skin and the plaited hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouthThe train had stopped with a rusty screech' and as she went down, she still thought 'about the plaited hair resting in the calabash. (Adichie, 149)

When Debbie in *Destination Biafra* was travelling to Benin with her mother after the death of her father, they were accosted on the way and the two men with them were murdered while the pregnant woman with them was cut open. Thus Buchi writes, 'The Ibo woman and Stella Ogedemgbe dug a shallow grave for the dead young mother and her two babies, the soldiers had cut her open and killed her unborn child, saying, who knows, he might live to be another Abosi' (135).

Again, in *Destination Biafra*, unarmed civilians travelling down to the east with their families were massacred for no just reason only portraying them as rebels. 'They were still loading the women into the lorry when the shooting started. The air was again filled with the cries of men dying. The men were bleating like goats and baying like hounds. In no time, it was all over' (Emecheta, 177). The women were still shocked when they saw Major Lawal ordering the jeeps, trucks and ambulances to run over the bodies of more than two hundred men so that it will not look like genocide to foreign observers who were silent when we died.

During the capture of Asaba, they were called out to celebrate one Nigeria when the most hideous crime known as 'Asaba Massacre was committed'. Thus,

Human voices bayed like horses, croaked like goats being slaughtered... soldiers were shelling the trapped people inside through the windows, through the doors...Debbie dashed into the bush...while she listened to the cries of dying humanity. (223)

The octogenarian Irish nun and other nuns were raped and killed. They are unsuspecting women (nuns) who felt confident that they are doing God's work. Most of the people that Debbie started the journey with in *Destination Biafra* did not make it alive to Biafra except for one woman-Ozioma and two Nwoba boys. The killing of Ngbechi and his siblings, the nuns during the Asaba massacre and the blowing up of the Niger Bridge, which cost millions of naira to be built, shows wastefulness and the futility of war.

Adimora-Ezeigbo also painted a gruesome picture of an air raid attack at a market in AmaOyi. Thus,

... she saw an arm and a leg fly past and land a little distance from her. She shuddered. People were still running past, crying out in their frenzy. As she pressed her head down once more, Ginika felt a human body land on top of her. She fainted... She flinched at the sight before her – a thin woman with a battered head, still bleeding... the dead and the wounded littered the ground. (211)

Even Udo, the boy soldier in *Roses and Bullets* narrated his own experience of human massacre in the war front. Thus, he says,

Each shell that exploded took lives with it. Cries of men rose and mingled with the sound of explosion. As Udo lay trembling and calling on his mother, a solid but wet object fell on his back and rolled down beside him. With the gentlest of movements, he stretched his hand and touched it. He gave a stifled cry – it was a human head severed at the neck, which still nestled in the steel helmet that it had worn when it belonged to a body that was intact. His hand and body were covered with blood. Udo discovered himself shivering and no matter how he tried, he could not stop his body from shivering. Then he lost consciousness. ...he raised his head and saw the mess around him – the head in the steel helmet, pieces of human flesh and shrapnel littering the trench and the surrounding... It was a terrible sight to see dead bodies lying about and holes dug by exploding shells. (438)

Adimora-Ezeigbo summarizes this by arguing that:

...it is ... supremely ironical that the civil war, a war said to be waged against rebels was in fact no more than a cold-blooded slaughter of innocents...none of them contributed to the decision to separate Biafra from Nigerian, and none was in a position to influence the course of the war. Their massacre made no sense. (145)

In this situation of great massacres, women are usually the worst hit because they are always deeply attached to their children and husband.

During the war, the horrible sights made the women go through psychological torture that permeates their beings and leaves a lasting imprint there. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the woman who was carrying her daughter's head and Olanna suffered inner shock that will leave permanent scars in their lives. Kainene's emotional trauma after the death of Ikejide was also touching. As Ogbaziwrites that, ' Kainene, Olanna's sister is an emotionally stronger woman, but even her strong-willed nature could not save her from the shock that eclipsed her at the sight of Ikejide's death'(31). She also added that Harrison and Richard witnessed the terrifying death but only Kainene showed her shock glaringly.

In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika's reaction to the massacre at AmaOyi market was actually traumatic and this is exemplified as

... seemed to loosen the tight knot inside her, and freed her tear ducts. Ginika sobbed uncontrollably, as if crying could obliterate the images she saw at the market and blot out the memory of the nightmare. Involuntarily, she remembered the railway station in Port

Harcourt and mangled bodies she had seen in the carriage and the decapitated torso of the unidentifiable man. Fresh tears surged into her eyes. (213)

After the incident, she looked out of the window and saw Udo laughing in the veranda and telling the stories of the air raid to Dozie and his brothers. She was surprised how he could recover quickly from the experience. Women show deep pain not because they are weak but because they are mothers or future mothers who know the pain of losing a child.

Udo and Ginika's traumatic experiences are the perfect allegory of the psychological torture children were subjected to in the war. Udo's experience at the battlefield robs him of his puerile innocence. After the war, the hunger and horror Udo witnessed will make a new being of him. For Orabueze et al (2013) the emotional and psychological traumas are unparalleled for the survivors of the war. They write that after the Massacre at AmaOyi Market:

Ginika loses her appetite for food and suffers from insomnia; however the raid had neurotic effect on Mrs. Ndefo, who stayed in her room all day, ready to run into bunker at the slightest noise. Her fear had become so obsessive that she only come out of her room at night and left the preparation of meals solely to her housemaid and Amaka. (494)

The discomfort of AminaYaro, a northerner in Ginika's class, signals the cut of the taunting rope of the seemingly unity between the North and the East. AminaYaro cannot bear the conversation the portended civil war is generating. Out of self-volition, Amina stops coming to school. She perceives herself as a threat to the East. She returns to her homeland (169).

Furthermore, in *Never Again*, a pregnant woman has a premature labour and dies in the process when Ugwuta is being evacuated. Thus, she laments bitterly:

Mama, I am without a husband. My husband has been killed by the Nigerians. He is a strong headed husband. He refused to leave with us. I begged him. No, it is coming again (the baby). Mama I'll die, ... She was dead. (58)

With her death, her children are deprived of their mother and the horrible scene that accompanies her death will definitely leave a permanent scar in the lives of her children and onlookers. Women are usually the worst hit because they are always deeply attached to their children and husbands. The pregnant woman's losses and pressure of war contributed to her untimely death.

In the narratives, the physical scars of war and violence may heal, but those inflicted on the psyche of the characters may never be cured. The authors exposed the realities of war beginning with the physical and literal before going into the psychological and emotional facets. They discussed conflict as a pivotal moment that does not just offer historical context but functions as a stepping stone into the psychological and emotional effects of war on individuals, relationships, ethnic groups and the nation as a whole.

One cannot but acknowledge Nwapa and Emecheta's pioneering effort at evaluating and assessing from feminist point of view; the devaluation, brutality and transcendental psychological trauma suffered by women during the Nigerian civil war, which were glossed over in male-authored war novels. The authors used in this paper portray that their female characters

were abused and deprived of their right as human beings during the disastrous conflict that destroyed the people and their future.

The civil war was also characterized by wanton disruption of the social order and oftentimes, total breakdown of social and family ties. This means that the family lost its function as a social unit and its values were destroyed. In exploring the themes, the authors unintentionally reveal how the rhythm of life in the community is disrupted and family ties broken. Many people fled from one place to another in search of safety and good relationships were broken. This was well recorded in the novels used in this research work. In an interview with Sumaila Umaisha, Akachi says that the love shared by Ginika and Eloka is the type of love that is strong, genuine, ennobling and beautiful. Under normal circumstances, such love should last a lifetime and bring out the best in the individuals concerned. But war is abnormal; the civil war destroyed this love. One of the statements, the novel makes is that the Nigerian Civil War destroyed a lot of good, positive and beautiful things, especially human relationships and lives. It also destroyed property and infrastructure. It shattered dreams and hopes.

The lives of many people were torn apart by the civil war that broke out between Nigeria and Biafra. Eloka and Ginika fell in love with each other and married but the gap in communication brought disastrous effects on the newly married couple. However, their marriage as well as love to each other was plunged onto quicksand when Eloka was enlisted in the army; his absence animated ugly occurrences that destroyed their marriage. This means that a break in communication may cause a fragmentation of social relationship, which leads to the destruction of those common meanings that ordinarily should have provided coherence for an individual's life. In Eloka's absence, Ginika in order to run away from her mother-in-law's bad tempered attitude towards her, had to go partying with a friend, was drugged and sexually molested in the process by another army officer. As Ginika got pregnant for this anonymous officer, her mother-in-law's family as well as everybody abandons her for such "sacrilege". In the end, the child that Ginika gave birth to died. She lost all even her love, Eloka, except her precious life and hope.

Moreover, in *Never Again*, Kate's family relocated because of the increasing crisis. They had to move from Enugu to Port Harcourt then to Ugwuta and later to Mgbidi. All these were done in a hurry, disorganizing the family and depriving her children their rights to education.

Resourcefulness of women in war situation

Notwithstanding the devastating effects of the war, women are perceived to have transcended the reality of trauma to utilize their creative and resourceful potentials and survival instincts to the full capacity in sourcing for materials and providing basic needs for the sustenance of their families and society. Ginika and some women in *Roses and Bullets* engaged in all sorts of activities to help out during the war. They even trade along the enemy line. In *Never Again* Flora Nwapa writes that, 'the women especially were very active, more active than the men in fact. They made uniforms for the soldiers; they cooked for the soldiers and gave expensive presents to the officers. And they organized the women who prayed every Wednesday for Biafra' (7).

In Debbie's heroic movement from Nigeria to Biafra with its dangers and physical abuses, Emecheta neutralizes the stereotype of women being seen as 'mothers' and 'mistresses,' as well as the seemingly irreconcilable gap between women as the weaker sex and the struggle for survival. In so doing, Emecheta clearly in *Destination Biafra* inscribes the importance of women in nation-building and national development. Women's flexibility is seen by the capability to adapt to new situations and circumstances more easily and quickly than men. Emecheta has been able to prove through the image of Debbie that women can demonstrate the courage needed to survive difficult conditions.

Debbie, the protagonist in the novel *Destination Biafra*, acted as an agent of peace though she did not succeed because of the problems she encountered on the way. She is portrayed as a determined woman who makes a dangerous journey across her country in a desperate attempt to reconcile two bitter enemies. Only courage and her independent spirit gave her the strength she needed, when faced with the horrors engulfing her country.

During the war, we see Olanna who contributes immensely to the upbringing of children whom she teaches at Akakuma Primary School, with other teachers such as Ugwu and Mrs. Muokelu. She later establishes her own primary school for the same purpose. Although an air raid by the 'vandals' disrupts her wedding, she remains undauntedly committed to self-determination for her race. She devises survivalist strategies, like soap making, to make ends meet. Her strong-willed disposition comes to the fore when she leads the search party for Kainene after the war. This is commendable, especially when men like Odenigbo and Richard have lost all hopes. When Odenigbo and Richard betray emotion over the death of mama and inability to trace Kainene respectively, she is ever ready to console both men. Her resolve to adopt and care for 'Baby' is a good commentary on her love for Odenigbo.

Kainene is another strong personality created by Adichie. In a typical Igbo fashion, Kainene is a determined business-minded character. She is saddled with the enviable task of managing her father's vast business concern in Port Harcourt. She discharges this duty meritoriously and becomes the cynosure of all eyes. This quality endears her to people hence Richard feels no qualms in denouncing Susan for her. Although she repeatedly regrets the ill preparedness of Biafra for war against Nigeria, she plays her part, during the war. After the fall of Port Harcourt, she relocates to Orlu and establishes a refugee camp to care for the displaced and homeless. Even though she benefits in terms of contract from the war, she comes to mind as a determined Igbo woman whose commitment to the cause of Biafra is never in doubt. She refuses to move to London with her parents and resolves to thrive in war-torn Biafra. Her trade along enemy zone is a testimony to her determination to make her mark during the war, though she never returns.

Another strong-willed woman is Mrs. Muokelu. A barely literate woman, she joins hands with Olanna and Ugwu to train Biafran children during the war. She trains and feeds her large family and assists displaced persons to get food at the relief centre. Her commitment knows no bounds, as she never touches anything from Nigeria. To guide against starvation and deprivation occasioned by the civil war, she trains Olanna in the art of soap making which can be sold for survival. She is even ready to go for '*afia attack*' (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 293), if occasion demands. All the protagonists in the novels used in this discourse are resourceful and did everything possible for their families to survive the war situation, thereby playing multiple roles.

Furthermore, the Nigeria civil war brought with it a wave of awareness to women and their representations in Nigerian literature had taken a new turn. The female writers whose works are explored in this study have attempted to reconstruct women's experiences during the war by highlighting their actions and activities and ultimately presenting them as unsung heroes of the war. They contend that if men fought militarized battles with canons and guns, women similarly fought against the forces of air raids, hunger, and diseases in addition to physical and moral rape, hence, their roles and suffering should not be over looked or undetermined.

Conclusion

Nwapa, Emecheta, Adichie and Adimora-Ezeigbo in their novels broke the silence and gave voice and identities to the women by debunking the inaccurate depiction of women in war situations through their portrayal of women's strength and the indispensability of their roles in the society. Through detailed recreation of the realities of war, they have also written to educate their readers on the experiences and roles of women in war situations, thereby, conveying the message that the war in itself is unnecessary. It is a traumatic tale that needed to be told and shared so that, in the words of Flora Nwapa's title, it would 'Never Again' recur. It was in any case an invaluable lesson on life that needed to be passed on so that, the government will take into consideration the protection of women and children in violent conflict situations as has been voted for, in the United Nations Assembly.

In supporting Nwapa, Ezeigbo writes that the reality of the civil war rest on the premise that war is pointless, tragic and a negation of life. It is also clearly indicated that resorting to war as a means of settling disputes have far-reaching devastating effects on women and children. For those who lived through the war or heard about the war, it was a horrific and traumatic experience because the story is always told with bitterness and great feelings of lost. Each of the writers for this study presents a fair account of different aspects of the war to show their level of literary competence. They tried to portray the plight of women and their families in trying to survive the war, which they did cause by projecting them as active and resourceful individuals who bear the pain of any conflict experientially. This paper, in examining the consequences of war on women and children encourages the female writers to create a courageous woman who is a role model for younger women, one who achieves personal upliftment in her courageous activities during conflict situations.

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