

# **WOMEN AND VIOLENT CONFLICTS IN *DESTINATION BIAFRA*, *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN* AND *ROSES AND BULLETS***

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## **Abstract**

*Violent conflict being a way of settling disputes of some kind, always has devastating effects on the society and masses especially women and children. This study discusses the works of Chimamanda Adichie, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Buchi Emecheta who captured the events of the Nigerian civil war from different perspectives, oftentimes giving in-depth exposure to women's experiences in their narratives. Using multi-media methods of data collection and analysis, the study has appraised these historical novels to determine how effectively they have reconstructed the bitter experiences of women and the traumatic effects of war on humanity during this violent conflict in order to show the futility of war as a means of settling disputes. The study concludes that violent conflict has a devastating effect on the individual and communal psyche with significant traumatization of women and children, and therefore presents it as an unsuitable alternative for settling disputes in the society.*

## **Introduction**

The Nigerian civil war had its toll on women but the earlier male-dominated literary landscape gave only flirting attention to female representation in war narratives. Kayla Williams in 'Women Writing War' cites an article by war veteran and novelist Cara Hoffman published in *The New York Times* of March 31, 2014 in which she argues that "war narratives in prose, poetry, and film have always been, and

continues to be, dominated by male voices" (A23). From the Greek classics to modern story collections, Hoffman observes that these tales focus exclusively on the male experience of battle, and of return; the stories of women at war on the other hand, are 'nearly absent from our culture'. In line with this assertion, one can easily observe that in war narratives in Africa, both in oral tradition and in literary representations,

Women are not projected as active and resourceful characters; rather they are objectified and presented as sex objects only good for men's sexual satisfaction. In contrast to this stand point, female writers such as Oladele Taiwo have observed that , 'the women were made to experience the bestialities of war.'(123)

These female writers have also rejected the stereotypical representation of women as weak, fragile, unintelligent and solely dependent on men for personal needs and for survival. Perhaps this is a direct consequence of the shifting focus of women from being readers to writers as Elaine Showalter (1941) observed in her book *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists* (1977), where she submits that the focus of attention has shifted from 'women as readers' to 'woman as writers'. With the entrance of women into the literary space, more attention is now being given to women's experiences.

In line with this observation, this paper focuses on Women and Violent Conflicts in *Destination Biafra*, *Roses and Bullets*, and *Half of a Yellow Sun* with a view to positing that the female writers whose works are being studied have attempted to reconstruct women's experiences during the Nigerian civil war by highlighting their actions and activities and ultimately presenting them as the 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 undermined. Accordingly, Ifeyinwa Ogbazi captures 'the various ways the ensuing upheavals of a war precipitated by men impacted on the women, disjuncting and fragmenting their lives, and ultimately causing them not to live meaningful, peaceful and fulfilled lives'(22)

### **Violence, Violent Conflicts and the Nigerian Experience**

Violence is an intentional infliction of damage or injury. According to Givetz 'it is harm perpetrated on persons or property ranging, in the case of persons, from simple damage to total destruction'. (185) Nedum also considers violence as those "aspects of ethno-religious, ethno-political, geo-ethnic and socio-economic sanguinary conflicts" that threaten the national unity and security of Nigeria. The World Health Organization defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal development, or deprivation. This definition associates intentionality with the committing of the act itself, irrespective of the outcome it produces.

Violence also includes those acts that result from a power relationship, including threats and intimidation, neglect or acts of omission, in addition to more obvious violent acts. Violence cannot be divorced from the idea of conflict; therefore, violent conflict is used in this work as the manifestation of extreme, consistent and intense level of destruction of lives and property and can be used synonymously as war.

War/violent conflict as theme in literature became important for the writer because it affords the writer an opportunity to create and recreate history by recalling the past to shape the present, predict and possibly influence the future.

It therefore, holds an irresistible attraction for the writer because of what Chikwenye Ogunyemi describes as ‘the sheer urge to record as truthfully as possible an excruciating, indelible, visceral experience which the author has been physically and/or emotionally involved in’ (41). The ‘physical and/or emotional involvement’ of the writer largely affects the claim of the writer to ‘record as truthfully as possible’ the history of which he/she is a part of especially when that history has some negative connotations

Eddie Iroh as quoted by John Hawley made an observation that writers of his generation, who had lived through the Biafran conflict, were too close to the suffering to write the definitive accounts of the war, and that the task would fall on later generations. Writing in 1986, Feuser concludes that there had still not been enough time after the war to produce the sort of writing that would have sufficient emotional distance to turn suffering and commitment into art. As he puts it, ‘it will probably take another generation to come to terms fully with the past, be it politically or artistically’ (150). Here he echoes Eddie Iroh, who was in his early twenties during the war and who had said of his generation of writers that ‘we express sentiments now because we remember it so closely, but I believe the greater work about the war is yet to come—an unbiased, total assessment of the whole tragedy—and it will be necessary’ (Feuser, 150). Almost fifty years has passed since Iroh looked into the future, and we may gauge his foresight by surveying a few recent war-themed novels: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo’s *Roses and Bullets*.(2011)

Adichie, Adimora-Ezeigbo and Emecheta chronicle the pain of Nigeria’s national catastrophe to ease their pain and their people’s pain because as Nwachukwu Agbada observes, ‘Creative writing serves as an outlet for an individual’s pent-up

feelings, for his passion and for the expression of his hopes or disappointments. Writing could serve a stabilizing role in its writer's psychological make-up'. (7-8) While these writers endeavour to come to terms with the reality of the war, they remain committed to the demands of emotional truth by maintaining a non-partisan stance in spite of their pain. This quality of the author is perhaps what prompts Charles Nnolim to remark that 'the absence of a judgmental stance or apportioning of blames is part of the greatness of this novel (*Half of a Yellow Sun*)' (149). The success of the narratives lies in their non-judgmental tone, that is they did not come out to make condemnations outrightly but through their characters, actions, utterances, and the conflicts, they present subtle disenchantment with the war and allow the reader to digest the painful memories without anger and make their own judgments.

Of the three authors studied in this work, only Adimora witnessed the traumatic and unforgettable events first-hand as a schoolgirl. Buchi Emecheta writes that she was in Britain at the time of war; and that without first-hand experience of the war; she had to make up a story from what people told her later. While Chimamanda Adichie's story was built primarily on the experiences of her parents during the Nigerian – Biafran war because she was born seven years after the war.

Adimora – Ezeigbo, Emecheta, Adichie in recreating the war experience infused strong humanistic concern into their novels apparently to paint a clearer picture of hunger, deprivation, mass killings and suffering occasioned by the war. In the novels, readers are taken through these struggles, losses, and sufferings and in the process, they learn of at least some aspects of this particular time in Nigerian history. Issues such as family relationships, love affairs, community involvements, and the conflicts between the traditional ways of life versus the

more modern, often more corrupt, manner of life in the cities are explored.

These novels deal with a most sensitive part of Nigeria's ugly past - the Nigerian Civil War - which many Nigerians, particularly the political class, would prefer to forget. The story of the civil war is indeed a dark spot in Nigeria's history. Nevertheless, it also constitutes a very volatile issue in national discourse especially among the Igbo, who bore the brunt of the war while it lasted. The need to address the above issues adequately and preserve the history and memory of the war for posterity may have informed Achebe's writing of *There Was a Country*. The author himself provides an insight into this in the introduction of the book where he states that: 'It is for the sake of the future of Nigeria, for our children and grandchildren that I feel it is important to tell Nigeria's story, Biafra's story, our story, my story' (*There Was a Country*, 3). Embedded in the above extract is the need to preserve the memory of the war against the threat of forgetfulness. Chimamanda Adichie, Buchi Emecheta and Akachi Adimora- Ezeigbo support this position as part of their reasons for writing the war novels, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Destination Biafra* and *Roses and Bullets* respectively. For Adichie: 'The thought of the egos and indifference of men leading to the unnecessary deaths of men, women and children enrages me, because *I don't ever want to forget*' (39). The authors choose to preserve this bitter memory of our history through fiction. The task of confronting an ugly history is usually scary, but as Edward Brathwaite asserts 'it is only a fool who points at his roots with the left hand'. No doubt, Achebe recognizes the wisdom in Brathwaite's words above, and as it is typical of Achebe, he falls back on the philosophy of the Igbo proverb that 'a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body'.

These works being discussed are among the most accomplished literary works that take the war to its setting, and fulfil Eddie Iroh's contention that only a novelist with some distance from the conflict would be able to produce 'an unbiased, total assessment of the whole tragedy.' Their works evidently suggest that the horrors of the war and the indelible scar it left on the predominantly Igbo Biafran landscape and on the psyche of the people were visible and obvious for a long time. In fact, the events of the war remain relevant and topical more than four decades after it ended, prompting Adichie to observe that 'many of the issues that led to the war remain unresolved in Nigeria of today'. The emotional involvement of the writer in the war privileges history and therefore affords them, the opportunity to express in artistic form some aspects of their own history.

Hence, the novels become the authors' imaginative way of recreating Nigeria's political history, which has been marred by ethnicity, religious intolerance and leadership failure. By attempting to reposition this history, the writer, who believes that her work contains "emotional truth", employs fiction as the clarifying agent that makes truth plausible (Achebe et al, vii). Moreover, articulating in writing the horrors of the war as stored in their memory through stories they were told by their parents and relatives, and written accounts of the war serves as a liberating process. This is because 'going through the gory details of war is perhaps the only authentic psychological and spiritual cleansing exercise for the individual or group who went through all manners of harrowing experiences' (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 77-78). Their works tell the story of sadness, loss, and destruction; they also show self-determination, survival and hope- qualities that were portrayed in the characters. They were eager to withstand the darkness, the

horrors and trauma, which characterize war, and leave a memory that often lingers in the mind of the reader.

### **Negative Effects of Violent Conflict Situations**

Violent conflict has a broad range of outcomes including psychological harm, deprivation and mal development. It may not necessarily result in injury or death, but nonetheless imposes a substantial burden on individuals, families, communities and health care systems worldwide. Many forms of violence against women, children and the elderly, for instance, can result in physical, psychological and social problems that do not necessarily lead to injury, disability or death. These consequences can be immediate, as well as latent, and can last for years after the initial abuse. Krug et al posits that defining outcomes solely in terms of injury or death limits the understanding of the full impact of violence.

It is pertinent to observe that the inhuman conditions under which people operated during the war may have resulted to current societal ills such as greater incidence of stealing, prostitution (male and female), rape, abduction, increased selfishness, self-assertiveness, greed and other abnormal behaviour. According to Achike Udenwa in *Nigeria/Biafra War: My Experience*:

... morality is always thrown into the dustbin. People desire materialism strongly and do not care how it is acquired. Such people accept societal goals but reject the institutionalized means of achieving those goals. They believe in the adage 'The end justifies the means'. The war therefore made the people hard-hearted and hostile even to relatives. .. The war negatively affected the behaviour of the people. The people imbibed the spirit of destruction and disobedience to constituted authority. (217)

This type of situation brings out the beast in man that was hidden under normal circumstances and this affects society in a number of negative ways. Some of the negative outcomes of the Nigerian civil war are listed as starvation, rape, emotional trauma, destruction of lives and disruption of academic activities among others,

### **Starvation**

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 nearly died of mal-nutrition in *Half of a Yellow Sun* almost died of mal-nutrition due to poor feeding. The situation had degenerated so badly 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.'

Buchi Emecheta 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. Emecheta succeeds in presenting victims of the war in her writings. 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 Emecheta, who died of starvation. Emecheta portrays starvation in *Destination Biafra* as an ingredient of destruction and immorality as we see irresponsible wives leave their children to run after young soldiers who had promised them regular meals. 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, he 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)

## **Rape**

Women are always the victims of rape and it manifests in the society especially during violent conflicts/ war. This is because this situation breeds evil and moral decadence in the society. Army officers often 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. Ogbazi states 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 Akachi Adimora- Ezeigbo and Marion Pape in *Body Sexuality and Gender: Versions and Subversions in African Literatures* refer to rape victims as violated bodies while Buchi Emecheta in *Destination Biafra* refers to them as 'The Tainted Woman'. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the writer describes rape

issues clearly because as a woman she knows the psychological effects of that social problem on women. She describes how Ugwu and his friends after a successful attack on the vandals went on a drinking and smoking spree, and finally raped a bargirl.

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 Biafrians manhandling Biafrians, which goes to show that conflict situations breed 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 tragedy in the novel.

Again, 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 knew 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 situations. The worst of it is that whenever a woman is raped, she is stigmatized and may never receive 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.

'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)

The graphic 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 novel could possibly only be vividly captured by a woman writer 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. This betrays popular persuasion of most female writers in their strive to change the status of women in the society, as succinctly opined by Eldred Durosimi Jones:

A significant development since independence has been the increasing importance of women writers and the consequent focus on women's situation in society, their pre-occupations with family and work, And their attempts to free themselves from the trammels of tradition. (1)

The need to restore dignity of women is maybe what has influenced these female war novelists' preoccupation of the humiliation of women in the novels, which in itself is a form of protest. By returning to the past, with all its pain and trauma, they are stating that the story of the Nigerian Civil war is incomplete if it does not depict the victimization, maltreatment and brutalization of its most vulnerable victims. To support this, N. Akingbe in 'Creating the Past, and still counting the Losses' writes that 'as a significant event occurring in the past, it must be fully narrated within the present moment in such a way that

there is no ambiguity, and by extension, no repression of the truth of what happened'.(39)

Therefore, the depiction of the ugly brutality against women in the novels can be seen as an attempt by these writers to address the gendered bias of discourse on the war, as exemplified essentially in the novels written by male writers. This goes to buttress the fact that a female writer is better placed to discuss and meaningfully analyze the physical stress and psychological trauma her fellow woman is subjected to.

### **Destruction of Lives**

In every full-blown war, there must be loss of lives and property. Innocent people were killed in thousands or disappeared forever without trace. Women seem to suffer loss more than men because they are always at the receiving end. They experience rape and other inhuman atrocities before being maimed. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a woman was carrying the head of her daughter in a calabash and in *Destination Biafra*, the women were asked to remove their clothes so as to verify whether they are all women. They were exposed to cold and mosquitoes. In fact, this is the height of humiliation and man's inhumanity against man.

When Debbie 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 maimed 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* when unarmed men travelling down to the east with their families were massacred for no just reason but only because they were portrayed as

rebels thus, “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” (177)

All the people that she started the journey in *Destination Biafra* with 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 build , shows wastefulness and the futility of war. Akachi Adimora – Ezeigbo also painted a gruesome picture of an air raid attack at a market in Ama Oyi. 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)

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the author discussed the pogrom that led to the movement of the Igbos to the east. She described a situation where she begged Mohammed to help her get her relations so that they can travel to the east together during the riot, but when she 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. Auntie 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 were killed in the war front or murdered as Buchi Emecheta 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.

### **Emotional Trauma**

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 Ogbazi writes 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 Ama Oyi market was actually traumatic and this is captured in this scenario:

Ginika sobbed uncontrollable, 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.

### **Disruption of Academic Activities**

War disrupts academic activities of any society. During the war, schools were either closed down, destroyed or used as refugee camps. The immediate result of this closure of schools was early marriage and sexual immorality, which gave rise to unwanted pregnancies. This is because an idle mind is a devil's instrument. In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika married Eloka in spite of the parents' rejection 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. Eberechi in *Half of a Yellow Sun* was pushed to an army officer for sex because the war brought starvation and many people were forced to compromise on morals.

### **Resourcefulness of Women during the War**

Despite 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. Perhaps as a consequence of this, we are presented with women who are creative and resourceful in their works. 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.

The personality of Kainene makes a strong statement on the virtue Adichie bestows on her female characters. 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*' (crossing enemy territory to transact trade) if occasion demands.

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. Grace Okereke has rightly commented on women as symbols of courage in *Destination Biafra*, 'By creating a self assertive, politically-informed heroine like Debbie Ogedemgbe, Emecheta has successfully taken woman from the periphery of Nigerian politics and made her an article of history. Emecheta thus, uses her literary text to protest the ill-treatment of women by men and the need for society to embrace the significant role of women as harbingers of peace and justice. In the text, violence is meted out mainly on women, depicting in vivid terms the rape and the torture they experience.

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.

## **Conclusion**

Irrespective of how Nigerians from whatever tribe feel about the events of the 1960s, particularly the Nigeria-Biafra Civil

War, the fact remains that the events have become a significant, though painful part of Nigeria's history that can never be wished away. Chimamanda Adichie, Buchi Emecheta and Akachi adimora- Ezeigbo have written stories aimed at remembering, reconstructing and interrogating history. The novels – *Half of a yellow sun, Destination Biafra and Roses and Bullets* used in this discourse attempt to portray the destructive effects of Nigeria's 30- month civil war and the place of women in this historic violent conflict.

To achieve this, they were able to variously chronicle the unprecedented destruction and human suffering recorded during the encounter. In doing this, 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. By using women as their protagonists, these writers are able to expose the effects of the war on the populace especially women. Women are therefore, presented as unsung heroes of the war whose contributions should no longer be overlooked or undermined.

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