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To promote interdisciplinary studies in the fields of Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences and provide a reliable academically trusted and approved venue of publishing Language and culture research.

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Email: [hussein.hamouda@buc.edu.eg](mailto:hussein.hamouda@buc.edu.eg)

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Taibah University, KSA  
Email: [alaaghamdi@yahoo.com](mailto:alaaghamdi@yahoo.com)

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**THE WOMAN'S BODY AS ALTERNATIVE CANVASS OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF AKACHI ADIMORA EZEIGBO'S *ROSES AND BULLETS***

**Anthonia M. Yakubu**

Department of Languages, National Open  
University of Nigeria, Jabi, Abuja, Nigeria.  
Email: ayakubu@noun.edu.ng

**Elizabeth Olaoye**

Department of English and Philosophy, Idaho  
State University, United States.  
Email: olaoyee@gmail.com

**Abstract**

This paper examines the inscriptions of the harsh realities of the Nigerian civil war on women using a selected text, *Roses and Bullets*, written by the prolific author, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. One of the objectives of the study is to explore the various abuses a woman's body is subjected to, and the role the woman plays in transforming her body from an inordinate object to a site of power, of survival and of hope. In feminist discourses, the issue of the woman's body is relevant in the explication of texts. The paper will adopt the feminist theory of embodiment to critique the relationship of women's bodies to Geographies. Since stories are located in time, and since time explains many important historical events like war, we carry out a textual analysis of the exploitation of the female body during the Nigerian civil war, with one of the findings being that women respond readily to healing, as they are willing to forgive, put past abusive experiences behind them, and look forward to a better future.

**Keywords:** Women; Nigerian Civil War; Violence; Bodies; Power

**Introduction**

*War will never become the past  
For those who still carry bits of  
lead in their flesh and bones,  
the lead of the losses in their  
hearts, and the eternal burden  
on memory and mind...*

-Yuri Nagibin, 1985

The woman's body has always attracted much interest, and in many African cultures, it is seen as full of mysteries and dark powers. The social system of patriarchy has devised many myths to check these powers, one of which is menstruation. In African traditional religions, this portends a taboo, so much so that a menstruating woman is not allowed to come close to a shrine, for it is believed that the powers embedded in the medicines, prayers and incantations within the shrine will become redundant. A menstruating woman is viewed as spiritually unclean and is not allowed to come in contact with bodies or objects that are clean (See Saka et al, 2012). This myth about the uncleanness of a menstruating woman also extends to 'white-garment' churches, where a woman who is seeing her 'flow' cannot step into the church until she is 'clean' again. This belief also inhibits some women from receiving Holy Communion in Catholic churches.

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These reactions and responses to the mystery of a woman's body which houses many unexplainable phenomena mirror patriarchal fears about the power of a woman. These fears are also expressed in regards to menopausal women. There is the general belief that this category of women is more powerful because the decades of menstruation have covered them with an impregnable mystery and wisdom. The wisdom and respect usually reserved for old men are then accorded to this category of women, as they have the experience, desexualised bodies, and power, which command much reverence from the community they are in. Therefore, menopausal women are usually the custodians, agents and representatives of female deities in many Nigerian communities. For examples, the deities - Ovia, Olokun, Yemoja, Oya, Ala, Mami Wata, Ogbese - have menopausal women as their priestesses (see Alidou & Verpoorten, 2017).

Apart from provoking feelings of lust from the patriarchal beholder, a classic example being the lust for Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, after King David beheld her when she was taking her bath (see 2 Samuel 11), a woman's naked body is also believed to have enclosed within it much power. To curtail this, societies put in place some control measures. The earliest steps taken were in the socio-cultural and religious domains. In many traditional homes and communities, girls were brought up to cover up, dress modestly and sit with their legs together. A woman's body was regarded as sacred, especially because of the reproductive role it carries out, and as such, to prevent it from being profaned, it had to be covered from the 'other' gaze, the male eye. In contemporary times, particular cultures and religions mandate their women to be fully clothed. For instance, Muslim women are encouraged to wear the hijab, either partially or fully. Christian women should dress decently and avoid unnecessary exposure of the reproductive parts of their bodies. Married women too, in many Nigerian communities, are expected to be fully clothed, to reflect the dignity of their marital status. In 2008, a female Nigerian Senator of the Nigerian Senate, Ufot Eme Ekaette, initiated a proposed bill in the Senate, titled 'Bill for an Act to Prohibit and Punish Public Nudity, Sexual Intimidation and Other Related Offences'. If passed into law, many women would be arrested for what the law regards as 'indecent' dressing. It is what is culturally termed 'indecent' that led to the death of a female Nigerian graduate, Grace Ushang, who was on the compulsory national duty in Maidugiri, Borno State. It was alleged she was raped to death by many of the male locals because she was dressed in trousers, the official uniform of those on the mandatory national exercise (see the following Nigerian newspapers: 25 October, 2012; National Assembly Debates, 8 October 2009; Sahara Reporters, 4 July 2016). A woman's body is objectified, trafficked and commodified. A common belief is that her body can heal diseases. Thus, during the days when the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome gripped Uganda and some countries in Africa, many female virgins were raped and molested because someone, a traditional healer or priest, pronounced that AIDS in a man could be cured if he passes it out of his system into the body of a virgin.

It is generally believed that a woman's reproductive abilities and capabilities are sites of power (Ginsburg & Papp, 1995; Moore et al, 2010; Halewood, 2013). Motherhood is eulogised and every woman is expected to be a mother, except in very few religious instances, where a woman is expected to remain 'pure', neither to have married or conceived. In spite of the discriminations and inequity perpetrated against women, for example, inheritance rights, society still reserves some measure of respect for women as mothers. This respect is translated to fear about the powers embedded in a woman's body that has gone through the rigours of conception and childbirth. It is from a woman's body that generations

are sustained; her body conceives and sustains life. A woman can use her body to pronounce 'death' on particular person(s) or situation(s). This explains why women have in many instances stripped half naked or fully naked to protest certain situations. Men, other women and children usually run away, cringing in fear, whenever this occurs because they understand the repercussions that could come into being (such as the curse they pronounce coming to pass) when women make the deliberate choice to remove their clothing and go bare collectively into the public space. The power connected with a woman's body as a whole is also reserved for particular parts of her body. Thus, society runs to stop a harassed and frustrated mother who would place her hands on her breasts or womb to curse a recalcitrant child.

To curtail this power, societies put in place some control measures. The earliest steps taken were in the socio-cultural and religious domains. In many traditional homes and communities, girls were brought up to cover up, dress modestly and sit with their legs together. However, this has long been taken away by the wheels of globalisation. Today, a woman's body is objectified, trafficked and commodified. Like in the pre-colonial times, women are not seen as intelligent and sensible. Their worth and usefulness is contained within their physical bodies and what they can be put use to. Therefore, women are at the mercy of men, other women and patriarchal institutions that subjugate them and make them unable to realise or fully realise their capabilities of making conscious actions and choices as responsible citizens. Many myths and beliefs are created to substantiate the claim that in relation to men, women are substandard mentally and physically.

The dichotomy between what is public and private is thrashed underfoot when it comes to the context of war. For Igbo men, the Nigeria Civil War not only threatened their masculinity in the social belief that they are the heads of the household, the providers and protectors of woman and children; the war also provided an opportunity for them to correct their flaws in terms of virility and sexual prowess. Much as both men and women are victims of war, going through unimaginable physical and emotional trauma, the woman's body goes through specific dehumanising abuses which are often ignored and undocumented. The woman's body is thrown into the public space and battered, thrashed, forcefully invaded, branded and crushed under rough hands, flaming eyes, fierce actions carried out to pour out malevolent emotions, biased views, secret pleasures, filial hatred, disgust and envy and psychopathic desires.

### **The 'Other' Body: Ownership, Possession and Desecration**

Much has been written on the atrocities of war on men, women and children (Askin, 1997; Amnesty International, 2004; UNICEF, 2005; Beevor, 2007; Hedgepeth, 2010; Kudakwashe & Richard, 2015; Snoubar, 2016; Laukka, 2018). In war situations, an ownership struggle plays out: ' – to be the possessor of lands rich in mineral resources and the proximity of this land to other benefits and political advantages; there is also the desire to be the one in power, among other more complicated causes. Communities, regions and nations go to war, maiming, defiling and killing. There are also wars fought to gain or regain independence; then there are the religious wars, which have snowballed into terrorism in many parts of the world. During wars, boys and men are usually targeted; they are killed in large numbers, sometimes totally annihilated, for it is believed that a community ceases to

exist when there are no men in it, for it is men that are protectors and defenders of a community's sovereignty and unity.

In line with the general belief that without men, women are defenceless, their shield and coverings gone, during wars, women become 'fodders' for the rampaging soldiers, who inscribe and re-inscribe on their bodies, their hatred, lust and power. Contrary to Shilling's (2005: 1 – 23; 47 – 72) and Turner's (2000: 481 – 502) assertion that the body is not passively shaped and acted upon by society during war situations, the woman's body becomes booty, a canvas-of unimagined victimisation and violent contestation. The most common act of violence carried out against young girls and women is sexual – rape. They are gang raped and from recent terrors carried out by Boko Haram in the north eastern states of Nigeria, are kept as sexual slaves for the perpetrators and are also forced to 'keep house' for the soldiers – cooking and other household chores (see Zenn & Pearson, 2014: 46 – 50; Buba, 2015: 6 – 8; Matfess, 2017: 2 – 3. The perpetrator, a representative of 'perceived' historic, communal, religious, and nationalistic wrongs, rapes the woman as an act of hatred and spite on the community as a whole. The woman's body, therefore, becomes a receptacle of his venom. Through rape, a woman is completely stripped of her honour and personhood, and this way, the particular community she belongs to, is also stripped.

Perhaps, this explains why after wars, women who have been known to have been raped by the 'enemy', are ostracised by their communities (For more on this, see Diken & Laustsen, 2005; Nikolic-Rastonovic, 1996; Nordstrom, 1996; Sanday, 2007; Zenn & Pearson, 2014; Buba, 2015).

Many war narratives about the Nigerian Civil War dot the Nigerian literary terrain. Consisting of biographies, autobiographies, critical essays, poetry collections and memoirs, writers have creatively documented personal and near-personal events they or people they know experienced during the 30-month war that occurred between 1967 to 1970. Some instances would suffice here: Achebe's *Girls at War and Other Stories*, Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace*, Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra*, Saro-Wiwa's *On a Darkling Plain*, Omotosho's *Just Before Dawn*, Iroh's *Toads of War*, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Ezeigbo's *Facts and Fiction in the Literature of the Nigerian Civil War*, Obasanjo's *My Command*, Ademoyega's *Why We Struck*, Madiebo's *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, Amadi's *Estrangement*, Okpewho's *The Last Duty* and Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*. Among the biographies/autobiographies and memoirs, only a few are written by women: Rose Adaure Njoku's *Withstand the Storm: War Memoirs of a Housewife* (1986); and Bird and Umelo's *Surviving Biafra* (2018) as examples. A number of these narratives, apart from biographies and autobiographies, usually classify women under one mould: sexual objects who were dehumanised by violence (see Achebe 2012) or sexual objects who deliberately willed to be dehumanised in order to survive the war. For the latter, one always notes the author's subtle reprimand of girls and married women 'whoring' themselves shamelessly and hoping that the war would not come to an end (see Ige 1995; Osaghae et al 2002).

Just before the Nigerian Civil War started, the Federal Government, under the regime of Yakubu Gowon, issued a code of conduct for the Federal Armed Forces, a document that spelt out the behaviour soldiers should adopt while they are fighting the war. This document, which has been described as "humane" (Obasanjo, 1980: 166), is very honourable on paper, and hard to obey in practice. Part of it reads:

*Under no circumstances must pregnant women be ill-treated*

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*and killed; children will not be molested or killed. They must be protected and cared for... Women will be protected against any attacks on their persons, honour, and in particular, against rape or any form of incident of assault. (Obasanjo, 166 -167)*

The reality was filled with terrible human rights abuses that are the subject of many writings. Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* (2014) narrate the choices, experiences, challenges, relationships, resolutions of particular characters who experienced and survived the Nigerian Civil War. Deviating from the usual casts female victims of war are often moulded in, the author presents female characters who, though pawns in the intricacies and complexities of war, were able to make deliberate choices that brought them consolation at the end of the novels.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

*Roses and Bullets* explores how a woman's body amplifies the horrible aspects of the Biafran war, like a billboard accentuating its magnitude. The theory of embodiment then becomes an indispensable tool in the analysis of the text.

Although the concept of embodiment has only gained currency in several disciplines over the past two decades (Goschler, 2005), its manifestation in feminist discourses can be traced back to the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's seminal text on the subjugation of women. Implied in Beauvoir's rumination that "[o]ne is not born, but rather, becomes a woman" (283) is the view that "[n]orms about anatomy are the problem....: women are defined by their reproductive organs in a way that men are not" (Trites, 140). By implication, the woman's body holds meanings that the male body does not; therefore, it is not neutral.

A number of feminists have been primarily concerned with the state's efforts and measures to restrict and form the woman's body into a particular form, in order to make it fit into a preconceived notion of how it should be in a patriarchal environment. The medical field has been used as one of the state's instruments to inscribe patriarchal patterns on the woman's body. Braidotti (1994: 57) refers to this as "the medicalization of the female reproductive body". This is the application of reproductive technologies to the woman's body, where it "is transformed into a factory of detachable pieces" (p. 61). While Foucault has written on modernity's use of biopower to achieve a strong control and manipulation of the human body, feminists have noted the state's preoccupation with the woman's body and its sustained interest through the institutional structures, policies, myths and beliefs, to conform it into a particular form (See Braidotti, 1994; Bondi, 1997; Butler, 1997; Mahmood, 2001). In all spheres of life – economic, political, social, etc. – the woman is expected to reflect the inscriptions that her body has been subjected to: 'subservient'; 'inferior'; 'lowly'; 'substandard'; 'dependent'; 'secondary'; 'assistant'; 'soft and malleable'; among others.

In this paper, we look at the woman's body in a socio-cultural context – the myths, beliefs, and practices enacted by patriarchy to control the form and the uses the woman should be put to. However, some scholars believe that even in environments where the woman's body is prescribed upon, the woman can create empowering spaces for herself by building up her inner strength for her own personal development, by seeing beyond the injustice meted out to her gender. In *Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent*, the author, Saba Mahmood gave particular instances of different strata of women in Egypt, who form religious groups to study the Quran and apply its teachings to different aspects of their lives as women in order to "attain a certain kind of state of happiness, purity, wisdom,

perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1997: 24). To these women, veiling their bodies is actually empowering as it prevents their bodies from the male patriarchal gaze. In spite of the restrictions placed on their bodies, they transferred their attention from it and carry out acts to build up within themselves enviable values like patience, wisdom, fear of the Lord, to mention a few. So, while they follow the laid down gender laws that their patriarchal societies have mandated them to follow, they concentrate their energies in disciplining certain parts of their bodies, like their mouths and eyes, to improve their inner well-being.

But Conboy et al (1997) disagree with this view on the embodiment of the woman’s body. The woman’s body embodies, among other things, cultural meanings, “certain cultural and historical possibilities”, and “physiological and biological casualties” (p. 402). Women are conditioned therefore, to act out and reproduce these elements in order for them to be accepted as law abiding fellows of their societies. This reality of women in a patriarchal society affirms de Beauvoir’s assertion in *The Second Sex* that “one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman.” (1974: 38). In other words, a woman is not *naturally* so; she is conditioned to be so and compelled to live up to the gendered stereotype of being a woman. Therefore, her body is the outward cultural signifier of these historical limitations (Conboy et al, 404).

The woman’s body encapsulates socio-cultural conventions, myths and beliefs that codify the way this body should act. The woman is expected to ‘perform’ or re-enact and interpret these cultural restrictions placed on her gendered body within the confines of a patriarchal setting. Not performing it rightly will bring upon her punishments that will shame her publicly.

In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika suffered physically and psychologically as a result of the war and as a result of being a woman. Her body exemplified the eclipsed dream which is Biafra and it shows the devastating effect of the war on a people. Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo succeeds in giving a vivid account of everyday life among Biafrans from the first day Biafra was declared to the day the war ended. Having experienced the war herself, Ezeigbo is able to give a realistic account of domestic life during the war. The simplicity of the story told is actually the strength of the narrative as it chronicles the life of the protagonist, drawing attention to the way her body changes from a state of naïve innocence to a state of being a scarred canvas of the war. Ezeigbo herself testifies to the terrible effect of the war on the Igbo population:

In the pre-war Igbo society, there was a lot of honesty, integrity and hard work. But the war swept away our culture, our values and morals. Many young men went into armed robbery. People had become extremely poor and Biafran money was useless. Even the twenty pounds they promised, how many got it? It was also at this time they declared the indigenisation policy where other ethnic groups bought shares in companies as foreigners withdrew. Most Igbos didn’t have money to make such investments and that is the root of the lack of industrialization we see in our society, for example. *We also had more Igbo women becoming promiscuous. Some went away with soldiers just to survive.* Only few families who were working and receiving salaries were able to send their children back to school. (*My Biafran Story*) Emphasis ours

Along this line, even before the war begins to ravage the protagonist’s life, her body, especially as a site of sexuality, has been shown to hold special meanings for her immediate family and community. Having lost her mother earlier on in life, Ginika’s body is a site of

memory to her father who believes his new wife is incompetent to bring up his children. To him then, Ginika has to be protected and shielded like a parcel of land from encroachment by male bodies. Christopher Schliephake's rumination further expatiates this reasoning:

If there is meaning attached to a space, it is...an embodied one, a feeling rather than a reflective or cognitive process. Lived or inhabited places have, in their materiality, a presence that acts on us, whereas our bodies, in turn, act on our environments and become their own agents of memory that "retain habitualized patterns" and "reproduce pleasurable, traumatic, and indifferent experiences that we have undergone in the past" in relation to a place (387)

During the war, these impressions about her body become amplified as everything about their lives begins to change. For instance, Ginika's manner of dressing changes during the first days of the war when she leaves the school to join her parents in Mbano. This is because the war changes people's sensibilities and disposition to life. According to Ginika:

She would most certainly need a pair of trousers or shorts. She did not usually wear these in Mbano, as most people considered them strictly men's clothes and frowned upon a girl wearing or appearing in them... She could not resist a hearty laugh at the thought that the war had made most people less conservative and more accommodating. The sight of a girl in trousers or shorts had now ceased to provoke a resentful stare or malicious criticism as in the past.

A change of sensibilities is perceived here as a less conservative society. In Ginika's home, this change is evident in her father's willingness to allow her to join a special squad involving both male and female participants in spite of his earlier attitude to her body as a place to be protected.

The civil war took its toll on peoples' bodies, as they became disembodied, and dismembered. When Ama Oyi, where the protagonist stays is shelled, the reality of people as bodies is pressed home. This bombing takes place while Ginika and her cousin are in Ama Oyi's market:

Could these be rockets or cannon balls? Soon after before she lowered her head completely, 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... There were howls here and there. All she wanted to do was get away from the gory scene. Further away, she saw limbs ripped off their owners, and body parts lying around as if they were for sale. Some of the bodies were trapped by chairs and stools people had brought to the market, Ginika cringed at the sight of blood splattered on trees, on the ground, on merchandise and on the dead bodies lying everywhere (146).

This physical assault visited on bodies of Biafran citizens is a dramatization of a deeper level of psychological displacement that the war signifies. Ginika's body and dress is stained by the blood of the wounded woman who lands on her at the market. Later on, we realise that it is not just her body that is stained by this traumatic event; her mind is too, as she later stares helplessly at her lunch, engrossed with the memory of torn and dismembered bodies.

Another effect of the war on Ginika's life is manifested in the way a normal marital rite is cut short due to the war. An unlucky wife in the narrative has her husband drafted into the army on their way from the church immediately after their hurried marital vows. For such a wife, if she has succumbed to the strict rules of chastity which was still widespread among the Igbo around this period, conjugal bliss becomes a mirage, leaving her body in a state of longing and unfulfilled expectation.

The Nigeria Civil War did not suspend the cultural beliefs and norms of the Igbo society; instead, these continued to play out during the war. Just like before the war, the discrimination against women continued unabated during the war. In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika's mother-in-law called her aside to question her about her fertility. She wanted to know if she got pregnant before her husband enlisted in the army. With a sense of judgement beclouded by a cultural primacy of childbearing in matrimony, she blamed Ginika for not getting pregnant before her husband leaves for the war front. With her constant pestering and deliberate denigration of Ginika, the latter sought a distraction by going out with Janet whom she worked with at the relief centre against her own good judgement. It is while she went to a proposed dance which eventually did not take place that she experienced a degradation of her body. While she slept in the night under the influence of alcohol, someone - one of the soldiers - slipped in to possess her body sexually. Her reaction the next morning showed she was in a state of sleep while this takes place. She became pregnant.

The unfortunate turn of events did not arouse pity in Ginika's parents-in-laws. Her rape then became a source of shame and trauma while the pregnancy is its memory that will not go away, try as she might. Sent out of her husband's home, the trauma of the whole incident and the starvation of the war compounded her issues. The pregnancy made her unwelcome to even her parents who believed she has shamed them by getting pregnant by someone other than her husband. By the time she brought forth this child, it was an embodiment of the war. Her child was like Biafra itself, for "he was too tiny and was malformed. Each of his hands had two fingers missing. His breathing was laboured" (297). The same way the Nigerian government starved Biafra to death of submission, Ginika believed that she starved him to death while he was inside her, that she neglected him and didn't give him a chance (297).

By the time the war comes to an end, Ginika has suffered the loss of her marriage, her father's love and the death of her baby – experiences etched on her body through its violation and abuse.

### **Roses for a Dutiful Wife?**

In this section, we want to emphasise that the abuses suffered by women during wars are reflections of the abuses – psychological and physical – that they experience in a normal patriarchal Nigerian society. The Igbo setting of the selected novel is miniature of the real Igbo society, where women are generally viewed as second class citizens (Omagu, 2016; Vesanummi, 2007; Pandey & Wadhera, 2014). War situations facilitate these feelings of aggression and lawlessness against women.

War situations remind one of the philosophy behind William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1997). In it, the reader sees human beings the way they really are when there are no restraining laws and expectations set up to make them 'conform' and 'civilised'. In the jungle setting of the novel, the inherent evil in people, suppressed in civilised societies, is let loose,

and its first victims are the morally upright and the intellectuals. In the selected novels of this paper, the characters are portrayed as loving and responsible towards one another. Life is predictable and sweet; relationships start and mature into marriage and plans are made and carried out. But the drums of war changed all that, and everyone suffers its effect, in one horrible way or the other.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* re-confirms the belief by many writers (Ezeigbo, 1991; Petchesky, 1995; Ogbonna-Nwaogu, 2008; Henry, 2011) that women suffer exceedingly in war situations, and they carry in their bodies the effects of war. *Roses and Bullets* describes the life and activities of a woman before, during and after the Nigerian-Biafra Civil War, portraying a woman, a wife, whose body was subjected to two rapes and whose heart was crushed by pain and rejection from family. The reader gets acquainted, at the opening of the novel, with the eighteen-year-old protagonist, Ginika, the daughter of a medical doctor, Ubaka, and step-daughter to Aunt Lizzy. The novel is divided into four parts that chronicle different stages of experiences in the protagonist's life, experiences that leave imprinted on her body, scars of hatred and rejection, and in her mind, painful memories caused by the war. Part one (chapters 1 – 7, pps. 3 – 72) is aptly titled "The Beginning". The author presents us with the naivety and delusion many of the people in the Eastern region of Nigeria, who later became known as Biafrans, were living in before the war officially started:

How everyone had rejoiced! How they had all  
Danced and sung victory songs, with everyone  
Learning to sing the new national anthem! (12)

It was still in this deluded state that many, including Ginika, participated in preparing packed lunches for the Biafran troops when the war started. The author slowly weaves the fascination with the body, male and female, into the plot of the novel. It starts with the physical description of the body: Lizzy, Ginika's step mother, is described as "a fat woman of about forty" (6) with a "rather large body". Ginika's father, Ubaka Ezeuko, "was not tall; he was of average height, stocky and dark-skinned". (8). Bobby, her friend, "was tall and slender, with a physique that was more feminine than masculine" (31). Her only sibling, Nwakire, is a "tall and sturdy young man" (44), while her boyfriend, Eloka, is "tall and well built" (20). Her friend, Philo, is described as not being beautiful, "but she had a figure some men found attractive – big busts and buttocks, shooting out in front and behind" (52). The author presents these descriptions from the effects the physical body of one sex has on a member of the opposite sex. So, for Nwakire, Ginika's brother, his sister's friend, Philo, "seems to repel him ... perhaps it was her wide mouth and flaming nostrils..." (51). Ginika admires the physical built of her brother:

Her eyes were on his chest which had no  
hair on it. Then shifted to his shoulders which  
were broad and muscular (47).

Ginika's physical attraction to Eloka when they meet for the first time is also described by the author:

Ginika squirmed at his naked gaze  
But she was glad he did not drop it (26).

Part one of *Roses and Bullets* is filled with the interest in the physical body, especially the female body, the feelings that are stirred from this, and an acknowledgement by the protagonist of the difference between sincere admiration and lust. The feelings Eloka aroused in her are quite different from the ones she experienced when she is with Lieutenant Kanu Ofodile, the person in charge of training civilians in military art. He has made subtle overtures of desire to Ginika, but she rejects them because she does not want her professional relationship with him to extend into something personal. Ofodile reacts like harshly to her rejection:

Ofodile's eyes smoked. "Look, what makes you so puffed up?"  
He spat. "You should be glad I'm interested in you."  
When Ginika apologises, he retorts, "Sorry for yourself...  
*Do you realize you are a bloody flirt? You encouraged me  
All along and now you pretend you did not*".  
She denies this, and he roars, "Shut up, you did".  
His eyes were blazing and she thought he would hit her (56).

From this experience, Ginika started to become aware of the male interest in her body, for the wrong reasons. Her boy-meets-girl-get-married naivety is beginning to be challenged by other contesting forces who believe that her body is theirs whenever they want it. She begins to differentiate between a healthy appreciation of her physical beauty from a lust-infected one. When she meets Philo's mother, she noted the difference:

"Philo said you are beautiful; she is quite right". Ginika smiled, pleased with the compliment, thinking how different she felt hearing these words uttered by Philo's mother than when she heard them from Lieutenant Ofodile: from the former the words had rung true; from the latter, they had sounded throaty, rasping with lust and the desire to seduce (61).

By the end of the first part of the novel, the grip of the war moves closer to individual homes, looking for young men and underage boys to join the Biafran Army. Ginika's two loves, her brother, Nwakire, and her boyfriend, Eloka, do not fear and run and hide like many of their mates are doing; they long to wear the khaki uniform and fight for Biafra's independence. For Ginika, the tide turns right before her eyes, heralding what lies in store for her, as her brother drops a letter to her father and her that he has joined the army (pp. 71 – 72). The second part of the novel, "Before the Beginning" (chapters 8 – 11, pages 75 – 117) leads the reader mainly to the relationship Ginika had with her father and her step mother, who could not maintain an open relationship with Ginika. When at age sixteen Ginika attended a dance with her friends and came home late, her father ordered her to his room where he examined her to ascertain her virginity. This left Ginika in a state of trauma. To her, her father had done the unpardonable by encroaching on her privacy in examining her private part. Earlier on in the narrative, Philomena, Ginika's friend, also tried to own Ginika's body sexually when they both slept together on Ginika's bed during an overnight visit. Aunt Lizzy, her step mother, was cold and unfriendly towards her. Ginika therefore transferred her love and allegiance to her only sibling, Nwakire, and they become very close so that her heart

hurts when he leaves to join the army. Part Three, 'The Middle' (Chapters 12 – 33, pages 121 – 330), presents the climax of the novel.

Many things happen to Ginika's body in quick succession that she almost succumbed to despair. Her husband, Eloka, also leaves to join the army, and Ginika is left to contend with a mother-in-law who resented her for not conceiving before allowing her husband to leave for the army. The mother-in-law wanted a grandchild just in case her son does not return alive, and Ginika's bodily presence became an object to vent her hatred and venom onto. Then a worse thing occurs: Ginika is drugged and raped by a Lieutenant Ugoro, at a dance party she had gone to with her friend, Janet (pp. 269 – 271). This singular abominable act set in motion many changes to her body and heart. Lieutenant Ugoro had forcible sex with her by 'taming' her intelligence and rejection of his advances with a drug. Much literature exists on the pervasiveness of rape and how the military uses it as a weapon of degradation and humiliation against the 'enemy' in a war situation (see, for example, Nordstrom, 1991; 1996; Diken & Laustsen, 2005; Sanday, 2007). The consequence of the rape is a pregnancy, an unwanted one. According to Diken & Laustsen, 2005: 112 (also see Nikolic-Rastanovic, 1996:202), "*carrying a child that is the product of rape can be seen as an extremely cruel form of torture*". The trauma of being raped and having to deal with whether to hide in the cloak of silence victims of rape usually resort to, Ginika is now forced to face another trauma, being pregnant. As the baby grows in her, she is caught in a quandary – should she or should she not reveal to her parents-in-law, and more importantly to her husband, what has happened? She decides to first of all go and look for her husband:

*I want to go to Etitu to look for Eloka.  
I can't bear the thought of this pregnancy  
Let alone carry it through the nine months  
it will grow inside me. I will die if things remain  
as they are now. I want to find Eloka and tell him  
what happened and beg for his forgiveness (289).*

Here again, just like she did when Ofodile accused her of leading him on, she seeks for Eloka her husband, to apologise for her being raped. The conditioning she has been given is that the attention given to her physical body is caused by her, the bearer of the body. She is to be blamed for being beautiful, and for being drugged and raped, and in the process, for being pregnant for a man that is not her husband. So she blames herself, her body, even before anyone else does (Dworkin, 1991; Snow, 1994). She goes in search of her husband but never met him, as he has been promoted a captain and posted to another town. She returns home dejected, and then psychologically prepares herself to break the news of her pregnancy to her mother-in-law. When Ginika tells her mother-in-law what had happened, the latter screams:

*Onwaora, Onwaora, where are you? Where are you?  
Come and listen to your daughter-in-law. Abomination!  
My ears have gone deaf after listening to an abomination (294).*

Rape destroys family honour and annihilates cultural values (Nordstrom, 1996). It goes beyond the victim's invasion of her "innermost intimacy" (Seifert, 1994:55); it extends to families and a whole community. Everyone is affected. Ginika's parents-in-law sent her packing from their home, her father and step mother rejected her, and only her aunt, Auntie Chito and her grandmother, stood by her (295). Then, when the baby came, it eventually passed on.

The last part, Part Four (Chapters 34 – 40, pages 333 – 374) can be titled "The Homecoming"; in this section, the two loves in Ginika's life returned, not the same when they left. Now, their minds are unsettled for they have seen many atrocities of the inhumanity of people, particularly men like themselves. The joy of uniting with her husband again turned sour, as his parents had already narrated to him the inhabitation of her body by another man's seed. When she meets him at his parents' house, he is cold and unmoving as he listens to her narration of what had happened. Then he pronounces his verdict:

*I don't believe you. You have behaved badly. I'm totally disappointed in you* (352).

As if the rejection by her spouse is not enough, another rape is inflicted on her body by friends of an admirer, Sergeant Sule Ibrahim, from the northern part of the country, whom she had jokingly told to go and get circumcised before she could marry him. He took her request seriously and died in the process. His friends came looking for her, took her to the barracks and raped her, inscribing their hatred and disgust on her body. While the violence meted out on girls and women particularly is not restricted only to a war situation, this violence is easy to carry out during wars, especially by soldiers, the players of the war.

In the patriarchal blame game, the woman is seldom given a chance to explain herself before she is condemned and if she is listened to at all, she is seldom believed. Patriarchy does not have a platform for this. This denial of women's self-expression facilitates the man's right to easily condemn and judge them. In *Roses and Bullets*, the army played out the practice in war: women are raped not only out of the belief that they are commodities and objects existing to satisfy the sexual desires of men, as we see in the case of Ofodile, a "home" soldier's rape of Ginika, but they are also raped not out of lust, but a deep spite and hatred for everything the opposing community holds dear. In this case, the rape of the woman *is* the rape of her entire people and culture, played out in Ginika's second rape by two soldiers. Her body has become an alternative and contested canvass of the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War, that goes beyond the obvious – two governments at war – to a deeper war that includes a total domination and annihilation of a gender, a people and a culture.

In the novel, Ginika was at the mercy of the contesting forces. Her new found but fleeting independence and joy are quickly knocked down by a patriarchal system which refused to listen to her story when she was raped the first time – her parents-in-law labelled her a prostitute and disowned her.

### **Conclusion**

A woman's body symbolises many things; it also embodies a community's culture, continuity and posterity. Because of the expectations placed on the body of a woman, there is always, on the part of the man, the temptation, to conquer it, own it, or destroy it. And so, her

body becomes a contested site, a canvas, for a myriad of needs and possession (see Powell & Henry, 2017). What this translates to is that even when there is no war, there is a form of hatred and spite for a woman, especially a powerful one, that only a war situation can spill forth. The breakdown of law and order in war situations facilitates the opportunity for some men to carry out their repressed desires on the body of a woman, usually through rape.

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