



## FUTILITY OF WAR AND ITS TRAUMATIC EFFECT ON WOMEN: A STUDY OF ADE-OKERE'S *FOREST DAMES*

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**ABSTRACT:** *War is futile and should be discouraged in its entirety by any individual, group, society or nation. Young men who never witnessed any war in their lifetime clamour for war in the face of any little provocation but those who had witnessed war never wished to experience any form of war again. During the civil war, the Northern part of Nigeria was aided by foreign allies against the Biafrans. The war was actually initiated by the northerners who started killing the Igbo people in the North with impunity. In the end, the war was declared as no victor, no vanquished even when millions of Igbo people were killed, their women and girls raped and their properties wasted. A lot of creative writings have been written on the theme of the futility of war. The creative writers in their individual works vividly demonstrate the futility of war with the aim to condemn any move for recurrence of war. Most of the writers wrote on the general perils of war. Many articles have equally been written on war and its imminent dangers to individuals and societies at large. In this paper, the researchers aim to investigate the traumatic effects of the civil war especially on Biafran women with the view to discourage further occurrence.*

**KEYWORDS:** Biafra, Futility of war, War, Literature, Trauma.



## INTRODUCTION

*Forest Dames* is a story of the Nigeria and Biafra war of 1967 and 1970. Many novelists have written on the subject. Many of the authors who participated in the war, such as Elechi Amadi, Chinua Achebe and Raph Uwechue wrote from their personal experience. Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra*, is almost an autobiography. It chronicles the author's active involvement in the war. Some other writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who were not born before the war, wrote from an indirect experience. Adichie, in an interview, disclosed that she got her facts for her *Half of a Yellow Sun* from reading works of those who lived before the war and by listening to those who participated in the war. AdaOkere Agbasimalo falls under the third category; young youths who, though were born before the war, witnessed the war as a young girl. In the novel, she concentrates on the trauma innocent girls suffered during the war. The novel is best described as a faction, juxtaposition of facts and imagination. The source for the novel is about ninety percent fact, well crafted as fiction. The novel was written not solely to entertain but basically to inform. According to Laurence Perrine(1978), literature is not solely written for entertainment. A good literature, according to him, is that which while entertaining, also educates. He describes such literature that solely entertains as miniature golf or ping-pong. Such literature, he believes, is not worthy of the attention of anybody. In his own words, "But, unless fiction gives something more than pleasure, it hardly justifies itself as a subject of college study. Unless it expands or refines our minds or quickens our sense of life, its value is not appreciably greater than that of miniature golf, bridge, or ping-pong" (3). To make it more vivid, he goes further to say that "To have a compelling claim on our attention, it must yield not only enjoyment but understanding"(3). AdaOkere Agbasimelo had this in mind, just like other serious writers, so she has very clearly mirrored the experiences of those who witnessed the war, especially the young girls, who as a young girl she was then, witnessed the threat. She therefore, very subtly, recreated the facts about the war in fiction, using the character, Adaeze, popularly known as Deze to pass her message.

### Theoretical Framework

Young girls, though did not fight the war, were haunted like preys, humiliated and almost devoured by the soldiers. They suffered tremendous trauma hence, the adoption of **Trauma Theory** as a theoretical framework for the work. Trauma theory sprang from Freud's psychological theory. Sigmund Freud, according to Wikipedia.org, describes trauma as a wound inflicted not upon the body but the mind. Trauma theory thus attempts to understand the different ways by which traumatic occurrences are demonstrated, processed, and repressed throughout a variety of literary and historical texts.

### Futility of War

Charles E. Nnolim, in "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*" in *New Novels in African Literature Today*, writes that "The world created by Adichie is one of betrayal, death, conflict and loss" (2010: 145). He alleges that the Igbo were victims, also, of the residual shenanigans and schemings of British imperial policy in Nigeria (145). In their "Fiction Begets Facts: An Explanation of Biafran War in Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn*", Nasiru Yahaya, Amina Bello and John Olorunshola Kehinde. disclosed that war does no-one any good. They believe that war is futile and that the experiences of the war have been a source of inspiration for writers. According to them, the Nigerian Civil War is laden with gruesome experiences which provided and still provides materials for writers for a body of works that



form the Nigerian war novels/literature. To them, the stories about war as fictionalised by the writers are intended to teach and warn Nigerians about the dangers and aftermaths of war. In their “The Nigerian-Biafran War: Post Colonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide,” Heerten Lase and Moses A. Dirke maintain that the war is widely regarded as a watershed in the post colonial global order. They argue that the Nigerian-Biafran war is qualified to be considered a genocide for the fact that an induced famine was used as a weapon against the Biafrans. From the literary pieces, we understood that the Nigerian soldiers, referred to as the enemy soldiers by some of the novelists, were highly assisted by the foreign countries. Chinua Achebe, in “*There was a Country*,” writes that “The military operation was aided by Egyptian mercenary pilots flying the Nigerian army’s brand-new British, Czech L-29 Delphins, and Soviet MiG-17 and Ilyushin Beagle 11-28 aircraft” (136). From the literary piece, it became obvious that other countries assisted the Nigerian side by providing them with sophisticated weapons to fight the Biafran soldiers who relied solely on improvised arms. It becomes more pathetic that the Biafrans also became threats to fellow Biafrans. Emphasising from Flora Nwapa’s *Never Again*, Ernest N. Emenyonu;

Nwapa dramatises the total despair of the common man who was exploited and abused by the Biafran leadership and elite, identified in the story as the glib-talking intellectual and the steel-hearted Biafran military officer who was a greater threat to the life and security of the Biafran masses than the invading enemy (95).

Emenyonu clarifies by quoting from the novel, the perils caused the Biafran masses by home soldiers as, “Looting. It was the order of the day. It was our bane. The bane of Biafra. I used to think that only the invading army looted property, not the home army” (*Never Again*, 1991: p. 15).

War is futile, as almost everyone loses valuables and lives to the war. However, Biafra was highly hit by the war basically because they were unassisted. According to Achebe (2012), “The agony was everywhere. The economic blockade put in place by Nigeria’s federal government resulted in shortage of every imaginable necessity, from food and clean water to blankets and medicines” (*TWAC*, 199). Other writers of the civil war disclosed more pathetic experiences of people who witnessed the war. Many Igbo people in the North abandoned their hard-earned properties in the North and ran when it became so obvious that they were being hunted and killed with reckless abandon. According to AdaOkere, “Four days after that discussion, they got to the market and were told that Mama Gozi, whose stall was next to Mama Deze’s, had been killed the previous night” (37). More pathetically, the author disclosed that dead bodies of Igbo people littered everywhere in the north. She writes that “The bodies of some of those killed at night had been dragged out and left on the road for people to see. They were bodies of men, women, youths and children, perhaps with common identity” (40). These even happened at the initial stage, signalling the fact that the northerners had earlier planned the war against the unwary Igbo and they had begun to unleash mayhem on the innocent Igbo people in their midst. Further, as at the peak of war, even at the end, an uncountable number of properties and lives of the Igbo people were lost. Similarly, Uche Nnyagu in *the Travails of the Giant*, relates the gory experiences of those who participated in the war. According to Okwuchukwu Umeaku, a major character in the novel who participated in the war, “I was conscripted while I was an undergraduate at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. That was where I understood the definition of the concept – suffering. I saw suffering with my physical eyes. I was among the soldiers that fought the Biafran war. My immediate younger brother was also conscripted but he did not survive the war” (130).



AdaOkere Agbasimelo in the novel, vividly illustrates the gory experiences of the endangered species, which obviously are the Igbo people of the South-East part of Nigeria. She understood that everybody both the child, middle aged and the old people suffered the pains of the war. However, to her, the real endangered species are young Biafran women. This group, she believes, feels the greater threat of the war. The novel starts with the reminiscence of a woman about the plights of girls who are hunted perpetually by the Nigerian soldiers during the Biafran and Nigerian war. The girls are forest dames, visited nocturnally by their mothers. The poor innocent girls remain perpetually in the bush to avoid being captured by the Nigerian soldiers for their sexual satisfaction. Deze's mother, who had visited her at night in the bush, reveals to the forest dames that Wakego, Denis' daughter was captured. This amazed the girls. Deze is amazed and sympathetic for Wakego because she knew she would be devoured sexually by the soldiers. In utter disgust, Deze asks, "Wakego? Oh my God, she was captured? Wasn't she hiding like we are? Oh my God!" (21).

From the interactions of the women with the forest dames, it is discernible that both the parents who take pains to embark on nocturnal visits to the forest and the forest dames are vulnerable. The forest is dangerous as wild animals could harm them, it becomes more dangerous at night when everywhere becomes dark. The girls and their mothers prefer the perils to being sexually harassed by the enemy soldiers. The author makes it vivid with the below excerpt from the novel, revealing too, that married women are not safe. Deze is terribly terrified.

"Hmm, Mama, I'm so scared."

"Oh no, no daughter, don't be scared, they can't find you. My God Jehovah will see you through."

The girls all stared at Deze's mother, interested in the story, thankful to God that they had become forest dames. Sofuru's mother told the story of Ogechi, a mother of two, who was snatched from her husband while they were having dinner (22).

The soldiers are so insensitive that all they desire is to satisfy their sexual urge without considering the perils they cause their victims. According to the narrator, Deze's mother, "One of the aggressors had ordered the woman to stop eating and follow them. Trembling, she picked up her baby and got up to go with them but was rebuked and ordered to leave the baby there. Ogechi left her baby in obedience. As she was led away, her five-month-old baby who was still on breast milk, cried as if she knew what was going on (22).

### **The Trauma of Rape**

Young Biafran girls in the North, before the real war, are raped in the presence of their parents. It is a painful thing to be raped and more painful when it is done in the presence of the girl's parents. The marauders storm their victim's houses without fear and cause tension to them. Their aim is not particularly to rob the people off their properties, they came basically to kill the parents and rape the girls. The experience of Deze's father while in the North is very pathetic. The writer discloses that Deze's father is enveloped in fear one night as the killers rouse him one night while banging at the neighbour's door. The fear in him intensifies as one of the killers shouts, "Kill them, kill the bastard."



“Yes, Thrust the dagger into that one’s belly, yes, scatter it.”

Killing is not enough, they came basically to rape. “Hey, young girl, this way, undress quickly!”

To further humiliate the Biafrans and get them aggravated, their girls are not only raped before their parents who are unable to help them, the innocent girls are made to suffer more mortification. The writer disclosed that stories were heard of pregnant women whose bellies were ripped open and the foetuses they were carrying shredded with a machete. Stories of girls gathered and taken to lepers, who raped them (56). As if the humiliation is not enough, there are as well, cases of breasts and genitals cut off and kicked around like footballs (56).

The poor treatment meted to the people of South East in the North heralded their abdication from the North. They suffer more perils trying to get back to the east. Their men are killed in the presence of their wives and their wives and daughters raped. In the east, the women are made to suffer more by the enemy soldiers. Deze is perpetually on the run trying to escape being raped and especially, being abducted by the soldiers for their sexual satisfaction. Her mother does everything to secure her from the soldiers who come regularly to capture her and other girls for their sexual satisfaction. The woman in a bid to feed her children, is always oppressed by the soldiers. The writer writes; “The soldiers sometimes waylaid the women returning from the distant market and dispossessed them of their goods. Every woman who passed by that way had to part with some of the items she was carrying” (78).

### **Soldiers Sacrifice their Lives to their Sexual Gratification**

Hard times during the war made some women compromise just to survive. Uwadie’s wife, Rosa finds succour in the enemy soldiers who turn her into a sexual object probably for some material benefit. The soldiers come to her at will to satisfy their amorous urge. The enemy soldiers do not consider that they would be endangering their lives trying to satisfy their sexual urge. The writer reports that information was gathered about Madam Rosa’s association with those perceived to be on a mission to annihilate her people. It appalled the home soldiers that Madam Rosa could find succour in the bosom of such avowed foes. During the war, people did what they could not do under normal situations just to survive. The home soldiers fail to understand that Madam Rosa’s association with the soldiers was an option for survival. Obviously, the home soldiers’ anger is basically that while they are fighting their foes, the same foes have an amorous affair with Madam Rosa. According to the novel, “The home troops fought and died for the likes of Madam Rosa as she parlayed with those they fought against. The home soldiers dropped the option of killing Madam Rosa but to use her as bait to get their foes killed as they come to have sex with her. To make this possible, the home soldiers get the home boys involved: they are to serve as spies on Madam Rosa. The writer writes that, “The boys were only too glad to take up that assignment but were almost discouraged by the tight security around the woman’s home” (131).

The enemy soldiers provide tight security for Madam Rosa not because they care about her, but to keep her alive to always satisfy their sexual urge. Even the enemy soldiers are aware that their lives are in danger while they pander with the woman, but the power of sex would not allow them to quit. They prefer to take risks but to keep the woman for their pleasure. In an interaction with the other home soldiers, one of them observes that, “She is being closely monitored as they are aware that they could be hit through her” (131).





The home soldiers are resilient. With the aid of the home boys, they get the enemy soldiers as they come to satisfy their sexual urge. The author reports, “The enemy soldiers were taken completely unawares when the home soldiers launched a midnight attack on their camp in Alaowerre and got them routed. Only a few managed to escape. The same night there was a simultaneous surprise attack on Madam Rosa’s premises” (131 – 132).

As the war progressed, the rebels decided not only to rape the girls and allow them to go their ways, they began also, to abduct them and keep them permanently for themselves. They go about hunting for girls they abduct and take to their camp. The victims were sexually abused at their will. While the rebels kill the men, they abduct their female counterparts. The author writes, “Whenever they took over and occupied rebel enclaves, the vandals took advantage of existing community social life. Their favourite pastime was to hunt for and abduct young females or older ones in the absence of young ladies or mere girls, in the absence of either (158). Then, nobody was talking about the rights of women as it was so obvious that women had no rights at all. The writer consolidates this when she writes that “They had no respect for females found within the invaded areas. They would not kill them. They would rather abduct and violate them.

The parents whose responsibility it is to protect their children, could not do anything other than to support their girls to perpetually be forest dames. As the novel puts it, “The parents, for their own part, would do everything within their power to keep the girls out of sight – and this included hiding them in the forest. The few girls who were afraid of the forest and who refused to remain in the forest were regarded as the scum.

### **Married Women Are also Hunted for**

The real target of the vandals are unmarried women. They are the real endangered species and in order to save themselves, they are always on the run. The vandals began to hunt for elderly women and married women too when they could not get the young and unmarried ones. They must always satisfy their sexual desire. The novel reports that the invaders were so desperate that, in the absence of young females, the bold or hard-pressed among them attempted to abduct any middle-aged woman around. The aged women were surprised that the vandals came for them. One of the elderly women, in amazement, asked the young soldier “Are you getting me for yourself or your master? (158). The women preferred to remain vulnerable and secure their female children. In a dialogue with her mother, Deze expressed disgust over the menace of the soldiers. She wondered what menace could be worse than taking girls forcibly away to military camps. The mother amazed her by responding that the salacious soldiers who could not see girls to rape and abduct resorted to taking married women. According to her, “And the more pressed one’s amongst them who can’t find the girls, who have all gone into hiding, took married women away to their camp (159). Such an act is an abomination in Igbo land as the author rightly pointed out but the soldiers were not interested in what abomination and what is not, all they needed was the sexual satisfaction. From Deze’s statement, “Those they took away have not come back and they are looking for more. God, I don’t want them to take me – o” reveals the fact that any woman abducted remains with them in the camp to serve them anytime they desire it.

Obviously, women and girls suffered the pains of the war more. Nothing hurts more than one watching one so dear to one being brutalised and killed. The dead suffer no perils but the living do. The women suffer the trauma of having their husbands killed and the same people that



killed them also came to rape them and their daughters. Abduction of poor women had become a recurring decimal. Every now and then, the girls and women remain in perpetual fear. There is a case of two green-uniformed men with guns who had abducted a defenceless lady sandwiched between them. The writer reports that “The woman, no doubt, had fallen into their trap. She had been abducted and was going to be forced to become their bed mate” (160). While they were still reminiscing on the recent abduction, another incident of abduction is reported by a little boy who, according to the novel, ran in, pointing backwards. The boy announced that a neighbour's daughter was being led away by three enemy soldiers. From the discussion, it is understood that the vandals prefer mostly, very young girls. When Dora lamented that all efforts to hide her away were in vain, Mama Hannah, visibly worried, said, “Are you surprised? That is a young girl. They will do anything to get her type, even if it means killing those who try to prevent them from reaching her” (160).

The fact that married women are also the soldiers' target is made vivid with the abduction of Basil's wife. The married women are forced away from their poor husband. According to Mama Hannah, “Basil's wife was taken away while she was sitting beside her husband enjoying the mid-morning breeze at the entrance to their house. She and her husband thought that as a married couple, the abductors would not get them” (161). The husband tries to protest but the vandal says to him, “Abi na only you sabi chop? insinuating that he (the soldier) had the right to his own share of fun. He then adjusted his rifle to remind Basil of its presence and went away with his prey (161).

### **Smart Girls Outwit the Desperate Soldiers**

Deze is always hunted for by the soldiers. She is a beautiful young girl, reserved and determined to excel but the soldiers always come to take her away for the same purpose of sexual satisfaction. Deze is so smart that each time they come, she would always find a way to outwit them. Each time they embark on a hunt for girls, they gather many of them but to them, Deze is like honey that each of them must taste. One of the soldiers describes her thus “You! Ajuku tomato.” They have stormed Deze's house unexpectedly and commanded Deze to follow them. Deze plays smart and escapes for her dear life. As if she was willing to oblige, she says to the soldiers, “Okay, make I bring my slippers, she goes into the house with the impression that she has gone to get her slippers and she escapes into the forest.

The writer writes that the soldiers usually went into the communities in a lorry as from ten in the morning and roamed about until evening looking for females to prey on, dispossessing traders of farm produce and chatting with some native male acquaintances, some of whom disclosed the girl's hideouts.... Once it was Sunset they hurried back to the vehicle for onward movement to the camp. Some of them returned to the vehicle with captured girls (163 - 164).

### **Water Soiled from the Fountain**

The vandals are sent by the top ranking soldiers to go and hunt for the girls for them. They remain in the camp and instruct their subjects to go and hunt for beautiful young girls for them. When a soldier captured the beautiful girl named Eber, he wished to keep her to himself and “devour ” her sexually at his will. But the beautiful girl has been captured by his boss. He describes Eber as a proper tomato to denote how beautiful she is. He goes further to say, “I wish say na me get am. But anyhow, I go touch am small before I hand over.” While pulling her up in the back of the truck where they were seated, wishing the girl were for him alone, he



plants his thick, dirty-looking lips on her, fondling her breasts and pressing her frame tightly against his body (164). Sule, the vandal meant to capture Deze, is filled with fury that she escaped. He runs to meet the other vandals who succeeded in capturing some girls and who are already waiting with their prey in the truck. Part of the reason for his tension is that his boss would not be happy with him for failing again to capture Deze, the beautiful girl whom they had described as Ajuku tomato to denote her level of beauty and how much they long for her sexually (164).

Water soiled from the fountain and there was fear everywhere. Women are more afraid of the incessant abduction of young girls than the real war. Obviously, the reason why the soldiers abduct the girls with temerity is because they gain the support of their superiors. Deze's mother lives in perpetual fear of losing her daughter to the randy soldiers who come on a regular basis. On one of her visits to see Obilobi, she is terribly worried about the fate of her daughter. She says to Obilobi, "I want to get back to Nekede. The harassment is getting too much and I am afraid for my daughter. I don't know where else to keep her," she complained.

The man's response immediately reveals to any unwary person the real brain behind the perdurable abduction. In his own words, he says, "I heard that one of them, eem... Sule came for another girl and this time it was your daughter he wanted to take by force. I wonder what he does with the girls. I think he is mandated to return to camp every day with at least one girl for the pleasure of his bosses. Otherwise, why would he take two girls the other day and today he is struggling for another one? I am glad that your daughter outsmarted him...." (165). Sule, the errand Soldier, determined to apprehend Deze, goes back the following day as he had promised the mother, to get her. Deze is still at large. Kwenga reports that Sule is filled with anger. With anger, he has dragged Hejeru, the same middle-aged woman he had earlier wanted to go with, into her father's house and locked the door behind them. According to the narrator, "They lamented that after a short while, Sule bolted out of the room, buckling his belt and pacing away hurriedly and they all watched in bewilderment as the war caused the nitwit to desecrate their valued ego and esteem. Luckily Hejeru's parents were not alive to see that" (167).

Deze and other girls live in perpetual fear as the soldiers vowed never to allow them to have peace. Deze is reported to have come back one evening and has hardly finished taking her dinner when the sound of a vehicle is heard. The author reports that "The vehicle pulled up with a screech. Armed soldiers jumped down and started running towards the house. They had become more daring... (172). Deze understands that there is danger when she hears the driver stop and the daring soldiers jump down and one of them issues instructions to them to cover everywhere. Deze, determined never to fall a prey, escapes through the link door and quickly dash into the bush.

To be safe, Deze and other girls defile fear and remain in the forest. Ordinarily, these girls would not dare enter the forest not to talk of staying there as their abode. They prefer to be devoured by wild animals to being raped by the soldiers. It pains Dora, her mother, that her daughter is in perpetual fear and risk of being captured as the soldiers raid on a daily basis. She did not support her daughter to be a forest dame but as the situation became tougher, she had no option. She approaches Mrs Ofoegbu, whose daughters are already hiding in the forest to seek that her daughter, Deze joins them. She chronicles the fear people instil in her about the plights of the girls in the forest to the woman. Despite the threat, she would support her daughter to join them in the forest as the only option to exonerate being captured. According





to her, “In fact, they don’t even link that forest with humans. As far as they are concerned people who dare to go there might simply be donating themselves to the wild animals. I just heard one elderly woman from your compound sympathising with you and saying that this thing that drove you into taking your daughter to that forest must indeed be serious.... When I heard that you had sent your daughter there I didn’t give it much thought. It was only after this night’s raid that it occurred to me that Deze could actually join your daughter in spite of the risks associated with staying there” (174). Eventually Deze joins the girls in the forest. The girls, Lee and Gonma, the author reports, “were pleased to have the company of Deze and Sofuru. ‘It won’t be just the two of us anymore,’ they seemed to be saying” (179).

Not minding the risk involved in staying in the forest, Deze is grateful to her mother for helping her escape being raped. Thus, Deze heaved a sigh of relief and was indeed grateful to her mother for moving her further away from indecent soldiers, even though she was now exposed and closer to the ravenous inhabitants of the forest” (179). Life in the forest is not easy. The friends in the forest are under threat of the dangers of the forest. The plights of the girls in the forest are vivified by the author as, “Bright lightning sharply flashed across with momentary illustrations; heavy claps of thunder followed. Gusty winds vigorously shook the leaves and branches, whistling past the vegetation, as if in a fury. Even the mothers of the girls who had embarked on nocturnal visits are seriously endangered. “Chei, the rain has quenched my lamp,” Phoebe cried out (184 – 185). Apart from the natural danger, the fear of wild animals is there too. The writer writes that the mothers on the nocturnal visit only talked in whispers not to attract attention. Wild animals could come and devour them.

### **Rape Persists Even as the War Declared Ended**

The war has been declared ended and many fortunate families reunite. However, even as the war has been declared over, war has not really ended. The surviving Biafrans relate their pathetic experiences of the war, while still sceptical about the declaration of “No Victor, No Vanquished.” Kwenga laments about the destruction caused to them. He lists some to include, their sons killed and their daughters sexually abused (220). The declaration of the end-of-war afforded the soldiers the opportunity to unleash their last mayhem on the girls. The author writes that many of the soldiers abduct girls, and at times women, for short periods along the way as they return to their various lands from their places of refuge (234). It appalled Deze that after suffering as a forest dame, Sofuru still fell into the hands of the abductors on her way home with her folks. It is so pathetic and heart-breaking that after the poor girl had suffered in the forest trying to avoid being captured and made an object of sexual satisfaction by the dirty soldiers, she was still captured. The writer disclosed that some of the vandals who already knew that they would leave soon decided to seize the opportunity to temporarily abduct girls. In the words of the author, “Members of one of the returning groups narrated how, on passing an enemy camp, they were halted, girls picked out and taken to their camp.... After what seemed like an hour or more the girls began emerging, some frowning, others expressionless.” The author, through the statement, “There was no need to ask what had transpired,” has subtly disclosed that the girls were raped. According to her, one of the women, Ojonma, did not return with the rest of the females. Obviously, the soldiers have taken her to be their permanent sex mate as nothing was heard about her again (235).

The war ends and Deze goes back to school. After her university education, she was posted to Ibadan for her National Youth Service Corps. The entire family is happy for her success and determination. However, the Vice Principal of the school where is posted for her primary



assignment again comes with his own harassment. He becomes so caring to Deze to the extent of offering her a self-contained room accommodation in his residence. Deze is so grateful, unaware of the Vice Principal's desire. Deze only suspects his plans when he begins to knock on her door every night he eventually opens up to her, "Deze, do you realise how sweet you are? I can really take good care of you here and nobody will know. All you need do is unbolt the adjoining door every night and you will have no problems during your service year" (298). Deze could not imagine that: after she had suffered to in the forest trying to escape being raped, now this. The more she thinks about the thoughts of the randy Vice Principal, the more she abhors him and the more she develops a different thought about men. "Hmm, is this the stock-in-trade of the male folk or am I just unlucky to imagine that! All I need to do is 'unlock the adjoining door every night' and place the VP at liberty to exploit me, turn me into his receptacle and empty his waste in me. Me? Adaeze Buno, God forbid" (298).

When it becomes obvious to the Vice Principal that Deze is not ready to oblige him, he comes up with threats and accusations just to cower her to succumb but Deze is determined and she excels eventually when the case is prudently handled by the principal of the school.

### **Aftermaths of the Civil War**

Though the outcome of the war was declared no victor, no vanquished, it was very obvious that the Biafrans witnessed tremendous damage: lives were lost, properties lost and mothers and daughters raped and left to suffer the trauma. The currency of the Biafrans was reduced to nothing, all in a bid to incapacitate them. Dora, though she is fortunate have her husband and children alive after the war and her daughter escaped being raped, laments thus: "People came to your land to kill your sons, rape your daughters and destroy your property and you are surprised when the same people destroy your money as well. Why? (251). She is determined not to lose hope but to start all over from the little she had. As a good woman, she encouraged her husband and others to be strong.

Some of the abducted girls later returned but with the babies and pregnancies. The author reports that some of the vandals are happy that the Igbo girls they kidnapped would bear them children at least, they would be fortunate to have Igbo blood. This is an indication that they hold Igbo in high esteem and perhaps, part of their reason for wanting to decimate the Igbo is jealousy. Ugoaku, one of the victims, narrates her observations while still with the vandal. According to her, one of the vandals' victims gave birth and he "shouted raising both hands up: 'Hey, my family don get Igbo blood now – o (256). The vandals are only interested in the babies as they allow the girls to go. Some others are allowed to go with their babies. The girls feel the trauma of the abduction but more traumatic for coming back with pregnancies and babies. According to Ojiugo, one of the unfortunate victims, "The abduction is bad enough but more bearable if it does not produce a baby" (256). Seriously disturbed by the fate of her baby, Ojiugo commits suicide. This act of Ojiugo amazed everyone. They wonder why she should take such a nasty decision after she had survived the war. Suicide, according to the author, "was an abomination. But Ojiugo had her own agenda" (260).

More pathetic experiences of the people after they had returned from their refuge include burnt of people's properties and human beings. Cordelia relates to her friend, Deze how they returned from their place of refuge to find that their house had been raised by fire. She emphasises, "Sure the house did not set itself ablaze" (264). More gory experiences are related by Cordelia when she says, "... in my village, we were told that the vandals set every house ablaze when it



became obvious that the rebels were after them. We found my grandmother burnt to death. Poor old woman, she was right there in the house....” (264).

## CONCLUSION

Laurence Perrine (1978), maintained that the essence of literature, apart from entertaining, is to educate. Creative writers, therefore, write basically to inform and educate the reader with the aim to reform. AdaOkere Agbasimelo has in *The Forest Dames* presented to the general masses, the dangers and futility of war so that those who did not witness the war would see through her fictional representation of the war, the reason not to incite another war. To her, war does no-one any good: both genders, including babies suffer the plights. In case of another war in future, more casualties will be recorded. Therefore, anything that will cause another war should totally be discouraged.

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