

Chapter Two

CHINUA ACHEBE AND FLORA NWAPA AT THE BIAFRAN LITERARY WAR FRONT

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Abstract

*The declaration, "No victor! No vanquished!" which came as a palliative rhetoric after the Biafra War also provoked the approach to the literary expressions that became an outcome of the war. Many writers of what is known as Biafra War literature appeared to demonstrate measures of heroism as the struggle for survival became imperative in the war. But Flora Nwapa in her collection of short stories, *Wives at War* seemed more inclined to the feminist cause and so chose a title that sounds very much like Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War*. However, Nwapa appears to give the 'girls' posture a facelift. The conflict assumes a dimension in which the girl/mistress image is outrun by the wife/mother portraiture. Therefore, this work which appraises *Girls at War* and *Wives at War* as they recollect the Nigeria-Biafra War stories also examines the gender altercation, as it becomes interwoven within key ideological structures in African literature.*

Introduction

While the Nigeria-Biafra War provided clues to the many battles that regularly confront humanity in the struggle for survival, the literature that proceeded from this thirty-month event seems rather multi-dimensional. In spite of being expressed in varied genres, there are reasons to suggest that these works of literature do not only bear elements of propaganda, they were, and have also adopted in solid ideological entrenchments. Especially, in the understanding that survival sounds much more imperative to the underdog than the

oppressor, and that art has always been a consequence of certain survival instincts, it is logical to assume that the effusion of captivating literary creativity derive more from the side known as Biafra than from the rest of Nigeria, designated the Federal camp during the war. Ironically, what appears to have instigated these literary works was the declaration: 'No victor! No vanquished!' Since the Nigeria-Biafra War had been branded a pogrom, the declaration was meant to expunge the lucid oppression and the eventual weight of the massacre of the south-easterners. Rather, this instigated varied literary expressions which may not have left the pronouncers exactly at ease. Indeed, most of them are narratives vacillating between autobiographies and diaries with much more factual constituents than fiction.

Ernest Emenyonu proposes that merit in narrative art proceeding from Biafra should be gauged in its "act of balancing emotional impulse and loyalty to art as a sacred entity" (xii). This comes with the expectation that some requirement behooves vibrant strides and more illuminating quests into the crucial matters which have continued to confront African literature. It is also in this regard that Chimalum Nwankwo's appraisal of Biafra narratives concedes that "the theatre is still too narrow, the tale too racy, and the level of creative flight not as high"(7). Yet, Nwankwo mentions Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War* and Flora Nwapa's *Wives at War*, the short stories under investigation in this work, among the few works adjudged to bear robust artistry. They are not only considered to bear pulsating figures and themes within the schema of the oppressor/oppressed, they are seen to provide the framework for upcoming writings on the Biafra subject matter as well as other related conflicts on the soils of Africa. Most importantly, the stories of the Biafra War in both collections under study here are seen to typify accomplished fictionalisation. *Girls at War* (GAW) and *Wives at War* (WAW) are expressed in same genre. Also, with perceivable battle lines in the configuration of the stories, a critical appraisal of certain strands becomes imperative with the authors' deep involvement in Biafra and in the key conflicts in African literature.

Chinua Achebe's vision of developing cultural assertion, national integration and continental identity through radio programs is enforced in the novels that came before *Girls at War: Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1962), *Arrow of God* (1964) and *A Man of the People* (1966). Other works by Achebe include: *Trouble with Nigeria* (1983), *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), *There Was a Country* (2012) two poetry collections, and the founding and editorship of two journals *Uwa Ndi Igbo: A Bilingual Journal of Igbo Life and Arts*; and *Okike: A Journal of New Writings*.

Flora Nwapa became deeply inclined to informing and educating women through writing and publishing. Having been in print by Heinemann, Nwapa founded Tana Press in 1977, publishing her own adult and children's literature

along with works by other writers. She became the first African woman novelist to be published in the English language in Britain. Her books include: five (5) novels: *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), *Never Again* (1975), *One Is Enough* (1981) and *Women are Different* (1986); two (2) collections of short stories: *This Is Lagos and Other Stories* (1971), *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980); five (5) Children's books: *Emeka*, *Driver's Guard* (1972), *The Adventures of Deke* (1980), *The Miracle Kittens* (1980) *Journey to Space* (1980) *Mammy water* (1979); and a poetry collection: *Cassava Song and Rice Song*, (1986).

Ezenwa-Ohaeto observes that the density in Nwapa's poetry demands a greater measure of critical attention. It is in discussing two of Nwapa's poems, 'Cassava Song' and 'Rice Song', that Ezenwa-Ohaeto submits a dual-pronged indictment on critics for their negligence on the feminist Nwapa as well as her poetry. In summation Ezenwa-Ohaeto observes that

there are poems by Nigerian female writers that are competently executed and their subject matter relevant to the realities of Nigeria and Africa... the study of contemporary Nigerian poetry may never be complete without the assimilation of those feminine impulses" (357).

On the other hand, Eve Eisenberg is among the many critics of Chimamanda Adichie's craft who often locate her as Achebe's literary daughter, suggesting that there are sometimes varied imitated patterns. Eisenberg insists that "Adichie enunciates an affective connection between herself and Achebe" (11). These critics in same perspective seem oblivious of the fact that nature invests the brunt of gestation on the feminine gender. Interestingly, Rose Sackeyfio places Nwapa along with Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta as literary grandmothers to Adichie's generation in a submission which recognises that, "women's identities take on new dimensions in western environments that command interrogation of the African 'self'"(103). If therefore Adichie's works smoothly latch unto perceptible temperaments in the crafts of both Achebe and Nwapa, it is not illogical to place them as 'literary spouses', especially deferring to their parallel accomplishments in Biafra War literature. Each of them has poetry collections on the Biafra War, collection of short stories and longer narratives on same subject matter.

In acknowledging the works which gave breath to her war exploration in *Half of A Yellow Sun* (435), Adichie gives the first slot to Achebe's *Girls at War* and goes on to recognise Nwapa, the only author whose two books, *Never Again* and *Wives at War*, feature in this listing. Yet, this might infuriate the gender battle too early in this discourse if facts of Adichie's feminist prevarication are explored further. James Currey affirms that the heroines which Nwapa molds feature as "worshipful servant-wives to erring husbands" (43). This pronouncement on Nwapa's characters is visibly paradigmatic of

Adichie's *Americanah* where measures of servitude attend the female personae. Adichie's narrative voice in *Americanah* is suggestive here:

For the first time, Ifemelu felt older than Aunty Uju, wiser and stronger than Aunty Uju, and she wished that she could wrest Aunty Uju away, shake her into a clear-eyed self, who would not lay hopes on The General, slaving and shaving for him, always ready to fade his flaws. It was not as it should be (83).

There are also parallel portraiture in the mold of Mama and Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus*, Olanna and Kainene in *Half of A Yellow Sun*, with Ifemelu and Aunty Uju as observed in *Americanah*. Generally, the placement of these characters comes in anticlimactic feminist posture as miserable wives, yet-to-be-married co-habiting spouses and of course melancholic mistresses in the three novels respectively. In viewing the supposed Nwapa 'grandmother' status in Sackeyfio's appraisal, regarding the 'wives' figure, it is seen to yield a catalyst effect, if not the intransigent brand among upcoming African female writers.

Severally, Achebe and Nwapa had paid tribute to each other's contribution in the development of modern Nigerian and African Writing. Achebe recognises Nwapa's *Efuru* as "a book ahead of its time, with an assuredly feminist plot and perspective" (*TWAC* 112). He also points to "her bold efforts at reconstructing many institutions that had been destroyed during the Nigeria-Biafra War" (*TWAC* 113). In her own eulogy for Achebe, Nwapa recognises the influence of *Things Fall Apart* on her acquisition of creative writing skills. Further on, she sounds grateful to Achebe in what she regards as "a sudden awakening to the importance of woman-being" (*Women* 528). Nwapa who had indicted male writers for relegating women in their earlier works, adjudges that Achebe remediates the situation in his last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*. Generally, Nwapa is known to be vociferous on the second-rate portraiture of female characters. It is perceptible that this inclination, with some advertency had inaugurated the battle which *Wives at War* draws out against *Girls at War* in this analysis.

'Wives' Versus 'Girls' at War

One of the key rhetorical strategies in place in *GAW* and *WAW* is the submergence of the 'girls' and 'wives' positions as opposing forces in their representation in the Biafra War theatre. A unique parallel abides in the choice of these feminine figures who are rarely found at the war front. It is this logic that highlights how the authors enlist these 'girls' and 'wives' in the war. With their roles as key actors in the war stories, they stand as metaphor for the conflicts which have caught the apprehension of Achebe and Nwapa. Whatever trepidations there might be, there are reasons to believe that intractable matters lie against these writers' philosophy of decorum. However, it must be established that the Nigeria-Biafra War is pivotal in the themes and events re-

presented in these collections of short stories. The fact that Achebe has always drawn attention to the politics and history of his people is affirmed in the choice of themes that touch the socio-political events presaging the war, establishing its postcolonial consequence and projecting transiting repercussions. It is within these perceptions that a vital space opens up for the appraisal of Nwapa's own inclination, how contrasts abound within each of the stories in both collections and the measure of discrepancies in both perspectives.

In *GAW*, only three of the twelve stories fully bear the setting of the Nigeria-Biafra War. Two stories, 'Marriage is a Private Affair' and 'The Voter', relate the catastrophic events of the tribalism and electoral manipulations respectively. Both facts abiding in the socio-political set up of Nigeria are known to infuriate the crisis that eventually led to the war. The rest of Achebe's stories which seem mute on the politics in Nigeria are made to bear symbolic and forceful satire that also parallel Biafra conflicts. Willfred Fueser's view of 'The Madman', the first story in the compilation, relates what he regards as the "concrete elements in the allegorical texture of the story" (198). Fueser sees Nigeria as the primary madman, Biafra as the secondary madman, the theatre of war as the market place, the post-war rehabilitation as the cure of the madman and of course Nwibe's withheld Ozo title as the post-war trauma of continuing exclusion of the Igbo.

The stories: 'The Sacrificial Egg' and 'Dead Men's Path' relate Achebe's proclivity to change. In these, the rigidity and authoritarianism which became the tragic flaw for Achebe's Okonkwo and Ezeulu are pinpointed. In 'Akueke' and 'Uncle Ben's Choice', Achebe wanders into the realm of magical realism, yet the two stories sparingly bear Biafra setting. For instance, the predicament of the character, Akueke, whose guardian spirit abandoned to the swelling disease is a fictional memento for the countries, some of them Africans, who reneged on their support for Biafra or rather lacked the capacity to effect it. The swelling disease parallels kwashiorkor, with all its abomination-seeming manifestations. And in 'Uncle Ben's Choice', the hint on Ben's encounter with *Mammi Wota* (mermaid spirit) comes in the wake of Achebe's deference to the kind of love stories that preoccupied the themes in Onitsha Market Literature. It is in this perspective that the 'girls' figure comes again as the visible conflict. Fueser's clue on the market as the war theatre also pertains to Achebe's predisposition to the Onitsha Market Literature, its mock-heroic conflicts and the comic relief they yield within the excruciating challenges of the war.

In 'Chike's School Days', tribute is paid to children's literature in the semblance of Achebe's *Chike and the River*. In spite of the seeming disconnection with the Biafra War setting, 'Chike's School Days' appear to stand as the relegation of the girl child within the Igbo hold on primogeniture. The five girls who

were born before eventually Chike came practically disappear from the story. While none of the girls is known by any name at all, three names are given to the boy almost immediately after birth. At the surface level, the names are seen to relate the circumstance under which the boy comes, but at the metaphorical plane the issue of detaching the woman from her identity comes into focus. Much more than the indictment of Okonkwo's identity, it is in this picture that (wo)manity is completely asphyxiated. 'The Sacrificial Egg' presents the dynamism that comes along with change. It connects with the traditional connotation of the market, not as a war theatre exactly, but a place for daily exchanging essential commodities instead of the market day alone. This impinges on the benefits of education and its potentials for overcoming limitations and liberating humanity from the clutches of fear and domination (45).

Another more debilitating picture of despicable (wo)manity comes in the story "Vengeful Creditor", where a girl also, Vero, admits poisoning Mrs Emenike's baby. Being a house maid, she was bundled home to her parents. Speaking to the girl's mother (Martha) later, Mrs Emenike who is described as being "cold and stern as an oracle" insists that "Your daughter did not learn murder here in my house". In response, Martha says, "as you see me here I am poor and wretched but I am not a murderer. If my daughter Vero has become a murderer God knows she cannot say she learnt from me" (GAW 67). The eight stories in the collection WAW prevail on the challenges of (wo)manity. Nwapa maintains a solid balance between the war and literature. She structures in the warfare events in Biafra in the first three stories: 'Wives at War', 'Daddy Don't Strike the Match' and 'A Certain Death'. While the very story 'Girls at War' is made to take the rear in Achebe's own collection, Nwapa thrusts 'Wives at War' as the first in the compilation of her own stories. There are several instances of female assertiveness which come to counter the irresponsibility-posture of Achebe's 'girls' figure. The women respond thus:

Your offence is that you by-passed us. Without the women, the Nigerian vandals would have overrun Biafra, without the women, our gallant Biafran soldiers would have died of hunger in the war fronts. Without the women, the Biafra Red Cross would have collapsed... (13).

The three women's organisations: the Busy Bee Club (BBC), the Women's Active Service (WAC) and the National Women's Club (NWC), provide the platform for the committed participation of the women in the various aspects of the Biafra struggle for survival. In 'Daddy Don't Strike the Match', the metaphor of the match relates the pleas from the children and their mothers that the men refrain from the incitements leading up to the war. An instance of the acts of obstinacy noted against men is presented here:

Your husband, I know, is stubborn and talks too much, like your people. Persuade him to leave with you. If he refuses to leave, leave with your children. When the time comes, nobody will ask him to leave. He is a man, he will have no difficulty at all. (17)

Implicit in Nwapa's stories is the suggestion that the war could have been averted if the men had been more concerned about women's vulnerability and the helplessness of their children. In 'A Certain Death', Nwapa sees the conscription of the youth into the Biafra Army as passport to their death. Therefore, WAW constructs a theatre where the sorrowful recapitulations of Biafra aftermaths inaugurate the strength of wives who shoulder men-inflicted burdens. This also raises the crux of the matter in the other three stories which do not bear the Biafra setting: 'Men's Palaver', 'A Wife's Dilemma' and 'Mission to Lagos'. The two stories which maintain a balance between cursory Biafra War pictures and measures of gender conflicts are, 'The Chief's Daughter' and 'Alpha'.

Propagandist Transitions

In so far as propaganda was employed in different measures during the Nigeria-Biafra War, its adoption within the Biafra War narratives needs to be interrogated within certain ironical perceptions. Since certain propagandist schemes were also met with counter-propaganda, it becomes intriguing to assess any claim of absolute moral uprightness by any of the two sides in charging the other camp as employing propagandist schemes. The Nigeria side mounted a formidable stronghold against the recognition of Biafra. Indeed, propaganda became a weapon of its own, on the camp of Biafra, for not only attracting support and recognition but for also installing fear on the enemy camp. That this signals a given choice in the circumstance where the weaker side leans more on inert intellectual prowess than the exhibition of physical strength implicates the underdog status of the Biafra side in the war. It might also grant veracity to the metonymy, 'the pen is mightier than the sword'. That this 'pen/sword dictum became somewhat of a driving philosophy in the blueprint of the war speeches presented by Lt Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu is not in doubt. That the speeches are adjudged to have had very far reaching effects in sustaining the zest of his side during the period the war lasted is also verifiable.

However, it might be more logical to see one of the sides as the oppressor and the other the oppressed, just as the artistic intentions of the man-writer and that of the woman-writer may be placed within the paradigm of opposing camps. But, the fact that Biafra was the defeated side, in spite of the 'no victor/no vanquished celebration, it may have put a question mark on the potency of 'the pen' over 'the sword'. However, the entire events assumed farther repercussions in the appreciation of the pen/sword exemplar. In this

light, it is imperative to interrogate the adoption of propaganda on the Biafra side. The explanation which J.A. Cuddon yields on propaganda is insightful here:

When literature is propaganda and when it is not is a much debated issue. If an author sets out to make a case for a particular religious, social or political point of view, through the medium of a play or a novel, for example, and he is seen to be doing this, and perhaps in the process he sacrifices verisimilitude by contriving character and situation to suit his thesis, then it might be said that the result is a work of propaganda. If what he has to say is worth reading or listening to long after the issue which provoked the propaganda is dead, then his art has transcended the contingent needs of the propagandist (563-564).

To suggest that the issues that precipitated these war stories by Achebe and Nwapa are dead, is to assume that the temperaments which culminated in the war are already obliterated in the present day Nigeria. This might just not apply here since much of the things that are related as propaganda are the rumors of different kinds which became part of the conflict within the challenges of the war itself. Nonetheless, it is expected that any view of propaganda is an attempt to sift facts from rumors and perhaps outright falsehood. But of much more literary merit is the implication of the refinement of propaganda, a process that translates it into ideology. Therefore, what is perceived as the civil war between Achebe and Nwapa ought to elucidate the intersection of certain ideological dimensions in the strands of the stories that incriminate the Biafra experience. While the term 'propaganda' sounds less amiable in relating to the works of Achebe and Nwapa whose literary merit is already established in this discourse, it is rational to conjecture that their journey into the war theatre presupposes an incursion into the jungle whose law is anything but decent. Therefore, recollecting the reality of the war, implicates the probability of adopting propaganda, being a key scheme in the war. Nwapa's 'Wives at War' gives such hint here:

We asked to be taught how to shoot. Did not women and girls fight in Vietnam? We asked to be taught how to take cover and how to evacuate women and children. But those who did not understand mounted strong propaganda against us. They said we were upsetting the women. But we were realistic. We knew Nigeria would fight us, so we must be prepared (*WAW* 14).

Nwapa's charge here stands as the evidence of the supposed attack launched against the said propagandists in the face of what is perceived as a sincere demand to be given a sense of responsibility in the war. Certain questions beg

answers in this regard. Does *GAW* indeed come as propaganda against women and to particularly deflate (wo)manity? If these assumptions are justified, to what extent and in what manners does *WAW* respond to these plots in *GAW*? But if the propagandist assumption on Achebe's *GAW* is not justifiable, to what purpose was Achebe's craft put then? In this circumstance also, should *WAW* then be viewed as being propagandist in its own rank or should it rather be located as coming in ideological clout? While some of the evidences will be prominently discussed in a subsequent section of this work where the status of the attacker and the attacked are placed within visible parallels with the facts of the Nigeria-Biafra War, there is need to see the evidences that certain textual insinuations in *GAW* stand as precursor to the attack that comes in *WAW*.

Visibly, there are sufficient presentations in *GAW* to suggest that Achebe's disparagement of women might not have been premeditated. In the story 'Girls at War', the interaction between the protagonists, Reginald Nwankwo and Gladys, reveals the indictment of the 'girls' figure in this regard. When both of them went to locate Gladys' friend's residence and the neighbors suggest that she might have travelled to Libreville with a boyfriend described as being 'powerful', Reginald is made to say that, "She will come back on an arms plane loaded with shoes, wigs, pants, bras, cosmetics and what have you, which she will then sell and make thousands of pounds. You girls are really at war, aren't you?" (114). The attack on the very derivation of Achebe's title from this excerpt needs to be placed on several scales, but most prominently, it appears to relate more to the propensity of the entire Biafra humanity and not only (wo)manity to the varied struggles of survival at the war time. The matters indicted here include: the misappropriations of business interests, of the arms plane and indeed the act of making merchandise of the war. However, it happens that the articles of trade tilt towards femininity, and so it is this group that appears indicted for measures of sabotage.

Moreover, considering that the story centers on the transformations in the lives of the people of Biafra following transitions in the events of the war period, it must also be noted that none of the sides had envisaged that the war was going to linger for as much as thirty months. Therefore, with the weeks turning into several months, the challenges of the people tended to infuriate metamorphosing temperaments. This reality is seen in the attitude of the characters. Nonetheless, Achebe might be charged with electing the 'girls' posture, perhaps her vulnerability in the circumstance of war conflicts. In *GAW*, Reginald Nwankwo was meeting Gladys for the second time but did not recognise her because of the said transformation. The first meeting which shows how fully dedicated Gladys was to the war as a Civil Defender is briefly presented in a flashback. At that time, supposedly the beginning of the war, she had subjected Reginald to a thorough search at her duty post. Even his authoritative voice claiming his post at the Ministry of Justice could not

intimidate Gladys. In her commitment to carry out the search, Gladys says to Reginald: "Sorry to delay you, sir. But you people gave us this job to do" (*GAW* 104). But with the presentation of Gladys's later life, there are more undertakings which bear contrary outlook.

In the story, 'Sugar Baby', ranked the next in picturing survival in Biafra, certain views of propaganda emanate. Sugar is made to stand as a symbol for those who were only inclined to scrambling for items of relief for war victims. Ironically, Cletus the protagonist dismisses the acquaintance with a girlfriend because she stole part of the items of relief. It was sugar particularly which he had kept away for himself. Achebe presents his condemnation for the girl here: "You know that's not fair,' he said turning on me sharply, "Nice girl indeed! Mercy was just a shameless grabber like all the rest of them" (*GAW*101). Cletus' friend's immediate response to the observation above yields the affirmation here: "Like all the rest of us. What interests me is that you didn't find out all those months you went with her and slept with her until I brought you a packet of sugar. Then your eyes were opened" (*GAW* 101), a view that it was unwarranted to bear allegations against another for offences one is known to commit. However, to learn in this story that Cletus had been deployed to the Propaganda Directorate on the Biafra side may be seen to precipitate the propagandist charge which Nwapa had insinuated above in *WAW*.

The deprecation in the 'girls' morality which also signals the downturn in her obligation to the war efforts of Biafra is presented thus: "Yes, everything stinks here, even these girls who come here all dolled up and smiling. What are they worth? Don't I know? A head of stockfish, that's all, or one American Dollar and they are ready to tumble into bed" (*GAW*115-116). Much more, the pictures of the supposed prosecutors of the war on the Biafra side are represented by Gladys, Reginald Nwankwo and some other prominent members of the militia who were partying at the heat of the war. Regarding Gladys, it says: "It was a long dance and he followed them with his eyes without appearing to do so...She danced next with the Lieutenant-Colonel and again with Captain Joe, and then Nwankwo agreed to take her home" (*GAW* 117). In spite of Nwankwo's vow not to dance because people, even expatriates were dying for the Biafra cause, other acts of his sound particularly incongruous, much more like sabotage. The effect of Reginald's regular largesse for Gladys is also presented here: "He would arrange with his friend at the WCC to deliver to her every fortnight. Tears came to Gladys eyes when she saw the gifts. Nwankwo didn't have too much cash on him but he got together twenty pounds and handed it over to her" (*GAW* 120).

Reginald had also observed that, "We are fighting a war and I happen to know that some young boys at the front drink garri and water once in three days" (*GAW* 112). Even with what comes as manifest generosity of spirit, when he meets the severely wounded Biafran soldier who had the "crude wooden

crutches”, Reginald says to him, “Never mind. Everything will be all right. We are proud of you boys and will make sure you receive your due reward when it is all over” (GAW 122). That was all the soldier could get from him. This presentation may as well be viewed as propaganda against the elite, the class to which Reginald is made to belong.

It becomes incongruous to assert that any propaganda against women is as much intended as it is suggested since Reginald features prominently in the satire. The more fitting suggestion is that Achebe had been too well known to recollect how the feminine influence might impinge on the determination and courage of the warrior. For instance, he had created an Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* who restrained his sons from listening to women’s stories. To him such stories bear the potentials of weakening their manliness. Okonkwo is also made to describe the men who reclined in the journey to kill Ikemefuna as effeminate. There are other instances of supposed affront on women in GAW, which bear the potentials of exasperating Nwapa’s gender battle. In GAW, the picture foreshadowing insanity in the first story ‘Madman’ opens with the quarrel between two women, Mgboye and Udenkwo. In a fit of reaction, Udenkwo says, “Thank you, great judge. Udenkwo is mad. Udenkwo is always mad, but those of you who are sane let...”. And Mgboye responds, “Shut your mouth shameless woman, or a wild beast will lick your eyes for you this morning. When will you learn to keep your badness within this compound...” (WAW 5). It is only after this figure of madness in the wives that the real madman begins to arrive on the scene. Yet, the known case of madness is allotted to the men.

Ideological Warfare

Nwapa’s deflation cum emasculation of Adizua in *Efuru* has often been seen as a response to Okonkwo’s ostensibly oppressive-husband image in *Things Fall Apart*. This is considered to come in the usual quick attempts to display pictures that cascade the evolving ‘what a man can do, a woman can do better’ myth. Nwapa’s inclination to the feminist cause, especially in electing to elevate the women from ‘girls’ to ‘wives’, sounds most implicit in the configuration of the battle lines between and within (wo)manity in the short stories. But a glimpse at the ordering of the compilations in both collections yields certain clues that Nwapa indeed opens up the fire against Achebe, and so may be placed as the attacker at the Biafra literary battle front. Both collections have related titles for the stories that eventually become the titles of the full collections of their short stories – *Girls at War and Other Stories* and *Wives at War and Other Stories*. The title stories in both collections are not just ordered to yield each author’s own articulate intents, each of the stories imbues reality in their setting and characterisation. There are certain pointers to the conjecture WAW comes as a challenge to GAW or perhaps to lend refinement to seemingly undesirable pictures.

In full recognition that the events of the war are elemental to the authors' imagination in these collections, it is imperative to structure the argument on this section on the parallels between the war experience and the positioning of the perceived literary camps. The first relates certain allegations that generate the gender conflict in Nigeria literature. It suggests that the derogatory image of women in the works written by men is responsible for the attack which comes in the emasculation of the male characters in works written by women. This relates the charge that the said actions of the young Igbo Officers in the first coup in Nigeria gave warrant to the reprisal attacks by the northerners, and all of these eventually led to the Nigeria-Biafra War. The Achebe-Nwapa arraignment at the literary war front comes in this similitude.

Closely examined, the first coup in Nigeria disrupted the democratic process, enshrined a catastrophic temperament culminating in the war. The disposition to relegating the entire (wo)manity to mere girlishness in Achebe's configuration is emblematic in the response from Nwapa. Adduced here is the logic of figurative candor insinuating that the attacker's act is but a reaction to preceding literary events. Regarding the Biafra War proper, Michael Gould says: "The coup, when it came, was seemingly well planned by a group of idealistic mainly Igbo army officers. In Kaduna and Ibadan, it secured complete success but in Lagos the coup was defeated. In Enugu, in the east, the plan failed..." (26). While Gould's affirmation stands as the most widely believed account of the January 15 coup plotters, another outstanding statement which contradicts this view comes from Odiá Ofeimun. Even with his petulant reaction to Achebe's publication of *There Was a Country*, Ofeimun's statements are noteworthy:

The truth is that it was not an Igbo coup. It was a coup by some hot-headed Nigerians who believed that their country needed to be better run. It just so happened that many of them were Igbo-speaking. Adegboyega was not Igbo-speaking, but they could not have gone on looking for a rainbow coalition to plan a coup...Achebe did not know that it was NEPU which galvanised the north against the 15 January coup (24-25).

In the context of the gender war which locates Nwapa at the feminist camp, she is seen to have enlisted such feminists as Buchi Emecheta, Ifeoma Okoye, Chimamanda Adichie and Chika Unigwe. Their works reveal their willingness take up of arms to defend their territory like Biafra. Nwapa's observation charges that, "Nigerian male writers, such as Chinua Achebe, Cyprain Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, and Elechi Amadi, have all in their earlier works played down the powerful role of women"(Women 528). This charge may be placed in same temperament as the allegation that the Igbo had assumed key

positions across Nigeria. It is this identification within the factual issues culminating in the Nigeria-Biafra War that is seen to be symptomatic of the fictional war in place in these two collections. That one story had gone before the other bearing seemingly sarcastic pictures of 'the girls', further enforces the view of derogating (wo)manity, especially in the consciousness of patriliney among the Igbo, the nativity of both authors in focus here.

Another fact which seems most insightful about both the Biafra War and the ideology in its literature is the relegation of the wife-mother role in the entire struggle for survival. One perspective correlating feminist assertions on the status of women comes in Emefiena Ezeani's observation that the events leading to the war had been heated up as the massacre of the Igbo people implied that the northerners sought to make them 'second class citizens' in their own country. What Ezeani indicts as de-Igbonisation is presented here:

Following the footsteps of the British colonial Government in political acts of gerrymandering and policy of Divide and Win, the Yakubu Gowon Government dissected and destabilised the Igbo nation by merging important Igbo places, like Port Harcourt and Obigbo, with a non-Igbo State and by so doing, made the territorial delineation problematic (176).

It is supposed that Nwapa reacts to the de-womanisation plot in Achebe's *GAW* where the girl-mistress figure makes no room for wife-mother maturity. To this extent, the 'wives' image comes to re-inaugurate those roles (wife-mother), which Nwapa imbues with great potentials in the survival of Biafra and its people.

The intention to uphold the status of the woman, in *Wives at War*, as 'guardian angel' for both husband-soldiers and boy-soldiers has factual justifications. Quite early in the story, Nwapa drives her point home with the first shot at the 'wives' image here: "Bisi was a devoted wifeBut Bisi was determined, like the other Igbo in Lagos, to make her home at Onitsha, when she saw that her husband was bent on going back home" (*GAW* 1). Bisi is made to re-present the dutifulness of the 'wives', who in spite of the men's stubborn disregard for their own protection, take several measures to secure them. Even the Biafra War songs bear evidences of these roles of wives and mothers in the face of the insufficient ammunition which the Biafran army suffered during the war. The lines of the Biafra War song: '*Ebe m Gara Igba Mgbò*', as collected by Akuma Njoku is succinctly captured thus:

Ebe m gara Igba mgbo egwu ayakata -- Where I went to
the game of shooting
Mgbo m ji alu ogu n'okola mu, e-wuh! -- My ammunition
got finished, e-wuh!
M si ozi ziere m nne mu o -- I said, send an emissary to my
mother *Ya zitere mu ogwu ahu a na-eji eze*
mgbo -- Let her send me charms to dodge bullets (27)

As it is in this song, the men are seen to be less passionate about the battle than the women. This is seen in regarding the battle front as a place for 'the game of shooting' as the song relates. While it might be valid to establish that the men realized that there was no escape from the battle and so decided to ease off their own tension, such acts seemed like another war again being most disquieting to the woman. Joe Achuzia captures an interaction with his wife which corroborates the pictures of the 'wives' anxiety for their soldier-husbands in related circumstances:

My wife came to me as I was still standing there by the telephone and asked, "What is the matter?" I said, Oh, nothing, only that I have just been given the command of 57 Brigade." She said, "Wasn't that Lt Col I venso's brigade?" I answered, "Yes" but that he would now take over 54 Brigade and Brig. Nwawo would become the Divisional Commander. She then said, "Just in the place where the heavy fighting is going on?" I said, "Yes, but there is fighting on every front..."(119)

Again, much of these facts of the passionate obligation of the wives in the Biafra War are related in Rose Njoku's own autobiography. Her husband was among those army chiefs charged with acts of sabotage against Biafra. She recounts that,

Our journey to Owerri town on that Tuesday was uneventful and rather faster than it had been the previous day. On reaching Emekuku, I called in at the Convent to tell Reverend Mother Helen that my husband had been put under prison custody the previous day. She was very sympathetic but I told her that all I needed was to pray for fortitude....I drove straight to the prison. I did not have to wait long before the mighty gate was opened. I introduced myself to the Warder at the gate and asked if I could see my husband who was brought in the previous day...It was the first time that I had seen the inside of a prison(140).

These pictures in which wives are variously made to attend to the security needs of their husbands and children project the force of Nwapa's ammunition in *WAW*. It may be said that her attack stands against the irresponsibility in

the characterisation of Achebe's 'girls' or rather Achebe's characterisation of irresponsible 'girls'.

Achebe's presentation of the piousness and benevolence of Rev. Father Doherty in the story, 'Sugar Baby', could be matched with Nwapa's portrait of the Reverend Sister. Achebe's account has it that, "Cletus and I made the journey on the following Saturday and found Father Doherty in reasonably good mood for a man who had just spent six nights running at the airport unloading relief planes in pitch darkness..." (GAW 95). Nwapa's reaction in the story 'Daddy Don't Strike the Match' relates how the young girl who was taken back from the Northern to the Eastern Nigeria pinpoints her love for two Reverend Sisters in remarkable succession. She says: "I want the war to end so that I can go back to school. I like school, daddy. I like our white Rev. Sister. Will I see her again..." (WAW 19). The woman is made to maintain the inspirational posture for the young generation. Again, the girl's mother recollects the benevolence of another Rev. Sister, this time in Biafra. The narrator relates, "A kind Rev. Sister had given her some toilet rolls at one time" (WAW 24).

Nwapa also seems to have embarked upon repairing the gossip-image often associated with women. In the same story, 'Daddy Don't Strike the Match', the narrator relates the impending doom of the Igbo people in the North,

Ndidi told her husband, who dismissed it as gossip. Everything was perfectly all right: there was peace, there was stability. But Ndidi saw one or two of her people in Kano and began to make preparations. She hired two lorries at a fantastic price, triple the normal charge (WAW 17-18).

The smoothness in the rhetorical contrasts gives veracity to Nwapa's ideological preparedness. In viewing one of the short stories as giving effect to the other, perhaps in the manner in which a rib is re-created as (wo)man being. It is valid to appreciate GAW as not only the precursor to WAW, but also the trigger to its feminist temperaments. It sounds more logical to examine the intentions of Achebe and Nwapa within the precincts of the ingrained ideological warfare in the texts under study here. The writer's intentions are deducible within the events of the Nigeria-Biafra War, its historical antecedents and their very literary aftermaths.

No Victor/No Vanquished?

At the literary war front, several related battles were being fought on the Biafra side, following the declaration, 'No victor! No vanquished!' Nonetheless, as it was in the conscription of immature and amateur soldiers on the side of Biafra, many writers in similar designations got enlisted. Indeed, as the war situation had been with the soldiers, the writers had also generated the boldness in their brand of enlistment. The fume of the attendant battles is decipherable in the glance at some of the titles with merit. An appraisal of the

phrasing of these titles reveals the agony of the entire war even with its end. They most poignantly project the uncertainty of the future. These titles include: Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn*, solidly pitched against Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra*. In Hillary Njoku's *A Tragedy without Heroes* and *Withstand the Storm* by his wife, Rose Njoku, there are autobiographical representations of diverse family predicaments in the war. The nationhood of Nigeria is put to question in the titles: *Beasts of No Nation* by Uzodinma Iweala, *Divided We Stand* by Cyprain Ekwensi and *Destination Biafra* by Buchi Emecheta. Additionally several testaments came from expatriates whose experiences in Biafra seemed too big to be bottled up. Among these are J.L. Brandler's *Out of Nigeria*, Tony Bryne's *Airlift to Biafra*, Dan Jacob's *The Brutality of Nations* and Rex Niven's *The War of Nigerian Unity*.

There are two philosophical clues from the Igbo proverbial stock which suggest that the 'No victor! No vanquished!' declaration at the end of the Nigeria-Biafra War might indeed have signaled the continuation of conflicts related to the same war, with diverse consequences. The first of these clues is located in the saying: *Onye ma obi onye eji n'ala?* – 'Who knows the next plan of the one held on the ground in a fight?' In spite of sounding interrogative, there are two mutually exclusive answers which are often not uttered, given that the explanation of proverbs among the Igbo implicates the listener's lack of common sense. This traditional belief is embedded in another Igbo proverb: *Onye aturu ilu kowaa ya, ego eji luo nne ya furu ukporo* – If a proverb is given and explained to anyone, the bride price paid at that one's mother's traditional marriage rites is considered wasted. However, there is need to present the two likely outcomes in the mind of the vanquished which also provoke the philosophical clue to the declaration. If the one held down is released, that one either takes to his heels or stands to fight back. The alternative which seems to have given warrant to the declaration is the latter. It suggests the apprehension of the Federal side in the circumstance of the surrender by Biafra.

The other philosophical clue that comes into focus here is the proverb, *Nwoke lucha ogu, nwanyi enwere akuko* – 'When the man completes the battle, the woman takes up the story'. This proverb, which touches on the occurrences in the war, the end of those occurrences and the telling of the events, is in the Biafra story also seen to connect the 'No victor! No vanquished!' declaration. Evidently, the events of the thirty-month war period was too long and had bred shades of acrimonies that could not just be saturated with this declaration. However, to the extent that it came to obliterate memories of the terror unleashed against them by The Federal might of Nigeria, it hugely succeeded. The proof of such success lies in the contents of Biafra War autobiographies mostly, where the writers seemed more inclined to telling about their individual affronts with the Biafra authorities or at best their own marks of heroism rather than picturing in full the key incidents of the war.

On the other hand, the success of this declaration rather bears a negative mark on the robustness of the Biafra War literature as Nwankwo highlights. It is in this light that *GAW* and *WAW* stand out. The warrior/story-teller dictum conveys the estimation of the greater accomplishment and also suggests that the more important battle is fought after the real warfare is over.

In recognizing Achebe's satire on the leadership class in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Umelo Ojinma points to the nervousness of these elite as they encounter the dictator. Ojinma says, "Achebe writes that these elite in positions of responsibility, in their debasement, would stoop to flattery, boot-licking, and back-biting in order to ingratiate themselves with those in power" (87). If the 'No victor! No vanquished!' declaration came from the Yakubu Gowon led Federal Government who had initiated and prosecuted the pogrom, then there are clues to why many of the autobiographies and less-than-half-fictions written by supposed intellectuals, appear as confessor penance. If it is affirmed that Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* was made to pacify the women in the wake of the feminist upshot, the adoption of this proverb also ought to be seen to have transited from its pejorative outlook of the flippant gossip figure, not the woman storyteller alone, to the role of the writer. This supposition corroborates Achebe's view of the writer as a burdened participant observer of the war events. If Achebe's presentation is seen as a deconstruction of the original semantic hold by the Igbo ancestors on this warrior/storyteller proverb, it suggests that after seven years of Nwapa's *WAW*, Achebe uploads his own brand of the 'No victor! No vanquished!' declaration.

The treatment of the Biafra War in *GAW* and *WAW* stands to validate the assumption here that in spite of the willing submission of the authors to other responsibilities during the war era, they were inadvertently or otherwise conscripted by their writings into certain battalions of the Biafra conflict. Also, if it is suggested that their conscription came with these publications, it is then needful to interrogate the currency of the Biafra matter from the point of the ceasefire. Ironically, to say that the Biafra War is yet raging in diverse forms, strings radiantly from the very narratives which are adjudged to belong to the corpus of Biafra War literature. It appeared to have been sparked off with the immediacy of the war's end, when the surrender by the Biafra forces had been variously interrogated.

The vulnerability of the woman which Nwapa constructs in 'Daddy Don't Strike the Match' (earlier cited), may not be all about the masculine stubbornness but a more realistic perception of human frailties—the (wo)manity of the woman, indeed the humanity of man. There are truths in the statement, "He is a man, he will have no difficulty at all" (17). In locating the husband as 'a man', the speaker refers rather to the listener, the wife as woman who must understand her plight with regard to speed and perhaps other pre-journey laggardness. While the view of masculine stubbornness

might seem pejorative, its appropriation here pertains more to locating self-awareness with experience. This is explicit here, "When the time comes, nobody will ask him to leave" (17). Therefore, the re-presentations of gender weaknesses which are visible in both collections rather establish the 'No victor! No vanquished' proclamation.

The picture of the uncaring husband, which may be viewed as an attack on man also relates the extent to which the man-woman relationship abides as a natural order. A view of the picture which Nwapa paints in 'A Wife's Dilemma' reveals an attempt to mediate the initial assertiveness of the 'wife's figure which she had presented. Here, the man, Amma, is shown to be more caring. It goes thus:

Amma apologised for driving me in such a car. He knew I had a Volvo and a paid driver. There was no need for the apology. It was rather exciting for me. I told him so. When he said that we were all alone in the world, I was as nervous as a girl of sixteen on her first date. Was I being desired by a young man? I was definitely much older than Amma. He took my hand and my heart missed several beats. (57)

The setting here is Lagos epitomising the permissiveness which Nwapa's relishes in this circumstance. It reveals the measure humanness in the 'wives' who also manifest very strong desire of the opposite sex. In this, the initial female assertiveness is submerged in the thoughtful game of mediation. In 'Mission to Lagos', where the BBC journalist, John Hammer arrives on a foreign mission to train Nigerian journalists, Nwapa presents more of the pictures in which the women fall easily for the men. It comes in a more daring desire to date foreigners. It is captured in Yetunde's observation here: "True, Nigeria men had come back from abroad with white women as their wives. But it was still not common to see a black woman married to a white man" (74). Yetunde's character is also made to provide clues that Nwapa berates the girls who disregard their customs, especially in preferring foreign standards. John Hammer's British nativity culls the several facets of the colonial damage: cultural retardation, identity crisis and stagnated development.

Yetunde's confusion regarding marrying the British, John or the Igbo, Dike ostensibly represents the Yoruba alignment in the Nigeria-Biafra War. Nonetheless, in placing the girl/woman (Yetunde, who, in the story had been married before) in this intriguing situation, one might question Nwapa's commitment in elevating the 'girls' to the 'wives' status.

Furthermore, Nwapa makes room for the assumption that she does not altogether condemn the chauvinistic deference to the male child. This is visible in the story 'The Chief's Daughter:

It was only his beloved Adaeze who proved, if proof was needed, that she was the offspring of the Chief. She was every inch her father. She was so like him that the Chief kept asking his 'chi' why it did not make her a man so as to replace him. Adaeze was as diligent as her father, hardworking and industrious (85-86).

It is rather not fortuitous that this picture that Nwapa paints of Adaeze compares with the same desire that Achebe's Okonkwo had for his daughter Ezinma—that a dutiful daughter would best have come as a boy. While the clues to the Chief's dictatorial tendencies are highlighted, it is not in doubt that he shows much more love for Adaeze than his sons. On Achebe's part, picturing the zeal of the misguided headmaster in the story, 'Dead Men's Path, connects dictatorship as the cause all avoidable 'tribal wars' that typify the Biafra situation. To this extent, the Achebe-Nwapa battle is seen to re-live the 'No Victor! No Vanquished' declaration, by imbuing the stories with great philosophical strands. In spite of the shades of opinion on the conflict between the 'girls' image and that of the 'wives', the portrayal of the characters comes in a manner that is most realistic, especially in the de-personalisation of the characters. The result is that man is brought to perceive the truth in each context, and with a better realisation of human weaknesses. This is seen in the views of manliness for which male writers 'under-characterise' female assertiveness and female response in what may be seen as 'penis-revocation'.

Conclusion

The aggregate tenor in Biafran War literature is evoked in Afam Ebeogu's critical appraisal of the poetry accompanying the travails of the people of the then Biafra. Ebeogu's conclusion is that the poetry of that age merely re-created the agonies of the thirty-month era. Same goes for much of the Biafra War autobiographies earlier mentioned in which the travails of the writer come into focus. Yet, the installation of finesse in *Girls at War* and *Wives at War* comes in the manner in which satire is made to attain farcical status. The analysis reveals how the writers in focus retain revolutionary strands and extricate the appurtenances of propaganda within the framework of lofty ideological lamp holders. The rhetorical ingredients employed in erecting the ideological structures within the Achebe-Nwapa confrontation lie analogous to the oppressor/oppressed positions at the Nigeria-Biafra warfront. They foreshadow the challenges of the future by giving structure to the theatre of African literary battlefronts.

Within these stories in *GAW* and *WAW* are significant conceptual structures which establish measures of vibrancy in works of art on the Biafra subject matter. The appraisal of these concepts is considered to bear considerable prominence over such literary elements as plot, characterisation, theme and setting. Therefore, it is in realising the elements of symbolism, irony and comic

relief that the contrasting positions become visible. Symbolism is perceivable in the girls/wives correlation, irony in the propagandist/ideological charges and measures of comic relief in the victor/vanquished mediation. Interrogating the disparities in *GAW* and *WAW* bears the ready evidence that the force of literature provides more enduring and scintillating conflicts than the battle at the Nigeria-Biafra warfront. Perhaps, the exclusion of the events between 1967 and 1970 in the Nigerian historical records strings from this apprehension. In this understanding, Biafra War literature is adjudged to also provide clues to these facts of history and how they correlate other conflicts.

This discourse has interrogated the persisting disparities which in their ranks also project perspectives of warfare within the stories that make up the collections, *GAW* and *WAW*. Implicitly, there are textual evidences that fundamental distinctions abound between the Biafra War narratives and the fictionalisation of the Biafra subject matter. That *GAW* and *WAW* belong to the latter category of these writings implicates several contentions on the stories within the actions in the Biafra literary camp. Part of this distinction which is embedded in the analysis is the clue that art is divested from history in spite of the rootedness of the former in the latter. All these are annexed with the suggestion that it is the exploration of Biafra War, with the titles the stories bear that places Achebe and Nwapa as literary spouses. If there are conflicts pertaining to role apportionment in the family and those that indict the transition from girlhood to wifehood, then the demands of family obligation may translate to that of the nation. Coming from the same Igbo tradition, the robustness of their tale-telling art comes to play in these stories. If to no other effect, the vigor in *GAW* and *WAW* justify the refutation of Eurocentric postulation that the depleted narrative quality in African prose is an aftermath of a distasteful, if not a tasteless narrative tradition in Africa.

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