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Reimagining Igbo Womanhood: A Reading of Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* in the Context of Nigerian Civil War

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Biafran War (1967-1970), one of the most brutal and inhuman wars in the history of Africa, has inspired a number of works and studies in African literary history, a majority of which represent women as victims and stereotype them as passive sufferers of war. There are only a very few works which account the experiences of women who refused to be defeated despite being assaulted, raped, widowed, orphaned and denied dignity during the male scramble for power in post-independence Nigeria. This paper attempts to critically analyze the historical war- narrative *Destination Biafra* (1982) written by the Nigerian author Buchi Emecheta and relies on African feminist methodology to investigate how a woman writer captures the Nigerian women's indomitable spirit during the turbulent socio-political scenario in the country.

Keywords: African feminism, Biafra, Igbo women's voices, sexual violence, resistance.

African women writers, who marked their entry into a male-dominated literary terrain in the second decade of the twentieth century, have played a pivotal role in exploring and narrating tales of sufferings and survival experienced by black women belonging to different ethnic groups, economic backgrounds and socio-political conditions in Africa. African women, who were shorn of their space and freedom by

Western incursion into their land and culture, saw one of the worst faces of mankind during the "divide and rule" policies tacitly implemented by the Westerners, leading to some of the most brutal and bloody chapters in the history of different African nations. The civil wars, genocides, and incessant political turbulence in countries like Sudan, Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Liberia, Mozambique, Kenya, Congo and Zimbabwe, to list a few, reveal the latent complicity of Western power that led to miserable poverty, displacement, hunger and innumerable episodes of gruesome massacres within the continent. The themes of war, bloodshed, politics, corruption, nationalism and ethnic identities became *de rigueur* in literature written by African male authors and critics, but the experiences of women who bravely fought these hard times were conveniently ignored or misrepresented in the male-authored literary texts. The contemporary Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her much-acclaimed TED Talk, titled "The Danger of a Single Story", expounds the necessity of looking at a place, person or incident from multiple perspectives rather than trusting a single story. Adichie strongly feels that whenever a story is conveyed, its impact is largely determined by a principle of power which she terms "nkali" (Adichie, 2009, 9:50). This, she says, is in fact an Igbo word which means "to be greater than another" (Adichie, 2009, 9:54). A story becomes 'the only story' due to the way it is unraveled to people by a narrator in power. "Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person" (Adichie, 2009, 10:12). This exactly has been the reason why African women writers decided to venture into the literary front, for they were increasingly stereotyped, sidelined and silenced by the single stories produced by both Euro-American and African male writers.

In Adeola James' interview of African women writers, published as *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk* (1990), the Kenyan writer Asenath Odaga observes that male writers portray female characters in their books "in a way that makes them stupid or lazy or sensual" (1990, p.129). The Igbo feminist critic and theorist Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, in emphasizing the necessity for women's writing, states: "Men cannot speak for us. And they should

not be expected to. Only rounded human beings, who consciously seek wholeness in human society and life; who know that society can progress only with the full recognition of men and women both and not women ministering to men and living through men, only such whole men can speak for women" (1990, p.72).

Buchi Emecheta, the iconic Nigerian literary figure, foregrounds such women of potent personality and indestructible audacity in her 1982 novel *Destination Biafra.* Born into an Igbo family, Emecheta's life and experiences in Nigeria and in England have been inspirational in the making of her bold and remarkable novels like *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974), to list a few. As a single mother of five little children, in a foreign land imbued with racial prejudice, Emecheta's plight was more poignant than even the most miserable of her characters. Armed with the power of education and undaunted determination, she confronted the turbulent waves lashing at her life, and established herself as one of the most significant voices of Igbo women. With sixteen novels, several children's books and a number of articles to her credit, Emecheta emerged as one of the most powerful female voices from Nigeria, evoking world-wide concern over the social and cultural position of women, especially, the Igbo women living in Nigeria and abroad.

Marked by the author herself as a "historical fiction" (Emcheta, 1982), Emecheta set this novel in the turbulent period between 1964-70 when the ethnically plural country of Nigeria, which had got political independence in 1960, was literally transformed into a gory warzone with brutal murderers in uniform, wreaking havoc around and scattering corpses of their own people in the name of ethnicity and political supremacy. The emergent political figures and military forces, in their voracity for power and position, suddenly became too conscious of their ethnic differences and thrust the infant country to a point of vicious secession by 1967. The growing corruption among the political leaders and the uneven distribution of wealth among different ethnic groups provoked the military to overthrow the newly formed government.

> As it turned out however the coup created more problems than it solved. It turned out that most of the coup plotters were Igbos and most of those killed were non-Igbos while the Igbo political leaders somehow survived. The anger triggered in the North by this led to a counter coup of July 1966 in which Igbo Head of State Aguiyi Ironsi and several Igbo army officers were killed. It also led to a pogrom against the Igbo in the North, in which an estimated 30,000 Igbos and others of Eastern Nigerian origin were killed. (Adibe, 2017, 4-5)

Following these assaults, Colonel Emeka Ojukwu, the military governor of Eastern Nigeria refused to acknowledge Col. Gowon from the Middle Belt as the Head of the State and declared the Eastern part of Nigeria as an independent nation, the Republic of Biafra. Nigeria, which refused to part with the rich oil reserve in the East, resorted to all inhuman ways of brutality and murder until it finally forced the seceded state to merge with the rest of Nigeria in January 1970.

Emecheta, an Igbo, who was a student in London at the time of the civil war, originally hails from a remote land named "Ibuza in the Mid-West, a little town near Asaba, where the worst atrocities of the war took place" (Emecheta, vii). She felt obliged to write this novel because she found that a female perspective of the war that voiced concern for innocent women and children had to be heard and seen by the world. Though there have been several male-authored works of fiction on Biafran War, such as Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972), Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* (1976), Cyprian Ekwensi's *Divided We Stand* (1980) and Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra* (1982), none of these works succeeded in reflecting the strength of physical and mental endurance which women who lived through this horrific war-period revealed. Among the few African women writers, like Flora Nwapa, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Chinelo Okparanta who wrote on the theme, Buchi Emecheta's work stands apart largely because of the direct involvement of the female protagonist, Debbie Ogedemgbe, in the Nigerian military service.

Emecheta looks at war from the perspectives of women belonging to different socio- economic classes in Nigeria. Post-independent Nigeria saw young women who were Western educated, women who had found happiness in flaunting the wealth of their corrupt husbands in politics and women who preferred to subsist on the pathos of poverty and joys of motherhood, conforming to the norms of their respective culture in day-to-day life. Emecheta wanted to render voice to all these women, or rather, she wanted the world to hear the assorted cords of voice emanating from distinct sites of female existence, for as the Nigerian critic Ogundipe-Leslie observes, African women's silence in literature is not because they are voiceless, but because "we fail to look for their voices where we may find them, in the sites and forms in which these voices are uttered" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994. 11).

It is the educated African woman who has the advantage of being listened to by people around her. Her education demands her certain kind of respect from everyone but both educated and uneducated men hesitate to marry such girls for fear that they cannot be subdued like the uneducated ones. Adeola James analyses this tendency among men in the preface of her work *In Their Own Voice: Women Writers Talk* (1990). She observes that "most educated men look for simple and unsophisticated women as wives. 'Acada' women are uncontrollable, as Nigerian men say of graduate women. The 'acada' women, on their part, have learnt to take care of themselves" (3).

In the character of Debbie Ogedemgbe, whom Emecheta describes as her favourite character, one can see an 'acada' woman, well-educated, bold, dignified and determined, who refuses to be subdued by men or culture. As the daughter of the wealthy, corrupt politician Samuel Ogedemgbe and as the beloved of Alan Grey, the handsome and diplomatic English instructor of Nigerian soldiers, Debbie has deep insights into the shrewd political game in Nigeria which engenders a strong sense of nationalism in her. She feels ashamed at the greed, corruption and deception among the Nigerian political leaders, including her father, who were continuing to appease the Western forces for their personal gains and ethnic supremacy, whereas a major

part of Nigeria was desperately fighting against poverty and poor health conditions. She is suspicious of the political changes taking place in her country after independence. While many of her country men are carried away by the prospect of democracy and formation of a new government, Debbie senses that the British men plan to continue their rule in Nigeria indirectly. She questions Alan of their intention in splitting power among leaders belonging to different ethnic groups in Nigeria and does not hesitate in asking him straight: "Was that why you did it, to trap us into starting a war among ourselves" (Emcheta, 1982, p.42)

Her decision to join the army is received with much astonishment and more sarcasm by everyone. Chijioke Abosi, a Western educated Igbo army officer and a friend of Debbie, expresses his readiness to enroll her in the army, adding the comment, "it would certainly add glamour to our regiment" (Emcheta, 1982, p.58). Egodi Uchendu, in her study of Anioma women during Biafran war, investigates how women's desire in serving the nation had been degradingly exploited by the federal army:

> It was the job of the pretty guerilla girls to infiltrate the Biafran forces for information and to assess the strength of their army, weapons, stores and food. Many of the girls succeeded in gaining employment as cooks and casual workers with the Biafran troops. Such opportunities facilitated their work and enabled them to loot the stores of their unsuspecting enemies, returning to Ogbemudia with grenades, rifles, and ammunitions which were used to fight the Biafrans. (Emcheta, 1982, p.78)

However, Debbie is determined that she would join the army not as a stereotypical cook or wife but as a real officer. She believes that "surely every person should have the right to live as he or she wished, however different that life might seem to another" (45). Debbie's earnestness in serving her nation is however overlooked by the army officers who initially suspect her loyalty to the army in view of the army's involvement in her father's murder, but later considers enrolling her, on thought that she can be a "useful tool" (Emcheta, 1982, p.69) to them in reaching their goal.

Emecheta captures the indomitable spirit and insightful thinking of an educated Nigerian woman in her characterization of Debbie. Debbie is horrified at Chijioke Abosi's hasty decision to secede from Nigeria without proper arms or ammunitions or forethought, and readily accepts Saka Momoh's proposal to act as a mediator between him and Abosi, for convincing the latter to withdraw from any intention to proceed for a war. Though Debbie is a brave officer in the Federal force, Momoh seems to entrust the task to her because she is a woman and tells her to use her "feminine charms to break that icy reserve of his" (Emcheta, 1982, p.123). Debbie however overlooks such remarks, for as a responsible citizen, who values the lives of her fellow-beings, she considers it critical to hold back an impending war. She is determined to use all dignified means of persuasion to dissuade Abosi from seceding from Nigeria, which would renounce millions of innocent lives at stake.

Barbara Teteku or Babs, is another educated young woman through whom Emecheta echoes the thoughts and concerns of educated women on war. A friend of Debbie, she too is into the Nigerian army. More insightful and eloquent than her friend, she is quick to sense the horrific tragedy looming behind the innocent civilians wedged between two impulsive and egotistic leaders of Nigeria and Biafra. She rightly observes, "The women and children who would be killed by bombs and guns would simply be statistics, war casualties. But for the soldier-politicians, the traders in arms, who only think of their personal gain, it would be the chance of a lifetime. And the politicians who started it all can pay their way to Europe or America and wait until it has all blown over (Emcheta, 1982, p.109).

Like Debbie, Babs too expresses concern over the covert ways in which the Western forces are scheming to exploit the rich resources in Nigeria by brewing internal tension in the ethnically plural nation. The serious political discussions and vigour of the young women startle Stella Ogedemgbe, the widowed mother of Debbie, whose entire life as the wife of Samuel Ogedemgbe had been passive, colourless and totally shadowed behind the wealth and power of her husband. She, along with the wives of other wealthy politicians, embodies an entire generation of middle- class women in colonial Nigeria who had lost their traditional zest and individuality consequent

to colonial patriarchal influence and Western religion's insistence on the submissiveness of an ideal wife. Her words to Debbie and Babs reveal the concerns of women of her age and class to the emerging generation of conscientious and enterprising young women: "I don't know what has come over you girls. We all want freedom for women, but I doubt if we are ready for this type of freedom where young women smoke and carry guns instead of looking after husbands and nursing babies" (Emcheta, 1982, p.108). Such predetermined roles for women are overlooked by Debbie and Babs who believe that "there was plenty of time for domesticity and motherhood; at the moment their country was in trouble and they should help" (Emcheta, 1982, p.22).

Biafran war was a period in Nigerian history when several educated and uneducated young women boldly offered to join the militia out of true spirit of nationalism. As Babs rightly observes, there were more women joining the Biafran force than the Federal force. Egodi Uchendu observes that "more women joined the civil defense out of a sense of patriotism and a desire for social justice than for adventure" (2007,114). She compares this tendency of women to join the Biafran militia to that of Vietnamese women in the 1960s, Chinese women in the 1930s and the Tigrayan women in Ethiopia during the Tigrayan Revolution. To many of these women the militia was an opportunity to unite with their separated families, to be equipped to defend themselves from exploitation, to avenge the murder of their dear ones and for "the acquisition of a sense of identity" (Emcheta, 1982, p.114-115). Ogundipe –Leslie advocates this kind of an enterprising attitude and a complete inclusion of women for the socio-economic and political transformation of African countries in the postcolonial era. In her work *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (1994), she postulates her theory of 'Stiwanism' which derives from the acronym 'STIWA' standing for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa, wherein she insists that men and women impart equal participation and inclusion in implementing all significant strategies for a better tomorrow. Emecheta in her representation of dynamic women like Debbie and Babs accords to Ogundipe- Leslie's notion that African women writers ought to reflect

a realistic portrayal of African women's invaluable socio-political contributions at every critical juncture in their history. Through Debbie and Babs, Emecheta also seeks to accentuate the significance of education in imparting critical thinking and proud minds among the new women of Africa.

However, no woman, educated or illiterate; urban or rural; married or unmarried; mother or an expectant one; young or old; healthy or disabled, is spared from the vulnerability of sexual violence at the outbreak of a war. *Desitnation Biafra* recounts many such horrendous and grotesque instances of violence on women throughout Nigeria from the time of the first military coup in January, 1966. Egodi Uchendu, in her study on Anioma women observes:

> The sexual abuse of women is a regular feature of wars and it is understood to have personal dimensions and often public and political aspects. In Anioma it was one of the dreadful humiliations of the civil war that reduced women to objects of war and humiliated their men. Soldiers act out their contempt for male civilians by sexually abusing their women, showing the helplessness of civilians to protect their women during crisis (2007, 79).

Debbie's father, Samuel Ogedemgbe, before being dragged away during the coup, has to witness his wife and daughter being sexually harassed by the soldiers; Area Papa's wife Area Mama, who were both running a local bar in the North, is brutally raped in front of her husband before the latter is murdered by the violent men; the Igbo man Ugoji who is a bank cashier in Kano is forced to hide himself in the bush to escape the murderers, but on his return to his house he finds his beautiful girlfriend Regina raped and slaughtered to pieces of flesh; the husband of the Ibo family whom Debbie tries to defend from the Nigerian soldiers, fails to protect his innocent child, his pregnant wife and their unborn baby from the atrocities of the soldiers. Thus, war becomes an overt manifestation of male discernment of woman as the most valuable possession of man whose inability to protect her honor and life, seems to disgrace him and question his manliness. In the context of war, every woman, instead of being murdered as an individual enemy, is objectified, used and discarded as

war booty or destroyed in front of her man, intending to crush his dignity.

A similar fate awaits Debbie as well, on her mission to Biafra to meet Abosi. Despite being in military uniform and despite reiterating that she is a Nigerian soldier and not a fleeing Ibo, she becomes victim to gang rape by Nigerian soldiers in front of her mother. It comes as a great shock to Debbie that neither her education, nor her ethnic identity or position in the military could defend her in the war-territory of ruthless men who could see her as nothing more than a female body. She is however surprised at the sudden strength enraging her mother Stella Ogedemgbe, who confronts the maniacs so sturdily with the power of her tongue that even the toughest of the men in the gang spares her from rape or humiliation.

> Debbie sat in front of one of the cars. She was still too numb physically and emotionally to say a word; but her brain was ticking like a tireless clock. She admired her mother, who could use her tongue to move the hardest of men. Those attacking soldiers would surely have killed her but for the fact that, even in the vile drunkenness, they feared Stella Ogedemgbe's tongue (Emcheta, 1982, p.135).

It is the presence of her strong mother which enables Debbie to recover from the trauma of the sexual abuse she experienced. All these years, Debbie had seen her mother as a woman who "had pretended to be so frail and dependent that tying her own headscarf was a big task. All that show of dependence just to keep alive her marriage and to feed her husband's ego…" (Emcheta, 1982, p.157). Stella Ogedemgbe as a widow, along with the wives of political figures like Dr.Ozimba and Dr. Eze, emerge as able women when the gruesome realities of war encourage them to rely on none other than themselves. All these women, whose existence and voice had been blurred by the sophisticated position they enjoyed as wives of powerful men, gradually realize their hidden potential and take critical decisions for the safety of their children and family.

In her portrayal of the commendable transformation of these middle-class women, Emecheta attempts to underscore the role of

Western power and sophistication in enfeebling the strength of Nigerian women. In an interview given to Adeola James, she reveals her frustration by wondering "Why are women as they are? Why are they so pathetic? When you hear about traditional women who were very strong, you wonder, why are we today so pathetic, so hypocritical? (James, 1990, 42). Ogundipe- Leslie, in her study of African women observes that "the African woman has six mountains on her back" (1994, 28). It includes her oppression due to colonialism, oppression from traditional structures, oppression from her backwardness due to neocolonialism, oppression from man, oppression due to her colour or race and finally, oppression by herself. Among these six forces of oppression which are called six mountains, Odundipe-Leslie considers the last one as the most important:

> Women are shackled by their own negative self-image by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Their own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self –crippling. Woman reacts with fear, dependency, complexes and attitudes to please and cajole where more self-assertive actions are needed (1996, 36)

While Emecheta takes us through the voices of these urban middle class women in Nigeria, she does not forget to reserve a crucial part of her narrative for unearthing the tales of struggle and unbeatable spirit of ordinary rural working-class women in Nigeria during the Nigeria-Biafra War. It is through Debbie's journey to Biafra to accomplish the mission entrusted upon her by Saka Momoh that she comes in close contact with the rural women of Nigeria. It is only after she recuperates from the physical and psychological impacts of rape that she decides to resume her mission of meeting Abosi. From Benin to Biafra, the journey she undertakes turns out to be an inexplicably intricate and excruciating experience. Emecheta gives a very realistic and poignant picture of innocent Ibo people fleeing to Biafra fearing genocide and cruelties. The vehicle to Asaba, with more than a hundred Ibo men, women and children, is seized by Nigerian soldiers at night. Debbie is again led away to be raped by a Nigerian officer when he recognizes her to be the Oxford-educated girlfriend of the English man Alan Grey. It is his indignation for the white

colonizers and their culture that provokes him to rape Debbie, whom he refers to as the "white man's plaything." (Emecheta,1982, 176). However, he regrets his act on knowing that she had been a victim of gang rape a few weeks back. The next morning all women are allowed to continue with their journey, but the men accompanying them, including young boys are mercilessly put to death.

Packed to the tailboard of a mammy wagon and traumatized by the cold-blooded murder of their men and young children, the journey ahead holds innumerable challenges for the women in the group which include two pregnant ladies as well. One of these ladies gives birth to a baby boy and soon succumbs to death. The new born, who is left behind in the care of Debbie and other women, is symbolically named Biafra after the new born nation, their destination, Biafra. After their journey begins on foot, it becomes so tedious that sick, pregnant and old ladies are left behind. The single group later scatters into smaller groups for safety, and Debbie joins a group which includes Baby Biafra, four boys whose mother had stayed behind, a woman named Dorothy and her child, another mother and her six children, and the Madako family which included Uzoma and her three children. Throughout their interminable journey along dense forests, hiding breathless behind thick bushes and even while waddling through the swamp into which they accidentally fall running from soldiers at night, the women strive to uphold their strength of mind, in spite of several heart-breaking setbacks including the death of Baby Biafra and a five-year-old boy due to strain and starvation.

The death of Baby Biafra seems to portend the fall of the new-born nation Biafra and it entirely upsets Dorothy, a widowed woman and mother of two children. Through Dorothy's incessant wailing, Emecheta voices the anxiety and concerns of ordinary women victimized by war and poverty. War and violence often thrust women into utter vulnerability and mental agony so much that they fear the very thought of existence. However, Igbo women are fortunate to be part of a very strong and supportive community of women who stay closely together and fortify the mental strength of each other in times of all adversities. When Dorothy continues to lament over the death of her husband who was murdered, and her brothers who might lose

their lives fighting for the Biafran army, Uzoma walks up to her and hits her in rage: "'Shame on you, woman. Shaaaame!' she fumed. 'What type of Ibo woman are you? Which bush community did you come from? What unlucky woman raised you as a daughter? Since when have men helped us look after children? Have you not old people in your cluster of homesteads, to do their job of bringing up the younger ones?'" (Emecheta, 1982, 212-213)

Debbie is astounded by the absolute sturdiness and fortitude displayed by this ordinary woman of Igboland who had been too passive in the presence of her husband when she had met her a few days back, but days after the death of her husband she had gone to the extent of slapping another woman for "indulging in self-pity" (213). Uzoma is furious at the woman for intending to kill herself, forgetting her children: "Don't you think you have to make sure you live so that you can look after them? Because the men also gave us their name, you forget your father's name, and in the process of letting your husband provide for you, you have become dumb and passive. Go back to being yourself now" (Emecheta, 1982, 213-214). Emecheta reminds how Igbo women have always been independent owing to their high economic status within the society. The Igbo anthropologist Joseph Therese Agbasiere observes that Igbo women achieved their economic status primarily through farming and also by indulging in "petty trade in agricultural surpluses – cocoyams, cassava, melons and maize. Tree crops such as palm oil and kola nuts, as well as local crafts, including pottery also form part of a woman's trade" (1969, 37). All these privileges were lost due to Western influence which provoked the African men to restrict their women to domestic chores or to get them educated to be good teachers or nurses.

The intricate journeys undertaken by the women's group also reflect their motherly affection and concern for all children entrusted in their care. It is the presence of the weak, innocent, vulnerable children that gives the women more strength for striding towards safety instead of perishing on the way. Unlike Western countries where feminism has severely lashed at motherhood as one of the predominant means of restricting women's freedom, in Africa motherhood always entails respect and recognition for women. Obioma Nnaemeka, in

her introduction to *The Politics of (M)othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature* (1997), articulates her discontent with Western feminism's recurring propensity to render a victim-status to all African women especially mothers. She observes:

> Although feminist theorizing of motherhood has shifted in the past decade in terms of articulating the affirming aspect of motherhood, the earlier stridency against motherhood has not quite subsided. The yoking of motherhood and victimhood continues to be a feature of feminist discourse on motherhood. On the contrary, African women writers attempt most of the time to delink motherhood and victimhood the way they separate wifehood and motherhood… (1972, 5).

Based on Adrienne Rich's distinction between motherhood as an institution and as an experience, Nnaemeka argues that "motherhood in the African texts are based not on motherhood as a patriarchal institution but motherhood as an experience ("mothering") with its pains and rewards (1972, 5).

Though Debbie and others finally arrive at their destination Biafra, Debbie knows that it is too late. Neither she, nor Mrs. Ozimba or Mrs. Eze succeed in persuading the men whose senseless pride and unrelenting ego refuse to see the millions of corpses being strewn around them every minute. Ultimately all optimistic leaders of Biafra, along with their incomprehensible 'well- wisher' Alan Grey, shamelessly dash into South African and French planes, fearing the torrent of Nigerian bombs and grenades exploding and obliterating whatever remained in the Biafran territory. Debbie's outright refusal of Alan Grey's proposal to rescue and marry her, is a gleaming reflection of the dignity of the entire African women, who have been bravely enduring, confronting and resurrecting themselves and their children from the centuries-old dark period of slavery to the postcolonial epoch of man's cataclysmic covetousness for wealth and power. She yells with infinite derision and raging revulsion at all spineless African men and all scavenging white men shamelessly exploiting her land: "I see now that Abosi and his like are still colonized. They need to be decolonized. I am not like him, a black white man; I am a woman and

a woman of Africa. I am a daughter of Nigeria and if she is in shame, I shall stay and mourn with her in shame. No, I am not ready yet to become the wife of an exploiter of my nation," (Emecheta, 1982, 258)

Emecheta's war-narrative, a story which is narrated through the differing experiences of Nigerian women belonging to different social classes, locale and ethnic identities, reimagines Igbo women's identities, offering new dimension to their representation in literature. Such writings by female authors become significant in deconstructing the stereotypical passive, victimized images of African women and in asserting the significance of female power in restoring peace and stability within the society. Africa needs such powerfully realistic stories, reverberating voices from all its marginalized inhabitants so that the distinct power and strength of African women belonging to different ethnic groups be recognized and utilized for the socio-political development of all African countries, as envisioned by Ogundipe-Leslie.

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