CHAPTER 15

Nigeria at War

By the time I came to Kafanchan in the mid-1970s, the town had already been through some complicated history. Occasionally, as I lingered in the dining room of Rosy Guest Inn where I was staying, I would check the guest register lying on one of the tables. Straight columns drawn by pencil would ask for names, addresses, occupations, and then—"tribe." Most visitors would obediently fill in the name of the group they habitually identified with: Hausa, Yoruba, Nupe, Tiv, or whatever. One morning, however, an angry reaction had been written in there. The column for "tribe," one guest had felt, had no place in a united Nigerian nation. It was evidence of an antiquated mode of thought, which must be abolished.

I suspect my friend the inn owner had merely copied his columns from the guest book at the local "catering rest house," in a chain of state-run enterprises of somewhat greater prestige, remnants of the colonial era. Yet it could hardly be denied that ethnicity, or "tribe" and "tribalism" as local discourse would have it, was still a major fact of life in the late twentieth-century social order. The national anthem adopted when Nigeria became independent was written by a British lady, a resident expatriate at the time, and had these lines in the first verse:

> Though tribe and tongue may differ,
> in brotherhood we stand.

That anthem was replaced in 1978, but it had hardly portrayed the recent history of the country. One might have thought that the expatriate author had no business highlighting the differences; in any case, there was not so much brotherhood. In the late 1960s, the deteriorating national politics of Nigeria had struck Kafanchan severely. After the first military coup in early 1966, led by young Igbo army officers, there

were pogroms against Igbo settlers in the north. After a second coup, a countercoup led by northerners, the country fell apart. The southeast, fundamentally Igbo country, declared its independence as the Republic of Biafra, and a war broke out.[1] (There was a petropolitics involved, as the secessionist leadership considered that the recently identified sources of oil were in large part on Biafra territory.)

The Igbo community in Kafanchan at first believed it was safe. After all, it was strong, numerically and in other ways. But then there were rumors that truck-loads of men eager for a fight were on their way from the north, and Emir Isa Muhammadu declared that he could not guarantee the safety of the Igbo in Kafanchan. So more or less all of them hurried away, in large part by train, leaving from what, in a way, had been their railway station. Far from all made it back to their homelands, since many of them were massacred on their way. As the Igbo left, Kafanchan became for a time something like a ghost town. The houses they had abandoned were ravaged. Doors and zinc roofs were carted away. When rainy seasons came and went, mud brick buildings fell apart. But by then, locals, and more migrants from elsewhere in the country, had begun to fill some of the empty spaces.

The Biafra War lasted several years, with much loss of life, leaving the Igbo destitute and hungry. Some of those who made their way to Kafanchan in the early 1970s were returnees; others were younger people who had actually never been there before. But, while some advantageous niches in the urban economy could not be reclaimed, quite soon they were back running a great many of the stalls in the Kafanchan market place. (I mentioned the Onitsha connection of this commerce in chapter 6.) As I engaged in small talk with many of them, listening to their reminiscences, dwelling in considerable part on Biafran triumphs and heroic deeds, the only thing that could seem puzzling was that it was about a war that their side had actually lost.

Inevitably, in the times that followed, the war would come to figure prominently in Nigerian writing. The war novel that would eventually draw the greatest attention was Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007)—the title alluded to the design of the Biafran flag—which did much to establish the author's international fame. She had already made her successful debut, of course, with *Purple Hibiscus* in 2004. *Half of a Yellow Sun*, however, was probably the most celebrated Nigerian novel since Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (with her *Americanah* [2013] later coming in as the closest competition—see chapter 17). The central cast of five key persons is a microcosm of self-organizing diversity. To begin with, there is Ugwu, a houseboy evidently in his early teens, just arrived at the Nsukka campus home of his bachelor master

Odenigbo, senior lecturer in mathematics (thus in the same discipline as Adichie's own father). Soon enough, Odenigbo's girlfriend Olanna shows up, back in the country with a master's degree in sociology from London, to pick up a job as sociology instructor at Nsukka. When Olanna goes back to Lagos for a brief visit with her parents—her father is a successful businessman there, making profitable, although shady, deals with the government—she also meets her twin sister, Kainene, who will soon take on running those parts of the family business based in Port Harcourt. Kainene is less pretty but has a sarcastic humor; perhaps she comes out as the strongest character in the book. Her rather shy British boyfriend, Richard Churchill, shows up soon enough in Nsukka, to do a research project on Igbo-Ukwu art. (His last name offers ample opportunities for "Winston" jokes.) So here is the entire transnational spectrum, from expatriate via been-tos to the servant boy fresh from the bush. There are other, less central people as well, such as Muhammed, Olanna's ex-boyfriend; he is still a friend, so Olanna takes the train to visit him and his family in Kano. She finds the *sabon gari* (the migrant quarter where most Igbo live) dreary, and admires the walls of the old city. The time, to begin with, is the early 1960s, not really anywhere close to the war yet. Still time for animated postcolonial campus conversations about world affairs and about the comparative qualities of British and American higher education, after breaking the kola nut—and for critical comments about Balewa, Northerner federal prime minister in power in Lagos, too inclined to listen to the British.

Forward now to January 1966. Ugwu, Nsukka-based for several years, visits his home village briefly, and senses his growing distance to it. Then comes the announcement of the first military coup. During the following months, the political and business terrain in Lagos is in upheaval, and the twin sisters' affluent parents take one overseas trip after another, while reflecting on how to manage their financial and social investments in the new situation. Gradually the situation in the North worsens for the Igbo. There are graphic mini-accounts of some of the atrocities. Olanna, on a family visit to Kano, has to have the help of Muhammed to get out of town. By the time she gets back to Nsukka, after a difficult, long journey by train and then a shorter journey by taxi, she is exhausted and falls ill. One high Igbo officer, very likely involved in the first coup and a childhood friend of Olanna's, also has to flee the North, hides in the outskirts of Kafanchan briefly, and then escapes concealed in another southbound train. As an expatriate, Richard is freer to move around in the country. Returning from London through Kano, he witnesses the murder of a young, friendly Igbo gate attendant at Kano airport.

Nsukka is soon overrun by Nigerian troops. The story becomes one of evacuations and evacuations again; new postings in the Biafra administration; Kainene's and Olanna's parents relocating abroad once more; back in Biafra, families splitting apart as some hit the road and others do not; proclaimed instances of triumph; below-standard accommodation; air raids; and in between, moments of near normality and subtle negotiations over close but ambiguous relationships.

Now (surprisingly, but a smart move by Adichie) the book takes us back to the early 1960s again. This section offers backstage information for understanding these relationships. Ugwu goes to school, and has high hopes for his future. In his room in Boys' Quarters, he reads newspapers and magazines, and learns about things that have been beyond his horizon before. Olanna's and Kainene's mother gossips with her woman friends about other women's affairs and their own expensive consumer habits, and upbraids a newly hired but elderly servant, while her husband has a mistress living in a house he has provided. While Olanna is away from Nsukka, Odenigbo's mother moves into his house, complains about that woman friend of her son's who is most likely a witch, and brings a village girl, whom she gets into her son's bed for a brief sexual encounter. Olanna learns of this, is quite upset, and has her own one-night engagement with Richard, which in turn leads Kainene to break off her relationship to her twin sister—and to burn Richard's book manuscript on Igbo-Ukwu art.

Then back again in a new section to war time. Odenigbo does trivial although exhausting office work, but also joins the Agitator Corps to make patriotic speeches to villagers. Olanna teaches school. Kainene runs a refugee camp. Richard gets to write pieces for the Propaganda Directorate. Dull relief foodstuffs from the Red Cross, and a descent into poverty, with a new Biafran currency—pretty notes. Kwashiorkor, an illness caused by protein deficiency, spreads with obvious symptoms among the children. Opportunities for corruption and petty crime are plentiful in the interstices of the war effort. Odenigbo hears that his old mother has been killed, shot by "the vandals," and after he fails in his attempt to secure her remains, he turns more to drinking, at the Tanzania Bar, so named to honor one country that has recognized Biafra. Ugwu, around twenty years old by now, has faithfully followed his master's household even as its quarters have become increasingly cramped, but one day he is seized and forcibly recruited to a wild band of Biafran soldiers. Successfully killing a number of enemy soldiers in an explosion, he earns a new nickname as "Target Destroyer." Then, with his new peers, he participates in a gang rape of a bar girl.

Now Ugwu is gone again, reported dead in battle. But that turns out not to be true; although injured, he returns, but he has largely lost interest in Biafra and its war. All five key persons are finally together again, getting along better than for some time, but times are very hard. There is little to eat, and although Odenigbo can drive in search for foodstuffs, the scarcity of petrol means that he cannot get far. As Biafra finally collapses, Kainene goes out to search for whatever might meet their most basic needs—but does not come back. She vanishes, and the search for her everywhere is hopeless. The remaining four make it back to their old house in Nsukka. It is in shambles. Odenigbo finds piles of his books burned. As Richard goes to Kainene's old house in Port Harcourt, a strange woman lives there, and orders him out. It has been turned over to her, defined as "abandoned property." Olanna's and Kainene's parents have returned to Lagos from overseas. But the book ends without Kainene. A final mystery.

Reading *Half of a Yellow Sun*, one may feel that Kainene and the other four central characters are indeed made to come alive, portrayed in depth, in their passage through their complicated personal ties to each other as well as the tumultuous war scene. It will remain a story of things falling apart in Igbo society once more, now in a postcolonial era. But then Adichie was born in 1977, almost fifty years after Chinua Achebe, several years after the war ended; so in a way, like Achebe's book, this was already historical fiction, portraying the experience of people in a generation before her own. In a postscript interview, Adichie says that she could draw on the memories of her parents, both of whom had lost their fathers in the war. Yet a lot more research had also gone into the book.

We could note that not so long after the book appeared, in 2014, Biyi Bandele, Kafanchan-born, familiar from chapter 14, turned *Half of a Yellow Sun* into a film. He had moved in his war coverage from Burma to Biafra.

Of those well-known Igbo writers who were themselves of the war generation, however, hardly anyone among the more prominent could really stay away from the topic. The first military coup was indeed more or less forecast by Chinua Achebe, in the novel *A Man of the People* (1966), published at just about the time the coup occurred. But their writing about the war itself came mostly when it had been over for some time.

Cyprian Ekwensi's *Divided We Stand* was published in 1980, by Fourth Dimension Publishers in Enugu, but the back cover says that it was written eleven years earlier, "in the heat of battle." It focuses

on one family. To begin with, one may recognize a kind of rerun of Ekwensi's *Iska* (see chapter 5)—there is a prewar romance in Kaduna between a young Igbo woman and a Northern man. Selina Chika has been to a convent school there, receiving "the Roman Catholic education that practically turns every girl into a nun." Then she has been a civil servant, although with the Northernization policy there is no future for her there. Her boyfriend is Garuba Zaria, Northerner, and a major in the Nigerian army.

As the January 1966 coup occurs, Garuba finds himself close to the coup leader, while Selina escapes by truck to the family home in the Jos *sabon gari*, where her mother is waiting. (We may recall that Ekwensi spent some childhood years in Jos.) The most central figure among the family members in the story, however, is her brother, Isaac Chika, a star journalist at the newspaper *West African Sensation*, and in Lagos with his family. (This paper was also in *People of the City* and in *Iska*.) Yet another brother, Ben, is also in Lagos as a businessman, but remains mostly more distant.

Ekwensi allows considerable space for the events leading up to Biafra's birth as a nation. In those times after the first coup when the Igbo officers seem to be in power, the Araba king is plotting in Kaduna with his associates. Then the pogroms break out all over the North, and the second coup occurs, that of Northern officers. The period that follows seems a bit two-faced: in the North, the violent, looting crowds call out for their own secession, while in Lagos, the military and the politicians want a united country under Northern domination.

In Jos, Selina's mother Agnes prepares to join the exodus to the Igbo homeland: "The streets were filling up with more Eastern people on the run from parts further north. They were carrying their children on their backs, their possessions on their heads, while their wounds were wrapped in rags" (Ekwensi 1980: 86). After a fruitless journey back to Kaduna and then Kano, Selina escapes by air, saved by a "tall white woman," apparently from something like the Red Cross. The family comes together in its generations-old compound in Nkissi, a village close to Onitsha. Pa Chika, eighty years old, has been living there for some time already, after retiring from his Jos business (which involved selling small arms, mostly for hunting purposes).

All over the East, telephone kiosks and telegram counters at post offices are crowded with people pleading with relatives who are elsewhere—Lagos, Benin, Jos, Osogbo, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Bukuru—to return home immediately. Ben and Isaac and their families make it back by different routes. Isaac, having left the *West African Sensation*, is soon with the Biafran Press Service. When he goes to a

petrol station for fuel for his car, he runs into a white man, evidently a Reverend Father, buying two big drums of it. It turns out, however, that this is no Reverend Father, but a mercenary.

As Nigerian troops approach, the family has to be evacuated from Nkissi. It turns out that Garuba Zaria is one of the officers designated to lead the invasion of the heartland, with a son of an emir as his second in command. They do not agree on everything, but the son of an emir is "something of a god." On the Biafran side, brother Ben Chika is decorated for his bravery, but then he is killed in an ambush. The body is taken back to Nkissi. Planes flying in from Nigeria, some of them Russian, bomb everywhere, including schools. Selina is working for the Red Cross.

Isaac Chika travels with a Biafran delegation to a peace conference in Addis Ababa, hosted by the Organisation of African Unity, OAU. Sitting with the world press, he sees the Nigerian delegation entering "in outdated long robes that needed laundering." His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie speaks in Amharic, immediately translated into English and French. In the evening, soul music plays in the bars and night clubs. Returning home, he finds his father harvesting his yams and cassava.

While Selina has found a new boyfriend, a freedom fighter whom she plans to marry, Garuba Zaria is wounded in battle and brought to the hospital where she works. They get to talk one last time before Garuba Zaria tries to escape and is killed. And then her fiancé is also killed, not even knowing that she is expecting his child. Entering the Biafran Press Service newsroom, Isaac meets a news flash that the Biafran forces have surrendered and that the leader of what had been his country has escaped, possibly to the Ivory Coast.

Divided We Stand is held together by the five members of the Chika family. One may not find Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976) quite so accessible. A list of "principal characters" at the beginning of the book identifies twenty-six people. The plot seems somewhat unclear. In large part, the text is a running chronicle of, and debate about, the war—a debate between politicians, civil servants, academics, and businessmen. There is enthusiasm at the beginning, when the Biafrans even briefly launch a counteroffensive across the Niger River and get as far into the Midwest as Benin. Yet the Nigerians are moving in at several fronts, north and south. Nsukka falls, Enugu falls, Onitsha falls; Biafra is left with Umuahia as capital, and that is uncertain too. But the circle of companions, while bemoaning their losses, can see an advantage in the shrinking of their beer bellies—they fit more readily into their suits when there are occasions for putting them on. One of

the highest ranking of them, Amilo Kanu, emerges as the person most central to the narrative. Initially he is under some suspicion since he is rather slow deciding that he is on Biafra's side, and thus has to give up on his Lagos life and medical career. He also has a well-educated Hausa wife, Fatima, and this complicates things. She does not take readily to evacuation to an Igbo village. Her Hausa facial marks do not help her make local friends either. Then, when she comes unannounced to join her husband in Umuahia, he has to hide his newly acquired local girlfriend. Later Fatima is evacuated to Libreville, in Gabon, a country reasonably friendly to Biafra.

The buddies go on meeting. Their conversations celebrate brilliant weaponry inventions by Biafran scientists, at the same time as they keep up a running commentary on places lost to the enemy (largely Hausa soldiers), as well as on the strange taste of new locally brewed or distilled drinks substituting for the old imports. It is getting more difficult to keep up optimism as enemy aircraft drop bombs here, there, and everywhere. Personal stances change. One friend with a prominent business past, hitherto insouciantly secular, announces that he has given up on girls and is joining an evangelical group under a leader called Brother. Later, to the others, a member of the group comments, "When a man like that begins to talk about going regularly to prayer houses and all that jazz, I fear something has snapped."

Amilo Kanu decides that instead of keeping his exalted organizational position as director for mobilization, taking him relatively close even to His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, he should join the young soldiers on the ground. This makes him briefly a public hero. But a Nigerian plane seeks him out in his hiding place and drops a well-aimed bomb. Fatima is ordered back from Libreville to be informed of his death. Then soon the war is over, as Biafra has to capitulate. One survivor reflects somberly over the reunion with Nigeria and the future of the not-so-united country. The book ends with nine pages of notes: explanations, and translations of Igbo expressions.

Cyprian Ekwensi and Chukwuemeka Ike were in Biafra during the war. (Ekwensi, with his Northern diaspora background, may never really have lived there before.) Chinua Achebe traveled extensively abroad, not least in the United States, stating the case for Biafra to varied audiences. In his collection of short stories, *Girls at War* (1972), the title story is more or less about what the title suggests, while most of the other stories are earlier writings from what had already become a twenty-year career. In "Girls at War," consequently placed at the end of the volume, the youngish Biafra bureaucrat, Reginald Nwankwo, runs into the same young woman at three points in time as the war unfolds.

There is early patriotic enthusiasm, then a descent into corruption, smuggling, currency manipulation, and loose living. The girl, Gladys, is with the civil defense, and then in the fuel directorate. In her circle, one goes to Libreville, Gabon, to shop for things like high-heel shoes. The reader may wonder if Gladys will run into Chukwuemeka Ike's Fatima there.

By 1983, Achebe published a small book, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, again with Fourth Dimension Publishers. He was no longer so concerned with Biafra, and more with the larger first generation of Igbo and Yoruba political leaders—and finding the second generation following in their footsteps. There was now a civilian, elected government, and he had made an effort to engage with national politics, teaming up with the Northern reformist Aminu Kano in a new party. But now Aminu Kano was already dead. And as it would turn out, at the very beginning of the following year, the military would seize power again.

Then in 2012 came Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. In fact, the book is not entirely about the country that was, or the period in which it was a country. That takes up about half the book, which begins with Achebe's childhood and family life, and passes through the years before and after Nigerian independence. The narrative is rather artless, with a certain stream-of-consciousness quality, although it offers much detailed insider information about the overall conflict as well as about tensions within Biafra's elite. The comments on postwar circumstances are more brief. Published fifty-four years after *Things Fall Apart*, *There Was a Country* would be Achebe's last book.

Most of the writers of Biafra war fiction, in the generation who experienced it, were of the more urban, educated, elite or near-elite, and they also wrote in large part about Biafrans of such characteristics. (Adichie's Ugwu, the houseboy, is an exception.) In such writing, there would be little about, as Cyprian Ekwensi (1980: 5) would put it, "the kind of Biafran woman whose life rotated around planting seasons, harvest time, the price of *gari* in the market." But there was also a short (85-page) novel by Flora Nwapa named *Never Again*. Nwapa had already published *Efuru* (1966), a full-length story of strong Igbo women and troubled marriages. *Never Again* was first self-published in Enugu in 1975, then republished in the United States in 1992. By that time, it could take its place in an expanding feminist literary wave, in the African Women Writers Series from Africa World Press in Trenton, New Jersey.

With her husband Chudi, Kate, the woman who is the first-person narrator in this story, is hardly in the lower strata of Igbo society either.

They have a car, so as they plan their escape from their town, Ugwuta (aka Oguta, Nwapa's home town), in a war-torn area, they have to hunt for a can of petrol in the black market. But Kate comes across rather as an antiheroine. She is not pro-Nigerian, but more of a skeptic. The military triumphs and the wonderful feats of inventive Biafran scientists as reported by official news bulletins do not match what she observes around her. It all seems rather like what would lately have been termed "fake news," although of a patriotic sort. Kate is more inclined to trust the broadcasts of BBC, even if people around her find such listening habits politically incorrect—BBC is with the enemy. It seems Igboland at war is no longer characterized by the sort of transparency portrayed some years earlier by the anthropologist Victor Uchendu (see chapter 3). But the corpses, and the vagabonds and madmen in what has become a makeshift Nigerian prison yard, are very visible. When Kate and Chudi are finally able to return to Ugwuta, somehow freed from the occupiers, they learn that the townswomen have gone to sacrifice at the shrine of the Woman of the Lake. This pre-Christian deity, they understand, is the one who really delivered their town from the furies of the Vandals.

One might have thought that at least a civil war could have made the Nigerian writers turn inward, toward the battle lines running through the country. In large part that is true. Yet even here, there are again and again those outside involvements: Britain and Russia siding with Nigeria; some Francophone countries ambiguously friendly to Biafra. There are, too, Richard Churchill, Kainene's expatriate boyfriend, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and that mercenary masked as a priest in Ekwensi's *Divided We Stand*.

Just about all the fiction writing about the Biafra War that I have come across is by Igbo writers. There appear to be no portrayals of the excitement of "Araba," the threatened Northern secession, nor of the ambivalence of a soldier like Garuba Zaria as he strikes into the homeland of Selina, the girl of his intimate past. The main exception is Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985). Saro-Wiwa, from a part of South-eastern Nigeria that was not Igbo country, had studied English on a scholarship at Ibadan, then went to teach at the University of Nigeria at Nsukka, but left when Biafra seceded, and became a civilian administrator in a part of the Niger Delta after it had been reclaimed by Nigeria. Apart from *Half of a Yellow Sun*, his book is the most acclaimed of the novels of this war.

Sozaboy, however, is not so simply a pro-Nigeria, anti-Biafra story either. In fact, neither "Nigeria" nor "Biafra" are explicitly named anywhere in the book, and there are no ethnic designations.[2] This is a

first-person narrative, but soon enough that first person is there only as "Sozaboy," which is the generic term for "soldier boy." Not quite Standard English, obviously—but then the subtitle of the book is "A Novel in Rotten English." Saro-Wiwa offers an "author's note," in which he describes this as

> a mixture of Nigerian pidgin English, broken English and occasional flashes of good, even idiomatic English. This language is disordered and disorderly. Born of a mediocre education and severely limited opportunities, it borrows words, patterns and images freely from the mother-tongue and finds expression in a very limited English vocabulary. To its speakers, it has the advantage of having no rules and no syntax. It thrives on lawlessness, and is part of the dislocated and discordant society in which Sozaboy must live, move and have not his being.

So here, then, some thirty years after Dylan Thomas described Amos Tutuola's style in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* as "young English," and after that style drew the disapproval of educated Nigerian commentators, Saro-Wiwa can playfully exercise his own creativity, and academic specialty, in writing his book in a way where "rotten" may show some affinity to that "young." (It does not get so close to real pidgin as to become inaccessible to readers whose repertoire is confined to Standard English. Moreover, there is a five-page glossary at the end, explaining a number of terms and expressions.)

Sozaboy begins rather as comedy, on the local scene of the village Dukana, home of fishermen and farmers. There is the funnyman Duzia, who could have been a standup comedian, if he could only stand up—but he is a cripple. There is the aging Zaza, a veteran of the Burma war, who knows about soldiering: he spent that war in the jungle trying to find "Hitla," the mysterious pet enemy of his British superiors. Chief Birabee is corrupt, and there is the inevitable preacher, Pastor Barika. And there is Sozaboy's dear mother (there is no father around). Sozaboy is an apprentice driver, caring for a truck engine and looking forward to the day when he will get a license. The nearest metropole is Pitakwa (that is, Port Harcourt). Breaks there on the trucking journeys allow him to hang out at the African Upwine Bar, where he meets the young waitress Agnes, who has somewhat ambiguously spent time in Lagos but turns out to be also from Dukana and is now returning there. She becomes the love of Sozaboy's life, and moves in and marries him.

War breaks out, although to begin with it seems rather remote. But when the apprenticeship comes to look less promising, Sozaboy enrolls as a soldier at Pitakwa, indeed becoming a sozaboy. In short, he goes out with his mates to shoot at the enemy, but gets caught,

and finds himself turned into a soldier on the other side, joining what was previously the enemy. Although he gets to use old acquired skills and for a while proudly drive a Land Rover, he reaches the conclusion that "war is useless nonsense and everything is just to cause confusion." "That foolish man Chief Commander General have told lie about enemy and no enemy." But as he tries to escape from all that, he just finds more chaos: people fleeing along the roads—slowly, slowly because they are too tired to go any faster; disfigured children displaying the symptoms of kwashiorkor; soldiers looting. The Red Cross is giving out food and supplies—but people like Chief Birabee and Pastor Barika lay their hands on all that and sell it for a handsome profit. One senior soldier who used to be his superior, now apparently switching sides in the war back and forth according to what allows the greater advantage, lines up Sozaboy and a number of other soldiers to kill them off with his gun, one after the other. But just before he gets to the final three, he runs out of ammunition. So they, including Sozaboy, run into the bush.

The war comes to an end. As he makes a final return to what remains of Dukana, knocking on doors to try and find out what has happened to his mama and Agnes, people look scared and slam doors in his face. Duzia, the old cripple, explains the situation to him. The villagers have consulted a juju oracle, who explained to them that Sozaboy is dead. If and when he shows up again, he must be an evil ghost. And nobody dares to be the person to tell this evil ghost that these two women were the only ones killed by a bomb, in the single air attack to hit the village. Learning that he has lost his dear ones, Sozaboy walks away from Dukana, not knowing where he is going.

Again, then, these people—Ekwensi, Achebe, Ike, Nwapa, Saro-Wiwa—were all adults during the 1960s, with their own experiences of the time of war. They kept writing about it, for another decade and more.

After Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, there have been other war novelists of a postwar generation. Chinelo Okparanta, born in Port Harcourt in 1981, left Nigeria with her parents for the United States at age ten. Her *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) dwells on the lesbian relationship between an Igbo girl and an orphan Hausa girl toward the end of the war—thus combining two conflicts, as same-sex ties have themselves been widely disapproved of in the country.[3] The *New York Times Book Review*, *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Guardian* all reviewed it favorably. Okparanta attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop, studying under Marilynne Robinson and others, to become a professor of creative writing at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania.

A decade before that, *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) appeared, a brief first novel by Uzodinma Iweala (with enthusiastic blurbs by Salman Rushdie and from the *New Yorker* magazine), consisting of something like an imagined stream of consciousness of a child soldier at the margins of a war somewhere not really identified—but it could as well be Nigeria as anywhere else. (The choice of a first-person narrative may remind us of *Sozaboy*.) And while in an autobiographical endnote Iweala identifies himself as an American and mentions Jamaica Kincaid and Amitav Ghosh among his teachers in creative writing courses at Harvard, he notes that his two Nigerian immigrant parents would take him and his siblings back every year to the old country and the villages where they had grown up. They spoke Igbo at home. His father is a neurosurgeon; as it turns out, his mother is Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the renowned economist who came to serve two terms as Nigerian minister of finance, was at one point a strong candidate for the presidency of the World Bank, and is now head of the World Trade Organization.

As the Biafra war is taken up in the imagination of a later, diaspora generation, then, it becomes an Igbopolitan motif.

Notes

1. About the 1966 military coups and about the Biafra War a great deal has been written. A pro-Biafra reportage by the British journalist Frederick Forsyth (1969), published in the middle of the war, drew much attention. Among the works by Nigerians that I know of is a memoir by Ben Gbulie (1981), one of the young southern officers engaged in the conspiracy. Harneit-Sievers, Ahazuem, and Emezue (1997) offer "history from below," drawing on extensive interviewing and providing a view also of the seamy underside of the war, when underdisciplined Biafran soldiers did not always behave well toward their civilian compatriots. More recently, there has been an overview of the war by Gould (2013), who interviewed some main participants and portrays their personal backgrounds. One gets a sense of a rather anarchic war scene, with certain senior officers pursuing their own agendas.
2. The only clear reference by name to a political participant in the crisis is to one "Okpara," who is raising money for an army. This is presumably Michael Okpara, premier of the Eastern Region of Nigeria in the times before the first military coup. Sozaboy's "Chief Commander General" can hardly be anybody but Biafra's leader, Odumegwu Ojukwu.
3. At the end of the book there is an author's note pointing out that in 2014, President Goodluck Jonathan signed into law the criminalizing of same-sex relationships, and that in Northern states the punishment is death by stoning.

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