

The Principles of International Humanitarian Laws and the Nigerian Civil War: A Review of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*

By

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Abstract

The Nigerian Civil War which was fought between the federal military government and the Biafran rebels between July, 1969 and January, 1970 has generated a plethora of literature. Critical evaluation of these literary works has taken different perspectives. However, this essay takes a legalistic method that uses Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's very recent novel, *Roses and Bullets*, to address the compliance or non-compliance of the war to the principles of international humanitarian law. It examines the fate of combatants, wounded, sick and dead soldiers in the world of the novel. It equally scrutinizes the life of the civilian population, particularly the women, children and refugees, who are caught in the conflict. The role of the medical personnel and international humanitarian bodies are examined as well as the punishment meted out to the perpetrators of abduction, rape, torture, cruel and inhuman treatment that violate the laws of the nations.

I. Introduction

Where, after all, do universal rights begin? In small places, close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person: the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places, where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world (Eleanor Roosevelt quoted in Ezeilo 2008).

Prior to the time of recorded history, and the documentation of the rights of man, man has preyed on other men. And recognizing that "power and brute force need mediation" (Chukwuma 2012), one of the greatest philosophers suggested:

And the rule of law, it is argued, is preferable to that of any individual. On the same principle, even if it be better for certain individuals to govern, they should be made only guardians and ministers of the law.... Therefore, he who bids the law rule may be deemed to bid God and Reason alone rule, but he who bids man rule adds an element of the beast: for desire is a wild beast and passion perverts the minds of rulers, even when they are the best of men. The law is reason unaffected by desire (Aristotle *Politics*).

Man, therefore, having recognized the essentiality of the rule of law over the rule of man, strives to protect these rights in order to ensure that what Okey Ndibe describes in his examination of the spirit of history in Chinua Achebe trilogy as, “Things fall apart; an order passes; a dispensation dies; chaos ascends; terror triumphs” (293), will never happen again as in the two world wars. And as Eleanor Roosevelt suggests, these rights ought to be made fundamental rights which must be protected by the comity of nations in small places close to home – school, college, factory, and farm. But most importantly, the violations of these rights ought to be penalized in places that have been turned into theatres of war, where “the ‘gun’ is a sign of power” (Udumuchu 2012). The war situation gives rise to what Charles Nnolim describes in his critical appraisal of Aniebo’s *The Journey Within* as “Fellow man thus becomes a mere toy, not at the hands of the gods but at the hands of fellow men in a position of authority. The army as an establishment has thus usurped the powers of the gods and acts like the Olympians in the matter of fellow man’s destiny” (*Approaches to the African Novel* 140).

The situations, where men dwarf other men, and suppress and brutalize them play itself out in the novel under study. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *Roses and Bullets* is, undoubtedly, a work of literature, which “may appear to be describing the world, and sometimes actually does so, but its real function is performative: it uses language within certain conventions in order to bring about certain effects on the reader” (Eagleton 2009). It is not just any type of literature like the romance, but it is a literature of war, which Ernest Emenyonu observes, “has enriched contemporary African literature both in the quantity and quality of output” (2008 xiv). As a war fiction, it presents the horrors of war with its accruing benefits because:

In the process of mirroring society and criticizing its pitfalls, the war literature also serves as a compass for social re-definition. A didactic function emerges in the process, especially in the portrayal of death, devastation, avoidable mistakes and sufferings engendered by the war (Nwahunanya 1997).

The devastation of the Nigerian Civil War is the major theme explored in the novel, which has its setting in some Nigerian cities and villages. The events in the story are situated within the three-year-old genocidal civil war. This war and other wars are still raging in some parts of the continent that Chimalum Nwankwo refers to them as Africa's index, which "could guide the insightful reader towards the foundations of Africa's perennial or still unfolding tragedies" (2008: 13). And one may rightfully like to know the perennial and unfolding tragedies, which *Roses and Bullets* depict. Undoubtedly, the novel x-rays the tragedies of armed conflict, the human and material carnage, as a result of its violence. Violence, which Salami-Boukari says, "... in all its forms, whether physical or mental, battery, and abuse in all its forms, whether economic, emotional, or verbal abuse, including sexual assault and rape endanger not only women's well-being, but have a direct impact on the stability and life of the family as a whole" (*African Literature: Gender Discourse, Religious Values and the African Worldview* 2012). It necessarily follows that by extension, the nation engaged in armed conflict and the whole world bear the brunt of the devastation.

Bearing the effects of wars on mankind, this critical discourse will therefore desist from reading *Roses and Bullets* from a befogged feminist binocular vision for its "thematic preoccupation is the exploration of the specific subject of the dehumanizing status of women" (Awodiya 242) or is it interested in feminism's advocacy of the enthronement of women's fundamental human rights, agitation of parity between men and women "in the belief that women have been persistently discriminated against by virtue of their gender" (Ojaruega 2011/2012). It would also amount to viewing the issue of derogations of human rights raised in the novel, if they are seen in the narrow compass of "women's situation in societies which have undergone a war of national liberation and socialist reconstruction" (Davis 564) or the reductionism of only showcasing the "unspeakable exploration of women— some of whom are raped, some of whom are abducted and used as sex slaves and some of whom have to sell their bodies to survive" (Eustace Palmer 2008). The evaluation of the novel must transcend such feminist reading to get at the full

meaning of the text, which Pierre Macherey posits is the “ the relation between the implicit and explicit.... And what is important in the work is what it does not say” (*A Theory Of Literary Production* 1978). And what the novel does not say but is implied is that it is to be deciphered as an allegorical narrative that “represents the metaphor by which a process of learning, for both the protagonist and the reader, is examined” (Amachree 85). It is only through such a close reading that the war that affects the fictive characters in their fictive world can acquire a global canvass. It is only through this that the meaning of “Much of Africa’s women’s literature has been concerned about change, overtly or covertly...” (Kolawale 153) becomes glaring. However, the change must not be motivated by the impulse to scrap the status quo or to interrogate patriarchy or to overrun the rigid tradition that “discriminates against African women, who are seen as perpetual children and second-class citizens” (Azodo 1997). It is through the journey motif of the principal characters that undergo the crucibles of a civil war, devastating experiences of the protagonist, Ginikanwa Ezeuko, that the metaphor of war can be properly articulated. It is only through the excruciating experiences that Chinua Achebe situates the war in a metaphor of psychosis in his “The Madman” in *Girls at War*, which has been interpreted as:

... a metaphor for the Nigerian-Biafran conflict. For who can say which side was the real mad man in that conflict? The Igbo (Biafrans), who were the victims of the genocide and treated as aliens in their own country, were depicted “mad” for daring to secede from the Nigerian union. But in pursuing the Biafrans, Nigeria often appeared to be in a mad chase after victory only to resume a unified country again, whole but scarred from that chase (Patricia Emenyonu 2012).

The thrust of this critical discourse, therefore, is to examine *Roses and Bullets* within the macrocosm of the indelible imprints of the civil war on the fictive characters that inhabit the world of the novel. It would scrutinize within its ambit – the fate of the combatant and non – combatant soldiers, the fate of the civilian population, the role of the medical personnel and humanitarian bodies and the seemingly lack of punishment for the perpetrators of the crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. All these issues would be viewed within the back-drop of the multiplicity of laws that protect individual’s human rights laws, which Christof Heyns and Magnus Killander believe, “Both domestic law and international law can potentially protect human rights. Domestic or national protection is obviously the most important; it is the first line of defence”

(350). The civil war created a violent disruption in the fictive setting; particularly in Biafra, that there seems to be a state of anarchy where the operation of the law has been temporarily suspended; therefore, the domestic law never offered any protection to any of the characters. The whole enclave where the novel is set shows a glaring absence of the rule of law but jungle justice. However, one questions the non-implementation of the plethora of international humanitarian laws that purport to ameliorate the effects of war in conflict situations as depicted in *Roses and Bullets*. And this multiplicity of laws will be examined presently.

Some Provisions of International Humanitarian Laws

Before Albert Einstein's bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to determine the victor and the vanquished of the Second World War, witnesses to the horrors of the war had met in San Francisco, United States of America, on 26th June, 1945, with the intention of saving "the succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind" (*Charter of the United Nations*). And to ensure that the provisions of this Charter has universal application, its article 2(6) provides that "The organization shall ensure that states which are not members of the United Nations act in accordance with these Principles so far as may be necessary for the maintenance of international peace and security". It further provides that members of the organization ought to ensure that the fundamental human rights enshrined in this charter are implemented in "territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government" (article 73) and in territories, which are "hereinafter referred to as trust territories" (article 75). In order to ensure that perpetrators of scourges of war did not go scot-free, it established the International Court of Justice in its article 92 with the mandate that it "shall be the principal judicial organ of the United nations".

It is the same Charter of the United Nations formulated by the five permanent members of the United Nations – Republic of China, France, and the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America – that gave birth to the United Nations Organization, whose most important purpose and principle is provided in article 1 (1) of the Charter as:

To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.

The United Nations have tried to protect the rights of the individual and to maintain the equality of states. It has adopted several international human rights instruments which are called *The International Bill of Human Rights*. These include, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948, which provides in its article 3 that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”; article 4, “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and slave trade shall be prohibited in all its forms”; articles 5, “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”, article 8, everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law, and article 9, “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile”. The comity of nations recognizing that human rights as provided in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* cannot be achieved without providing for the enjoyment of civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created for them to enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights adopted in 1976 *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. One very important provision of the two covenants which is lacking in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is that they explicitly provide in their respective articles 1 (1) that “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”. The civil war in the world of *Roses and Bullets* is to be seen as falling under this provision, where Biafrans who felt marginalized and massacred in the northern cities and elsewhere decided to secede from the union and determine their own political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural developments. However, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* also provided like the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* all the fundamental human rights in articles 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9 stated earlier.

International humanitarian laws which are anterior and posterior to these declaration and covenants exist, and they are all aimed specifically to the protection of lives and prosperity in countries that are theatres of either civil or international wars. For example, as far back as 22nd August, 1864, long before the devastating First and Second World Wars, there was the *Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field*. This convention has a very narrow scope as it provided only for the wounded or sick combatants in the field and the protection of the personnel who examined and treated them. There was also the *Geneva Convention for the Relief of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field* of July 27, 1929. Having witnessed the horrors of World War II which was based on the superiority of races in which more than six million Jews were annihilated, in a diplomatic conference held in Geneva from 21st - April to 12th August, 1949, the representatives of governments revised the 1929 *Geneva Convention* and replaced it with the *First Geneva Convention* (1949). Unlike the few provisions of the first two conventions of the previous international humanitarian laws, this one has a wider scope in its sixty-four articles. The provisions of this convention “shall be implemented in peacetime” as well as to “all cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict” (article 2). The law sought to protect persons taking no active part in hostilities, that is, the civilian population, dead or wounded and sick soldiers, prisoners of war, medical personnel, members of the International Committee of the Red Cross and other impartial humanitarian body. Among the civilian population which it sought to protect, it stated, “Women shall be treated with all consideration due to their sex” (article 12). It specifically prohibited in article 3 (1):

- (a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- (b) taking of hostages;
- (c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- (d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court.

There is no doubt that this *First Geneva Convention*, 1949 for all intents and purposes, was aimed at avoiding the scourges of war, torture, rape, cruel and degrading treatment, and particularly, the crime of genocide. After the adoption of this convention, the world witnessed the massacre of millions of people in several armed conflicts across the globe, particularly, the extermination of

the Igbo in the three-year-old war, which provided the historical material for *Roses and Bullets*, the massacre of the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo after the fall of Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide which claimed the lives of almost a million people within months, while the world looked on. These exterminations are possible as long as article 63 of *First General Convention 1949* provides that “Each of the High Contracting Parties shall be at liberty to denounce the present convention”.

The community of states having realized the inadequacies of the previous international humanitarian laws are mindful that millions of children, women and men have been victims of unimaginable atrocities in times of armed conflicts, and having realized that these crimes threaten the peace, security and the well-being of the world which the *Charter of the United Nations* seeks to protect, affirming that these crimes go unpunished and determined “to put an end to the impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes and thus contribute to the prevention of such crimes” (Preamble *The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*). The Statute established *The International Criminal Court* in 2002. The court has jurisdiction over the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression. The statute, therefore, interprets genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. These acts are provided in article 6:

- (a) killing members of the group;
- (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The same statute also provides in its article 3 (7) for Crimes Against Humanity which includes murder, extermination, enslavement, imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law, torture, rape and sexual slavery, persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity, enforced disappearance of persons and other inhumane acts of similar character, intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health. In article 8 of the Statute, it is provided that “war crimes” means

grave breaches of the *Geneva Convention* of 12th August, 1949. In its Article 8 (2) (b), the statute provides what constitute war crimes in cases of armed conflict not of an international character, like the civil war in the fictive setting of *Roses and Bullets*. It particularly states:

- (i) Violence to life and, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- (ii) Committing outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- (iii) The passing of sentences and carrying out executions without previous judgments pronounced by a regularly constituted court.

In its article 8 (2) (c), the statute further provides that the following acts also constitute war crimes: intentionally directing attacks on civilian population or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities; intentionally directing attacks against buildings, material, medical units and transport, using the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions in conformity with international law; intentionally directing attacks against personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in humanitarian assistance, intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historical monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected; pillaging towns or cities, even when taken by assault; committing rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and forced pregnancy; conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces or groups, killing or wounding treacherously a combatant adversary and destroying or seizing the property of an adversary unless such destruction is necessitated by the imperative of the conflict.

Apart from these international humanitarian laws, there are also others that seek to particularly protect women and children in times of war. Being aware that women and children belong to the vulnerable group who suffer greatly in periods of emergency and armed conflict in the struggle for peace, self-determination, national liberation and independence, and the suffering of this group in many areas of the world, the General Assembly of the United Nations in December, 1974, passed the resolution for the proclamation of *Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict*. This Declaration particularly prohibits attacks and bombings of the civilian population; inflicting incalculable suffering, especially on women and

children and all forms of repression and cruel and inhuman treatment of women and children, including imprisonment and torture, shooting, mass arrests, collective punishment, destruction of dwellings; and women and children belonging to the civilian population and finding themselves in circumstances of emergency during armed conflict shall not be deprived of shelter, food, medical aid or other inalienable rights.

Again for the protection of the women particularly, the General Assembly also proclaimed on 20th December, 1993 the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*. In its article one, the Declaration defines ‘violence’ against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”. Therefore, violence against women includes physical, sexual and psychological violence which may occur at the family, communal levels or condoned by the state.

Moreover, the comity of nations realizing that children are also very sensitive and vulnerable groups that need special protection like women during armed conflicts also make provisions for their protection in *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1990. Its article 1 specifies that a “child means every human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child majority is attained earlier”. In its article 38 (1), it enjoins state parties to observe and respect the international humanitarian laws applicable to armed conflict that affect the child. It further states in the same section 38:

- (2) State Parties shall take feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.
- (3) State Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, State Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.
- (4) In accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts, State Parties shall take

all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.

And to further prohibit the incidence of recruiting children into armed forces, *Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention*, 1999, was adopted by International Labour Organization. The organization's international instrument also reiterates that a child is any person under the age of eighteen years. In its article 3(a), it states that the "worst forms of child labour" consists of:

All forms of slavery or practice similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.

The General Assembly of the United Nations still desirous to stem the involvement of child-soldiers in armed conflicts, particularly in civil wars, adopted the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* in 2000. This law enjoins State Parties to "raise the minimum age for the voluntary recruitment of persons into their national forces ... for persons under the age of 18 years are entitled to special protection" (article 3(1)). And in the same article 3 (3), it further provides stringent conditions under which persons under the age of eighteen years may be allowed. They include:

- (a) Such recruitment is genuinely voluntary;
- (b) Such recruitment is carried out with the informed consent of the person's parents or legal guardians;
- (c) Such persons are fully informed of the duties involved in such military service;
- (d) Such persons provide reliable proof of age prior to acceptance into national military service.

Besides, in 1984, the General Assembly also adopted the *Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* in its desire to stop torture, cruel and inhuman treatment throughout the world. In its article 1, it defines 'torture' as "any act causes

severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, which is intentionally inflicted on a person It provides particularly in its article 2:

- (2) No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.
- (3) An order from a superior officer or a public authority may not be invoked as a justification of torture.

Having reviewed the plethora of international humanitarian laws which enjoin state parties to domesticate the laws and implement the sanctions, where applicable, the next step is a textual analysis of *Roses and Bullets* to determine whether the civil war in the world of the novel complies with the provisions of these laws or otherwise. In other words, what is the fate of the fictive characters – combatants, civilian population, child soldiers, medical personnel, refugees or internally displaced persons and members of the international humanitarian body – that inhabit the fictive setting of the war fiction?

II. Violations of the Principles of International Humanitarian Law in *Roses and Bullets*

The Fate of the Soldiers

Roses and Bullets is a historical novel that takes its material from the Nigerian-Biafran civil war of 1967 to 1970, which violates the principles of international humanitarian law in times of armed conflict. The savagery of the war, particularly the human loss, is underscored by Ginika's grandmother's indirect companion, which has an undertone of a genocidal war, "Where are you fighting? These people who are fighting us, are they human beings. They are pursuing us and killing us like chickens" (352). The five-hundred-and-eighteen-paged novel, which is structured in five parts, and has its setting in cities and villages in Nigeria, explores the themes and brutality of wars, friendship, love, betrayal and the problems of childrearing. It tells the story of Ginikanwa Ezeuko, whose father tries to bring up as a virtuous woman. She is in a higher school as an adolescent when

the war starts, but her education is disrupted by the war. As the war rages on, she marries her heartthrob, Eloka Odunze, who is a university undergraduate before the war. Almost immediately after her wedding, Eloka joins the army and leaves her in the care of his parents and younger sister. She is raped by a Biafran soldier, and she gets pregnant and later has a malformed baby. At the end of the war, she is gang-raped by soldiers from the federal army. They abduct, torture, detain, break her ankle and rape her until she is rescued by her British teacher, who rehabilitates her and ensures she gets justice.

The experiences of the protagonist, Ginika, particularly her rape, are a metaphor for the devastation of war as her body becomes a site of encounter between the two warring factions. The first part of the novel, which is entitled “The Beginning” presents Ginika’s rebellion against the iron-fisted authority of her father, Ubaka Ezeuko. Her rebellion parallels Biafra’s self-determination against the Nigerian confederacy, because of the massacre of its people in the northern cities and in Lagos. According to the narrator:

Then she [Ginika] saw what those who had come before her saw – an open carriage filled with human debris. Ginika saw severed hands and legs chopped, lying like pieces of wood on the floor of the carriage; there were dead bodies that were whole but with deep gashes in different places – the neck, chest and belly. Some of the bodies seemed to be covered with rust, but Ginika knew it was not rust but discoloured blood (166).

The survivors of the pogrom are not better than the dead, for Ginika also sees at the Railway Quarters, “dazed people with head injuries and machete cuts all over their bodies; a few of them had tourniquets on their bandaged arms” (166). The madness and carnage which will overtake the fictive world is set against the background of some children who play in the grass, and they “looked so charmingly happy; free as birds released from a cage and allowed to take wind” (17). The free world of the bird is also reflected in Mbano, where the birds’ beautiful song wakes up Ginika, and “you couldn’t help listening to their singing. You couldn’t help having your fancy tickled. Above all, you couldn’t help enjoying it ... One of them looked so beautiful and adorable that each time she looked at it, tears filled her eyes” (34).

With the use of flash back in the second part, “Before the Beginning”, the narrator tells the story of her traumatic experiences when her mother dies and her father remarries a step-mother who stops at nothing to divide the family. In the third part, “The Middle”, the narrator reconnects the reader with the war that has already begun in the first part. The savagery and the brutality of the war – the disease, the starvation and the sexual abuses – are presented. Part four, which is entitled “The End”, unfolds the end of the war between the two sides of the armed conflict, but the war continues for Ginika as she is abandoned by Eloka who is back from the war front. It completes the cycle of her rejection which is initially started by her parents-in-law, her father and step-mother. It is also the beginning of another battle – the indignities heaped on Biafran men, the women and the feminization of Biafran by the victorious federal troops. The fifth part which is “After the End” actually ends the story and Ginika’s trauma as she is rescued and rehabilitated as a new life, a new hope, and a new beginning awaits her.

The civil war that rages in the fictive world of *Roses and Bullets* violates some principles of humanitarian law, like the prohibition of the recruitment of child-soldiers and the treatment of wounded, sick and dead soldiers. For example, Biafran youths support the secession of Biafra because of the pogrom in the north; therefore, they voluntarily join the army and anybody who holds a contrary opinion is seen as an enemy. Mr Amadi is almost lynched by an irate mob because he dares to argue “insistently that fighting a war was not in the best interest of Biafra, that Ojukwu and other leaders should stop the war” (50). The volunteers are particularly young undergraduates who join the Biafran army for various reasons. Etim Usoro joins the war to avoid boredom and he also admires the Biafran war-lord whose mannerism he imitates. Nwakire joins the war to avoid his step-mother’s petulance. Monday, Lizzy’s houseboy and an illiterate carpenter, joins the army because he admires Nwakire’s military uniform and his regal carriage. Uncle Ray also goes into the army because he feels it is his duty to defend the newly independent Biafra. Eloka takes his time to join the war because he understands the devastation of war, and as an only son, his influential and wealthy father shields him.

However, as the war drags on and many of the ill-equipped, ill-trained Biafran soldiers are slaughtered in the battlefields, young men stop enrolling voluntarily into the army. Families are now expected to donate young men, who will fight the war. Men in positions of power sacrifice their poor relations, which are sent into the army to fight. Eloka queries his mother:

So Leonard is not important and does not have the prospect of becoming somebody to reckon with because he is not at the university? He is expendable, but I am not. He's the one that can afford to get killed, not me (193)?

The families who have several sons volunteer to give one to fight on the side of Biafra; however, Philomena's two brothers are both in the army.

As the war drags on, it dawns on the youths that war is not a romantic adventure. The lines of donors and volunteers dry up; conscientious objectors to the war like Osondu hide in the houses like the cowardly Michael. The soldiers and military police are forced to go into the villages and refugee camps to conscript middle-aged men, the only sons of their families, ancestral masks who are no longer seen as sacred and even child-soldiers. The only people who are exempted from conscription among the male population are the very young and elderly people, sick men, dim-witted and severely disabled men.

Through Udo, who is one of the multi-focal points of view in the novel, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo presents the evil of using child-soldiers in armed conflict. He is conscripted in the barracks with other child-soldiers whom he describe, as "captives". The fact that he is an only son and his father has been killed in the Jos pogrom is not material to the soldiers who caught him. He never volunteers to go; his mother's consent is never sought; he is never told the nature of his job as specified by international humanitarian law. He is simply armed and pushed into the war front to experience the horrors of war. The omniscient narrator describes the savagery of the war through his experience at the war front:

Then the bedlam erupted as shells began to rain down in the trenches, as if the machines and guns were guided by an unseen power. Each shell that exploded took lives with it. Cries of men rose and commingled with the sound of explosion. As Udo lay trembling and calling on his mother, a solid but wet object fell on his back and rolled down beside him. With the gentlest of movements, he stretched his hand and touched it. He gave a stifled cry – it was a human head severed at the neck which still nestled in the steel helmet.... Then he lost consciousness (438).

When the war ends, he loses his innocence and the horrendous experience of the war matures him. And that is why Nwakire tells Ginika, “Too young? A young man who was in the army and saw so much evil? I don’t think he is too much to be told” (477).

The war in the fictive setting of the novel not only involves the recruitment of child-soldiers, but also depicts the abandonment of wounded, sick and dead soldiers, which is against the principles of modern warfare. The wounded Biafran soldiers are abandoned by their colleagues. The narrator describes Udo’s situation when he regains consciousness, “Everywhere was quiet. Where were the men in the trench with him? They had abandoned him while they retreated...” (438). The jungle is silent and he walks in the forest for three days, all alone, for even animals, presumably, have fled their natural habitat because of the madness of men. Udo notices that “Even animals seemed to have fled, for he saw none in his way, except a few bush rats and squirrels” (439). Besides, Captain Osioma would have been left in the battlefield to bleed to death or to be killed or taken as a prisoner of war by the federal soldiers, if not for the singular bravery of Lieutenant Eloka Odunze. His heroism at going back to the front and bringing back the wounded officer earns him promotion. However, it seems that it is not a pleasant experience being captured by the Nigerian soldiers. When Udo regains consciousness, he is “afraid to get up in case there were vandals lurking in the surrounding bushes” (438). It seems, therefore, that Udo’s fear is confirmed by a superior officer, Captain Osioma, who prefers to kill himself with his “cyanide-tipped needle” (380) to falling “into the hands of the vandals” (380).

Furthermore, it seems that the Biafran soldiers at the warfronts receive treatment while the hospitals still have drugs. Dr. Ubaka Ezeuko stays at home, when there are no more drugs to dispense. As the war rages in the enclave of Biafra, Udo’s pretensions at being shell-shocked vividly depicts the lack of care for the sick soldiers, particularly those that are neurotic as a result of the war. Udo tries to get home without being sent back to the battleground as a deserted soldier, he feigns to be shell-shocked. From his fellow soldiers, all he can get is a ride in an army truck and a sympathetic comment:

The boy is not up to sixteen years and he is a soldier. This war is evil; it has turned children into adults overnight. He is luckier than many others suffering from shell-shock – at least he has a home to return to and perhaps a mother to care for him (441).

To the civilian population at the relief centre, he can only get a burst of laughter and a woman's pitying statement, "See how young the boy is and they sent him to fight in the war front. Now he is mad. He is only a child He is mad at his age" (449). From the man who distributes relief materials at the centre, he gets a threat, "If you don't go away now, I will call the two military police in my boss's office. They will carry you to the warfront today" (449).

The dead soldiers do not fair better than their sick and wounded combatants. In fact, nobody keeps the record of dead soldiers. Nobody knows the where about of Uncle Ray when their battalion is cut off by the Nigerian army. No one also knows whether he is dead or alive for years until he comes back ten days after the war. The people only depend on rumour as no records are kept about the wounded, prisoners of war and dead soldiers. As Ginika rebuffs Sule's unrequited love with the information that her husband will soon come back, he queries her confidently, "Are you sure he did not die in the war? Why is he not back" (474)? And Adiele tells Eloka, when he enquires about Leonard's welfare, "But we have not seen him for over six months and we don't know whether he is alive or dead. Our eyes stare at the gate all the time, hoping he will come home for a visit" (347).

The Fate of the Civilian Population

The novel not only beams its search-light on soldiers, but also the devastation of the civilian population in an armed conflict that operated outside the ambit of international humanitarian law. It presents in its fictive world the appropriation and destruction of civilian property or infrastructures not justified by the exigencies of the war. *Roses and Bullets* has a symbolic title, which operates on two levels of meaning: personal and communal tragedies in times of war. The rose flower which Eloka gives to Ginikanwa at the time of courting symbolizes love, life and beauty and can only survive in peace-time, when it is cared for. However, in time of war which is symbolized by the bullet, the rose lacks care and it wilts and dies. Just as the friction from Eloka and Ginika's love-making crushes the bunch of rose flowers and its red fluid stains the purity of the white sheet on the bed, so will the civil war waste the youths of the Biafran and Nigerian forces. This is seen in the wisdom of old Adiele's statement, "There must be a way to replace the thousands who die every day. The world has broken to pieces and scattered on our heads" (*Roses and Bullets* 347). At the personal level, Eloka loses everything that makes life worth living prior

to the war – his love, his education, his rose garden, his rabbits, his wife and his life. At the communal level, Biafra and Nigeria will be a wasteland in terms of loss of its youths, who are epitomized by Eloka and Nwakire's death. Most importantly, the community loses its innocence as disputes will be settled after the war through the barrels of the gun. Again, the imagery of wasteland can be glimpsed in the death of Ginika's malformed baby immediately after birth. The malformed baby becomes a metaphor for futile engagements during and after the war. This is a war Udo, Eloka, Nwakire agree that "What a tragedy the war was! What an anticlimax to him and those who fought with commitment for a cause they believed in and died for" (479).

What make the war tragic is not only the experiences of the soldiers but also civilians. Before the war, both soldiers from the South-eastern region in the Nigerian army together with their civilians are massacred in pogroms in northern cities and Lagos. Udo's father who is a trader is killed in Jos. During the war, both sides committed war crimes in order to win the war at all cost. The federal government, for instance, uses starvation as an instrument of warfare. It changes its currency and blockaded the territory which results in the scarcity of essential commodities like sugar, salt, dresses; shoes and food items. The situation gets to a point where the people eat everything and anything as food. Udo tells Ginika how his widowed mother survives with his sisters because, "Things are not easy for them. Mama can hardly find enough food for my sisters and herself. Her main food now is the cassava husk which she soaks in water and dries before grinding it to make *fufu* or mixing it with vegetable to make *achicha*. Sometimes, I take my food to my sisters" (287). The narrator describes the sick girl in Ama-oyi refugee camp, who suffers from kwashiorkor thus, "Her eyes were like *umi*, shallow wells filled with muddy water. Her head had a few tufts of hair which ironically had the colour of gold. With her jutting wrinkled forehead, sallow skin, sunken cheeks and emaciated body, she looked more like a wizened old woman than a child of ten years that she was" (301). Apart from sickness, sudden death can also occur as a result of the starvation of the civilian population. This is brought home to the reader through the tragic death of two beautiful and healthy children. The narrator says, "Mgboli bought cassava in Ori Market and thinking it was the type you just boil and eat, she cooked it and fed it to her children yesterday. Unfortunately, it was the poisonous variety and the poor children died before dawn" (331).

In this God-forsaken war, the lowly-ranked soldiers like Leonard, whom the father tells Eloka comes home well but, "He did not look well at all; he looked starved when we saw him"

(347), Adiele observes to Eloka who is an officer, “You look well. Soldiering suits you” (347). Also among the civilians, the privileged and stealing classes like Chief Odunze’s family members are not malnourished. Again, the dogs of war that profit from the war are alright. Eloka warns the fat and chubby army contractor, “The beans are full of weevils in spite of the exorbitant price you charge; the palm oil is not fresh.... It is complaints all the time about your supplies (420). The civilian population that is caged within the shrunken territories of Biafra will either starve or make an attempt to trade beyond enemy lines. Ginika has to join the team – five men and fifteen women – for the “adventure she knew was fraught with danger, but was determined to get involved in if her aunt’s children and her grandmother were to survive, to escape from the clutches of Kwashiorkor” (450). The outcome of the journey is disastrous for the unarmed civilians for not only the few female survivors come back empty-handed, but “Twelve of them were missing – one man and eleven womenGinika couldn’t believe her eyes and her ears. What did it mean – that Eunice and others were shot in the ambush and were lying dead in the forest...? She wept for Eunice – another flower had withered in the land, another promising shoot, like Njide” (458).

Moreover, the war in the fictive world of the novel violates the provisions of international humanitarian law when soldiers from both sides appropriate civilian properties and infrastructures. Adim joins the war on two grounds, to avoid conscription and:

...the army had commandeered his 403 Peugeot estate car which he had used as taxi and he decided to become a driver in the army so that he could drive his car himself, because he could not bear to have another person do it. Now he was Captain Eloka’s driver but if the car were assigned to another officer, he would drive the new officer and would still be close to his car (392).

Adim is lucky to be close to his car in Biafra, other civilians are not that luck, for when the Nigerian army vanquished its Biafran counterpart and enters its territory, “What some of the victorious soldiers did in some towns and villages, seizing and raping women and confiscating people’s property with impunity” (479). Ama-Oyi Primary School which served as a school before the war serves as a refugee camp during the war, and after the war, it is a military base. As the refugees vacate it, “...the teachers’ quarters are occupied by officers – the commanding officer lived in the

headmaster's house – while all the classrooms and the hall were converted to quarters for the other ranks” (467-468).

Apart from appropriation of civilian properties, civilian infrastructures like hospitals, buildings, markets and roads are shelled and bombed. Also cities, towns and villages in Biafra are targeted. The village of Umuoku is bombarded with shells, and the villagers are fleeing from the catastrophe, “Eloka shuddered when he heard the sound of bombs exploding as the plane strafed the road” (416). After the air raid, the horror of the war is seen in “the woman's body jerked twice and lay still” (417), for she bleeds profusely from a deep wound around her neck for she “must have been hit by shrapnel from the air raid” (417). Apart from the air raid that kills Boma's mother, Afor Umuru is also bombed. The commission of war crimes in the armed conflict is brought home to the reader in the bombing of Orié Market at Ama-Oyi. The remote village before it becomes the theatre of war is seen to be a safe haven for refugees. Despite its remoteness, the villagers relocate the market in a “part of the thick forest called Oke-Ohia, Great Forest” (209), but military planes targeted it:

The explosions rocked the ground, assaulted the air again and again. Ginika heard anguished cries around her and held on to the tree. For a moment, she ventured to look up, and saw two jets turning directly overhead; they shone like silver, in the sun. In that instant, she saw one of them release some objects she could not identify; the objects fell from the rear end of the plane like the droppings of a goat. Could these be rockets or cannon balls (*Roses and Bullets* 211).

The air raid leaves both physical and emotional or psychological carnage on the people. Ginika, who is a witness to the air raid observes, “There were howls here and groans there. All she wanted was to get away from the gory scene. Further away, she saw limbs ripped off from their owners, and other body parts lying around as if they were for sale. Some of the bodies were trapped by chairs and stools people had brought from the market” (212). The emotional and psychological traumas are unparalleled for the survivors. Udo “seemed dazed, semi-conscious” (211); Ginika loses her appetite for food and suffers from insomnia; however, the raid has neurotic effect on Mrs Ndefo, “who stayed in her room all day, ready to run into the bunker at the slightest noise. Her

fear had become so obsessive that she only came out of her room at night and left the preparation of meals solely to her housemaid and Amaka” (218).

The historical war depicted in the setting of *Roses and Bullets* violates principles of humanitarian laws in its savagery. It is a war in which another war fiction indicts the world in its haunting mantra, “The World Was Silent When We Died” (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 2006). It is a war which another critical discourse says, “reveals that foreigners from Britain, France and Eastern Europe encourage the rift in the civil war to safeguard personal interests” (Orife 2011). It is a war which one will agree partly with Isaac Madukwe that it “stirs up primordial sentiments among the people” (2012:16). However, one will readily disagree with him that the British colonial rule through it polices in Nigeria stirs these sentiments “where such have not existed before now” (16). It is submitted that the novelist never indicts the British, it is the same primordial instincts of Africans that fired and sustained slavery prior to colonization that is also at work in a war that ought to be called by its true name: genocide.

Roses and Bullets as a war fiction written by a female writer reflects Barbara Rigney’s argument that “Literature, particularly literature by women, cannot be evaluated apart from the historical, economic, political, psychological and sociological conditions which produce it” (74). The novel deals with the ravages of war in a broader context and in a narrower one, the devastation women undergo in places that are theatres of war. A reader will naturally find the first two chapters of the novel boring, believing that it deals with such feminist stuff, “where women can only play the second fiddle” (Ezejiofor 2011). The reader may also suspect she will be regaled with such over-flogged themes as “African women have been conditioned from birth to look at the essence of their fulfillment within the realms of marriage and motherhood” (Ohale 131). However, from the third chapter, the reader is held in suspense to the end as the story unfolds the ravages of war in its fictive setting.

The novel showcases the story of Ginikanwa Ezeuko, who at the beginning of the war is a teenager in higher school, and holds the burning desire to obtain a university degree in journalism before her marriage. At the outset of the war, she contributes to the war effort with the other women by preparing snacks for Biafran soldiers fighting at the Nsukka warfront. When she relocates to Mbano, she joins the special constables who are trained to man the numerous checkpoints that dot the precincts of Biafra. She also joins the Mammy Water group, and becomes one of the principal actors in the play to boost the morale of Biafran soldiers. She gets married against her father’s and

brother's advice as the war drags on. Because she cannot conceive to perpetuate the Odunze lineage whose only son is in the war, her mother-in-law decides to use her as her family's beast of burden. Out of frustration, she decides to go to a dance on Janet's invitation at a military base at Nkwerre. She is raped by a young Biafran officer, Lieutenant Ugoro; she conceives and bears a malformed child that dies immediately after birth. Meanwhile, she is sent out by her parents-in-law from her matrimonial home for what they perceived as immoral and a "win-the-war wife – a harlot" (485) attitude. She is rejected during and after the war by her angry father and unsympathetic step-mother. Eloka, who comes back two weeks after the war with heavily pregnant, Boma cannot forgive her because the "story his parents told him which Ozioma confirmed earlier in the story was like a concrete barrier separating them" (487). Her brother who also returns from the war cannot bear the sister's suffering; he goes to Eloka's house, kills him and returns to his father's house and also kills himself when he learns that federal soldiers have abducted her. At the end of the story, Miss Miriam Taylor and others rehabilitated her.

One thing is clear in this novel as it is through Ginika, who is a symbolic character in *Roses and Bullets* that Adimora-Ezeigbo explores the dilemma of women, whom the men see as the booties of war in every armed conflict situation. In his examination of Nawal El Saadawi's trop of proverbial veil, Simone James says, "Like money, women are regarded as propertied possessions to have and to hold, and further to exchange as deemed necessary by male holder, or possessorslike money that is devalued, women undergo devaluation that parallels sterility or sterilization" (44). This opinion is borne out by Eloka's recollection of the value of women during the war:

He remembered Captain Akudo who was addicted to sex with teenagers. To him women are beautiful objects to be ravished and thrown away. "They taste differently when they are quite young", he had said, with a careless laugh. He had been disgusted and kept away from Captain Akudo and his debauchery. And there was also Lieutenant Nandu who saw sex as delectable food which he must eat at least once a day to remain alive and sane. Many others had equally indulged excessively in the act without talking about it like these two. He knew also that women flocked to military camps and made themselves available to officers; so it was not always the officers seduced them. Where did his wife belong in all this? Was she drugged and sexually abused, as she claimed (489-490)?

Eloka's reflection has thrown into light the two crucial circumstances a woman can be a sex-object in a war situation – either she is raped or she gives herself away to a man with the intention of deriving a material benefit from the relationship. In the case of rape, she never gives her consent, but in the second, she consents. Janet Nsoh and Nwoyibo Moneke, two female refugees at Ama-Oyi Primary School, are representatives of the second while Ginikanwa Ezeuko represents the first group. The two women are mistresses to powerful men in Biafra, and by virtue of that fact, they belong to the privileged class of refugees in Ama-Oyi. Janet reveals to Ginika her strategy for survival:

Just three and they help me in different ways. The squadron in the air force base in Ekwulobia gives me soap, cream and hair thread from Lisbon; the Captain in II Div in Nnewi gives me money to purchase what I need; and there's the major at Nkwere whom I love most and whose company makes the war bearable. If he asks me to marry him, I will (318-319).

However, the major never proposes, probably he sees her also as a win-the-war wife. Janet does not mourn her disappointment, but leaves with the last plane that brings relief materials into Biafra, to try her fortune elsewhere. In her letter to Ginika which is brought by her husband, she tells her, “She is in America where she ended up after escaping in the last relief plane that flew out of Biafra at the end of the war. She met a young Igbo man there and married him” (576). It is also through being a mistress to Chief Odunze that Nwoyibo Moneke and her two children are able to be part of the refugees that “had deserted as soon as they heard the war had ended” (467). Nwoyibo is able to maintain her “glassy dark skin and a nose as straight and pointed as that of a maiden mask” (308) through her sexual relationship with Eloka's father. Through this symbiotic relationship, which is only hurtful to Akunnaya, “the refugee woman's skin glowed and her face was without wrinkles, not even around her eyes or at corners of the mouth” (309). Her two children never suffer kwashiorkor or die from eating poisonous food. It is also through this survival strategy that Inno, who is not considered worthy to be conscripted into the Biafran army, because he was “halfwit with two fingers missing from his right hand” (299) is able to get a “pretty girlfriend and that it was the gift of food that attracted the girl” (306).

It is through Ginika's repeated rape that the novelist is able to hammer on the consequences of defective childrearing. Her father is a disciplined man who has to examine her vagina "to make sure she has not been violated" (155) by the boys she went to a dance with at Ugiri. Her strict upbringing is enough outside the context of a war; however, in wartime, the security around her crumbles and her lack of street-wisdom like Janet becomes her undoing. If she has had the street-wisdom of Janet, a girl of her age and without parents, whose "brazen behaviour and calculating disposition" in which she exploited every situation to her advantage, she would have not been raped. If she has Janet's street wisdom which she uses to survive three different refugee camps, she would not have taken the drink when Lieutenant Ugoro explained that "there was no soft drink left and he had bought her gin and lime like her friend" (374). Street-wisdom would have dictated to her to stop taking the drink when "She saw the man's face light up, but looked away quickly. She told herself it was not much, so it shouldn't get her drunk" (374). Her restrictive upbringing drives away street-wisdom which should have forewarned her that her marriage has ended with Eloka and she has nothing to stay behind for in Ama-Oyi when the war ended. Street-wisdom, which she lacks, would have thought her to choose either of two options: follow Janet to fly out of the country and begin a new life when she suggested that to her or marry Sergeant Sule Ibrahim, a disciplined army officer who does not fool around with women like others, a man who is dedicated to her so much that he was not interested in her past life and a die-hard lover who is ready to subject himself to the pain and risk of circumcision in order to be found worthy of her. Because of her lack of street-wisdom, she clings to a marriage that is doomed and dead, and at the end, she is abducted, gang-raped, detained, tortured, and subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment as Sergeant Bala and some of his colleagues find her responsible for Sule Ibrahim's death after circumcision. Like in every cloud where there is a silver lining, she is rehabilitated by Miss Miriam Taylor and others. Therefore, the journey motif in this highly allegorical narrative represents the metaphor through which the protagonist, Ginikanwa Ezeuko and the reader learn that war is not a romantic adventure, but it involves unparalleled brutality and savagery. *Roses and Bullets* teaches the devastation of war, particularly on young naïve and untutored women as they lose their innocence:

Ginika sat at the departure wing of the airport in Lagos. She was glad that she was returning home after being away for nearly six months. She was her old self again,

she thought, except she was wiser and more mature. She had been a school girl when the war began, but three years after, she was a woman with enough experience to last her a lifetime. She had experienced grief and she had known loss, but she would not allow that to harden her... the naïve girl of nineteen had turned into a patient and confident woman of twenty-two (511).

The novelist leaves no stone unturned to present the deplorable state of refugees in the genocidal war in the fictive setting of *Roses and Bullets*. Akinyele has observed that there is a “growing awareness that the refugee phenomenon is connected with wars and political upheaval” (168). And the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has declared, “Refugees are the ultimate symptom of social disintegration... Looked at globally, they are the barometer of current state of human civilization” (quoted in Akinyele 168). Prior to this declaration, the comity of nations had tried to protect human civilization from descending into a Hobbesian state. In its *Geneva Convention* of August 12, 1949, it provided therein and further restated them in article 8(2)(iii) of *The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, 1998 that “willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health” constitutes war crimes. Article 6(c) of the same statute states, “Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” is a crime of genocide. It is also a crime against humanity when “other inhuman acts of similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to the body or to mental or physical health” (article 7(k)) of the statute.

The savagery of the war in the novel violates the provisions of the statute. The refugees are subjected to inhuman treatment, and they are also deliberately subjected to mental and physical injuries by the federal government. The first set of refugees to be seen in the fictive world of the novel, according to *The Pilot*, a newspaper, “...are some of the people who managed to escape, they are returning to the East. Most of the people they are killing are Igbo. If the coup was an act of revenge, as the plotters claim, why are ordinary people being killed? Why are they killing innocent civilians who knew nothing about the January coups” (*Roses and Bullets* 151). Because of the pogrom which targeted the easterner – both soldiers and civilians – “Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu declared Eastern Nigeria a sovereign state. The new nation was called the Republic of Biafra” (169). This declaration is an act of self-determination of people who are oppressed, and it is recognized by *Charter of the United Nations* and *The International Bill of*

Rights. This act of self-determination culminates in a brutal civil war by unequalled armies. According to Eloka who takes a comparative view of the two forces:

They had everything – small arms, large guns, heavy artillery, armored vehicles and tanks. They had jet fighters and bombers; they had food and drinks galore for the fighting men; they had uniforms, boots, and helmets for the soldiers. On the contrary, Biafran forces lacked all these (419).

Biafra held out for almost three years because of the courage of both civilians and soldiers, who are engaged in a war that determines the existence of the group. The federal troops in its determination to win the war at all costs shell the cities, towns and villages of Biafra. Civilian infrastructures – schools, markets, relief centers, roads and cities, towns and villages – are destroyed. Displaced persons move out of them to areas of relative safety. As man's folly results in chaos, lower animals seem to be wiser and watch its consequences. As Eloka bids his rabbits farewell before Port Harcourt falls, he notices, "A big rabbit sat on its haunches, staring at him, virtually saying goodbye in its own way, apparently sensing his master undertaking a journey" (69). It is not only Eloka that undertakes the journey in war-torn Biafra – some ended in war fronts, others in refugee camps and some ended in death. However, as the refugees flee their homes and work-places, families are torn apart. A traumatized father tells Ginika, "I don't know where she, her two brothers and my wife are now. We ran in different directions when the enemy entered the town" (300). The refugees are not only uprooted from their environment, most of them lose their property. Rose Oko's opinion is that:

Refugees are people like you and I. But unlike you and I, they are a people without a home, without any property, except sometimes the clothes on their backs, a future that is unknown and seen to have no hope. They are a people that are stigmatized, often seen as inferior in the community in which they find themselves (quoted in Akinyele 168).

This opinion is a truism that applies to the status of refugees or displaced persons in the novel. Mrs Carol Ndefo, the wife of Dr Ndefo, flees from Enugu to Onitsha and from there to Ama-Oyi.

Because her husband is close to Dr Ubaka Ezeuko, he gives them part of his house to live in. Ubaka sees them as “visitors”, but to his quarrelsome wife, they are a nuisance as she says, the Ndefos’ children are “rude, forward and lazy” (251). As if the air raids in Ama-Oyi, the diabetes, the monotonous food are not enough problems for Mrs Ndefo, Lizzy’s abuses contribute to her neurosis. Ginika observes her abnormal condition, “Mrs Ndefo stood outside her door, as if she would scurry back into the room where she burrowed all day, like a squirrel” (251-252). After her father’s apology for the wife’s erratic behaviour, she insists, “She turned and entered her prison, as Ginika referred to Mrs Ndefo’s room whenever she discussed the family with Eloka” (253). It is not only Mrs Ndefo and her children who are divested of their rights; others go through the same trauma. Nwoyibo Moneke is not as lucky as Mrs Ndefo to only be verbally abused, she is beaten up for daring to be Chief Odunze’s mistress. Janet tells Ginika what happens at the camp when her mother-in-law comes with Michael, “They gave her a black eye and tore her dress.... Her blouse was torn and her *wrappa* wrenched off her waist and left her with just panties” (335). The fate of the male refugees are not better than the female ones: the healthy ones among them are conscripted into the army as they have nowhere to hide unlike the natives.

There are other “displaced persons who had been refugees” (*Roses and Bullets* 475) who are not as lucky as the Ndefos. Those ones like Janet Nsoh and Nwoyibo Moneke and the others stay in designated refugee camps. Janet, for example, has been in three different refugee camps in three different places in almost three years of the war. The camp in Ama-Oyi is not different from the one in Ngbo, which forces Eloka to keep Boma in his house because of the “smell, the exposure and the lack of privacy he saw there were dehumanizing, to say the least” (421). Despite the horrid situation in the camps, there is also the existence of a privileged class. Janet tells Ginika the criteria for being a member of this group:

Looking at those houses, pointing; Wealthier and more influential refugees live in those. They were formerly teachers’ quarters, but are now occupied by ‘lucky people’. Pointing to another building, she continued, I live in one of the rooms in that long building. Can you see the house over there? That used to be the headmaster’s quarters, I was told, but it is now occupied by a rich businessman from Awka. You may wonder how somebody like me managed to get a room there to myself.... An air force officer who is my friend helped me (304).

Nwoyibo's position as a lover to the refugee camp's council chairman assures her one of the rooms. Without money or powerful connections, the ordinary refugees occupy the school's classrooms and assembly hall.

This privilege does not stop at accommodation but extends to the sharing of relief materials. At the top of the management of the camp is the Ama-Oyi Local Council, which the people jocularly call Chop-and-go Council or *oloakara kansul* because they believe the "members of the council embezzle funds meant for executing the war and steal relief materials meant for the refugees" (239). This is a fact as Mr Odunze, who is the chairman, never lacks much throughout the period of the war. Below the council are the camp supervisors like Mr Asiobi and Janet. They also shortchange the refugees for when Ginika is being introduced to them, one of the women said in her hearing, "One more person to steal our stock fish and corn meal" (300). The refugees do not have enough relief materials for "they are not always available" (303), and "it was over three weeks since the last supply" (306). This crisis situation is caused by the federal government's total blockade of Biafra, the change in its currency, the ambush and the massacre of unarmed Biafran civilians who dare to trade across enemy lines, the near impossibility of flying relief materials without the planes being bombed or the runways being strafed, and the worry that "enemy planes would strike if people gather in front of the store" (287) to collect relief from the humanitarian bodies like Caritas and WCC. With starvation staring them in the face, they devise the means to survive the war, Mrs Ndefo who belongs to the privileged Biafrans by virtue of being a white American and her husband, a medical doctor, flies out of Biafra with her children. Janet and Nwoyibo use sex as a survival strategy. The men do menial jobs; steal fruits and crops from the natives. Old Adiele reports to Eloka the state of things in Ama-Oyi.

People, especially the refugees, steal anything they see. If I leave the bunch for another day, it will disappear.... The other day, I saw a stranger up that *udara* tree, harvesting the fruit. I shouted at him. You know it is an abomination in Ama-Oyi to harvest *udara* in that manner. Our people wait for the udara to fall down, before picking it up (347-348).

It is through Ginika's employment as an assistant warden at the camp that the narrator describes the frightening situation of the sick refugees, including the children. Apart from the use of child-soldiers, who are described as captives, the war wasted a lot of them who are not old enough to be recruited. And this is why Julie Agbesiere sees them as victims, when she states, "Important as the child is in the traditional society, it is observed that he lives in an environment where his very existence is at times threatened. This child finds himself a victim of societal beliefs and prejudices, of inter-communal clashes and wars, of parental excesses and repression and of infant mortality" (67). In Ama-Oyi Primary School, the ordinary refugees occupy the classrooms and the assembly hall. Ndulue who lost everything – his family and property – stays with the other refugees. He is presumed to be healthy, even though he is "emaciated and weak" (300), but it is obvious to a discerning reader that he is sick and suffers from a very severe depression as his "eyes remained dead, grey and hopeless" (ibid) even when Ginika is talking with him. He is as sick as Matthew, but while his own is psychological, Matthew's is physical, and both men died and are buried the same day in the same grave.

The second group of sick people is the children who are kept in one of the rooms the wardens call House of Horror. This is where the malnourished children, about twenty of them in the room, are in "various stages of dehumanization. She knew some of them would be dead before long" (301). It is in this room that she sees the ten-year-old girl who is wizened like an old woman. She is too weak that she cannot sit up without help, and she defecates on herself. Another room is occupied by very sick men. This room is designated as Room Without Hope. It is a darkened room with an unpleasant odour. All the occupants of this room "lay motionless, as if they were already dead" (303). Except Matthew, who is ironically a young man, who despite his terrible situation, is mentally alert and sings all the time. Matthew is described as lying on "his back, his rigid head facing up" (302) and his eyes sunken and opaque. His wasted body is described as a "veritable bag of bones, all flesh had vacated his body, turning him into a living skeleton" (303). And because of the long period he stayed in this position, his back and buttocks are covered with sores. These sick refugees who are willfully and deliberately subjected to conditions of life calculated to bring physical and mental destruction because of lack of food, lack of drugs and the absence of their relations, live in deplorable and inhuman conditions, as Janet tells Ginika, "Every week, somebody dies in this camp" (303).

The Role of the Medical Personnel, Chaplains and other Humanitarian Body in *Roses and Bullets*

All the *Geneva Conventions* – 1864, 1929 and 1949 – have consistently granted protection to medical personnel, chaplains and other humanitarian body like the Red Cross that provide their services for the members of the armed forces. Their buildings and equipment should not be seen as military targets. This protection exists in so far as the persons, their equipment and buildings are not used for military purposes. *The Rome Statute of International Criminal Court* in its article 8 (2) (iii) declares that it is a war crime if any person or group "intentionally directs attacks against personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in a humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping mission in accordance with the *Charter of the United Nations*, as long as they are entitled to the protection given to civilians or civilian objects under the international law of armed conflict". This provision is to protect civilian workers who are attached to armed forces. The civil war in *Roses and Bullets* is fought outside the provision of this law that the Biafran soldiers and civilians – the dead, the wounded, the sick, the malnourished and the healthy – experience the grinding mills of the war.

The members of the medical personnel are represented by Doctors Ufo Ndefo and Ubaka Ezeuko, both of them are trained abroad before the war. Both are working in government hospitals before the war; both are dedicated and hardworking. At the outset of the war, Ubaka cannot drive to Enugu from Mbano to bring back his daughter, so he gives Ufo a letter to deliver, instructing her to come back home. However, Ufo cannot do that because "an emergency case in hospital detained me and I had to send a driver to deliver the letter" (206). As a dutiful father and a wise man who understands the nature of war, he drives down to Enugu to bring back his daughter. He neither waits for Uncle Ray nor eats the food his sister-in-law offers to him. He explains to her, "I am in a hurry. I must return to the hospital at once. We have an emergency on our hands" (203). He has a hectic schedule as the medical director of a government hospital at Mbano. The day after he comes back from Enugu, he tells Ginika, "I need to eat well this morning; we have a marathon session of surgery today. My first comes up at nine o'clock. Five cases of hernia and one of appendicitis...". When the war drags on, the two doctors are posted to hospitals very close to the war fronts. Ubaka is transferred to a hospital in Alaoma within so short a time that he sends Udo to tell Ginika that "he would not be able to come as he told you" (203). Ginika is distressed at the

suddenness of his transfer and queries, "They just break families and move people at this uncertain time" (203). Dr Ndefo consoles her with, "I am also in a hospital near the front in Nnewi. This is why my family is here" (206). In other words, by this transfer they are now medical personnel transferred to Biafran troops fighting at the war fronts, who are supposed to treat wounded soldiers like Captain Osioma and shell-shocked soldiers, if they are brought to the hospital. By virtue of this position, they enjoy the perquisites of their office like having rations of fuel to drive their cars. But on the other side of the spectrum are the sick civilians like Mrs. Carol Ndefo, the sick people at the refugee camps, those who are sick at home and the pregnant women. These are left without medical doctors and drugs. Ndulue whose "eyes were glazed with boredom and grief " (300), the ten-year-old girl with "jutting wrinkled forehead, sallow skin, sunken cheeks and emaciated body" (301), who share the same room with twenty other children in the same state, Matthew with his "bony arm and scraggy leg" (303) and his inmates with the same "state of half-life" (303) and the "two of the healthiest and liveliest of the kids" (331) who died after eating poisonous cassava are left to die. They may have workers from the Red Cross who prepare belated special meals for them or women who are paid to change their dresses and clean them up; yet, they wait for death without the services of medical personnel and drugs.

At Umuoku during an air raid, Boma's mother, an elderly woman hit by shrapnel, "seemed dead or almost dead" (416), "bleeding profusely from a deep wound around her neck" (417) has no first-aid administered to her before she dies. For those who are pregnant, medical doctors and drugs are not available for them throughout the nine months of gestation. How can the pregnant woman give birth to replace the thousands that die in this war, if Eloka was not sure "there was a hospital or some other place she would register and be attended to" (422)? Ginika is lucky Chito procures the services of "Madam Mgboji, the midwife at Ama-Oyi Maternity Home" (339) to examine her, confirm that she is pregnant and to deliver for her a malnourished baby that is blighted from birth like the blighted society he is born into.

Those who are sick at home do not fare better than the others. Chito's mother's "legs were glossy, as if lubricated with palm oil and her feet were slightly swollen" (461) and Nonso has the tell-tale of kwashiorkor, but she cannot buy food or drugs for them because she "has sold every available thing she had – her jewelry, her *abada* and *Intorica wrappa*. They had nothing to sell" (463). The very few lucky ones like Mrs. Carol Ndefo get the Head of State's permission to fly outside Biafra to get medical treatment. The majority without influence and wealth stay in war-

ridden Biafra to wait for death. With the blockade and lack of drugs, the medical doctors are laid off and their condition is not better than the Biafran civilians, who would have been their patients, if not for the savagery of the war that defy humanitarian laws. This is obvious in Dr. Ubaka Ezeuko who has lost his job and stays gloomily at home. The narrator says, "He looked so ordinary in rumpled shirt and baggy trousers – a far cry from spruced up, immaculately dressed doctor she knew in her childhood" (321-322).

The chaplains are another group of people who execute their duties diligently, uninhibited by the war. They are not conscripted into the army despite the desperation of the soldiers to recruit men into the army. They go about freely to solemnize marriages as the war situation is a "season of wedding" (282). However, they make concessions for the influential people as the pastor of St. Marks Church weds Eloka and Ginika in Chief Odunze's house to avoid the bridegroom being conscripted. However, the poor bridegroom who weds in the church is "conscripted into the army as he and his wife were walking home after their wedding in the church" (283), and he is an only son. It is also a "reverend father in charge of St. Peter's Catholic Church" (332) who performs the burial rites of Matthew, Ndulue and Mgboli's two children before they are buried in a mass grave in the premises of the refugee camp.

Humanitarian organizations, World Council of Churches and Caritas are recognized by the humanitarian law and they are there in the fictive war-torn setting of *Roses and Bullets* to provide services for the war victims: soldiers and civilians. Njide is a brave young girl who joins the National Red Cross as her contribution in the win-the-war effort. In order to provide services to the troops at the war front, they follow them behind. Unfortunately, she was hit by a bullet and the "Red Cross brought her home very early this morning and buried her in a simple ceremony" (365). The humanitarian organization is also offering its help to ensure that children survive the war. They send children with severe cases of kwashiorkor to Gabon with some of their girls, and for those at the refugee camps, "The Red Cross set up a kitchen for them where special meals are prepared for them" (300). Eunice's job as a cook with five other girls at the Air Force Base in Ekwulobia is also protected by the law. However, it is as risky as those of the Red Cross who follow soldiers to the war front. This is because military bases are legitimate targets of air raids during armed conflict. She tells Ginika her reason for being at home, "The air base was bombed and the mess is one of the buildings affected, so we were asked to go home until the commanding

officer sends for us" (289). Though she survived the bombing of the military base, she is one of those civilians ambushed and killed when they traded across enemy lines.

Other humanitarian bodies like Caritas and WCC set up relief centers in Biafra to distribute relief materials like corn meal, stockfish, egg yolk, clothes and others. At times they stay up to three weeks without getting anything. Some of the people like Uncle Chima find the egg yolk distasteful, and the centres discriminate against the war victims who are not members of their faith. Besides, Ginika tells Udo that the relief workers operate the policy of sex for relief materials for the women:

We hardly have anything to eat these days. I went to the WCC centre a number of times but stopped when I couldn't get anything. The man in charge wanted to have sex with me before giving me anything and I refused.... Yes, that is the way it is now – you get what you want with what you have. I heard that even some Roman Catholic priests slept with girls before they gave them relief materials (446).

In the distribution of the materials, which excludes the most essential goods among them – drugs – the code is the survival of the fittest. The narrator depicts the inhuman treatment meted out on the war victims thus, "From afar they heard the buzzing sound made by the throng that besiege the centre. Ginika shuddered when she saw the attendants flogging the desperate neatly-dressed as well as shabbily-clad *beggars* who jostled one another on the winding queue" (448). Immediately the war ends, "some people in Ama-Oyi had broken into Caritas store and were carting away relief materials" (465). The looting signifies the end of material deprivation and the humiliation that goes with its provision. And the devastation of war in Biafra is seen in the treatment of Ginika at Igbobi National Orthopedic Hospital, because of lack of functional hospitals, descript medical equipment, non-existent drugs and inefficient and ineffective medical personnel.

Punishment for the Violators of the Provisions of International Humanitarian Laws

Roses and Bullets presents a brutal and savage civil war, which in its execution, individuals, armies and government perpetrate crimes that are against humanitarian laws. The fictive world of Biafra operates the law of the jungle, where there is no semblance of any legal system. Criminals

like Chief Odunze and his council members and the wardens at the refugee centers who steal the relief materials are never tried in court. There is no mechanism of law to try those who assault others like Akunnaya and Michael who beat up Nwoyibo Moneke, and the relief centre attendants, who flog the war victims who besiege the centers for relief materials. It seems that the only interest of the military government and the military officers is the successful execution of the war and not the administration of justice within its territory. In pursuit of this goal, Lieutenant Ugoro who rapes Ginika goes scot-free despite Major Okon's consolatory statement to distraught Ginika, "Let me assure you that the matter will be investigated" (376). Udo, a child-soldier, who is aggrieved with Boma and nurses the grudge of "beating the pregnancy out of her and I will do it" (431) knows like Major Okon that "*Oga* cannot court-martial me unless I commit an offence against the military law. Anything I do to that girl cannot be against military law" (431). Since rape and assault on civilians are not against military law, killing of people, including child-soldiers, who try to escape conscription, is not also an offence to be court-martialed in Biafra. The corporal who conscripted Udo and the other captives threatens them:

No nonsense from any of you....If you try any tricks, we shoot you. We don't want to do that because our bullets are for vandals and not our people. But if you try to run away, we see you as an enemy and shoot you dead. We don't shoot to wound or main you, we shoot to kill. So, he warned (436).

This may seem only like a threat to frighten the conscripted child-soldiers from escaping, but the narrator suggests that those who resist their property being appropriated for military use may be killed. This is done through the presentation of one of the rooms in the house at Ngbo where Eloka Odunze lives as an officer commanding a battalion:

The walls were stained and Udo had often wondered what the stain was. Was it blood or human excreta? It looked dirty brown. He wondered who occupied the room before Uzo. Who had lived in the house before his *oga*. Who was the owner and where was he now since the army had commandeered the house (429-430).

It is not only the civilian population of Biafra that is subjected to crimes, which violate the principles of humanitarian laws, the soldiers also suffer the same fate. There is no record of prisoners of war, no record of dead soldiers who are left in the war fronts to get despoiled or eaten by vultures. Udo who regains consciousness in the deserted war front "raised his head and saw the mess around – the head in the steel helmet, pieces of human flesh.... It was a terrible sight to see dead bodies lying about the holes dug by exploding shells, but there was no movement anywhere" (438-439). There is no punishment for soldiers who abandon their colleagues in the battle-fields.

It seems that in the world of *Roses and Bullets*, the greatest perpetrators of crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are the Federal Government of Nigeria and its army. There is no punishment for the soldiers who staged a counter-coup and massacred both soldiers and civilians of Igbo ethnic group who live in the northern cities and Lagos. The pogrom ought to be punished by the federal military government as an act of ethnic cleansing of the Igbo, but no one is brought to trial. During the war, the federal government and its army take every measure to ensure that the seceded region is brought back to the union. They use the blockade of the Biafran territory and the change in the Nigerian currency to starve the Biafran population and to leave them in a state of half-life when they are sick. The comity of nations would have tried the leaders of the country and the army for the violations of humanitarian laws in the execution of the war. There is no trial and punishment for the bombing and shelling of the cities, towns and villages in Biafra, and the targeting of civilian infrastructures like markets and personal property. There is equally no trial and punishment for those soldiers who ambushed and massacred unarmed and starved civilians who trade across enemy lines in Ugwuoba. The victorious soldiers who entered the territory at the end of the war to abduct women, rape them, confiscate people's property, torture and subject them to cruel treatment like Uncle Ray who "lay on the ground where she had seen one of the men kick him" (492) for trying to protect Ginika from being abducted by Sergeant Bala. There is also no punishment for those who subject civilians like Mrs. Carol Ndefo and Ndulue to mental injury. Mrs. Ndefo suffers from neurosis while Ndulue suffers from severe depression. In the whole array of crimes committed against Biafran soldiers and civilians that contravened the provisions of humanitarian laws, it is only Sergeant Bala, who is tried and for a very minor offence of abduction, leaving off other offences like detention, rape, torture, inhuman and cruel treatment which cause grievous bodily and mental injuries to his victim: Ginika. However, the others who aided his crimes, that is, the other junior soldiers with him are left off the hook which should not

have been so as the laws specify that none can depend on the fact that he committed the crime as a result of instructions from a superior officer to avail him from punishment. And Sergeant Bala would have escaped punishment like other millions of offenders if not:

That teacher of yours is wonderful. She saved your life by coming to Ama-Oyi to look for you when she did. Her supervening presence compelled that Commanding Officer to investigate your abduction by that horrible sergeant. And she saved your leg too – I was afraid it would be amputated. We learnt the sergeant was dismissed from the army (517).

Conclusion

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo depicts in *Roses and Bullets* a civil war that draws its materials from the actual war between Biafra and Nigeria. The savagery of the war gives rise to offences that violate the provisions of international humanitarian laws. For instance, the use of child-soldiers, the treatment of wounded, dead and sick soldiers, the rape of women, the shelling and bombing of civilians and civilian targets; the cruel treatment, torture and violence inflicted on the civilian population, the pogrom or ethnic cleansing of the Igbo and the willful and deliberate killing of the civilian population of Biafra, are the crimes that have been provided for by the comity of nations in the three *Geneva Conventions* of 1864, 1929 and 1949, before the historical civil war was fought. It seems no punishment is meted out to the perpetrators of the crimes, probably because the world kept silent or the novelist is not interested in the punishment but in the catalogue of devastation of wars. *Roses and Bullets*, therefore, presents an allegory of war as a wasteland, where nothing grows as:

Eloka got up and walked out of the compound. He headed for his rose garden which had turned into a wilderness. He stared at the tangle of weeds, thorns and roses. Eloka sighed. He had lost everything that made life worth living, he thought (490).

However, if Adimora-Ezeigbo has shown interest in the prosecution and punishment of crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes as provided in the three *Geneva Conventions* and recently in *The Rome Statute of International Criminal Court*, the court-martial of Sergeant Bala for a minor offence of abduction is inadequate. She should have reflected such big trials of perpetrators of war crimes like that of Ferdinand Nachimona for Rwandan genocide, Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslav dictator, who ordered the massacre of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, the trial and sentencing of Charles Ghankay Taylor in the Hague on 30th May, 2012. It is not only recent crimes against humanitarian laws that are punished, some have taken decades like the extradition and trial of Michael Seifert, the eighty-five-year-old "Beast of Bolzano", who was recently convicted for the murder and torture of prisoners in a Nazi transient camp in Northern Italy between June 1944 to April 1945. He was found guilty by a military tribunal in Vienna in 2000 and sentenced to life imprisonment. His appeal against his sentence was rejected in 2002 (web 2012).

With these punishments meted out on the perpetrators of these crimes, the writer who incorporates the crimes and punishments is raising the consciousness of the readers not to sleep over their rights, and also warning future violators that by their actions and words, they are firing an inferno that will consume them later.

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