

Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem (editors), *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*. Woodbridge: James Currey (hb £50 – 978 1 84701 144 2). 2016, xix + 491 pp.

Despite what could arguably be described as revitalized interest in writing on the Nigeria-Biafra war following the 2007 publication of Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and the polemical reception of Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country* (2012), the conflict and its biographical and literary representations have been a fixture in the creative and scholarly arena since the publication of Christopher Okigbo's *Path of Thunder* (1968). And yet, as editors Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem assert in their introduction to this refreshingly ambitious volume, 'no book has comprehensively analysed the nature, background, and sentiments that shaped the construction' of Nigeria-Biafra war writing (p. 1). In their bid to fill this gap, the editors and contributors foreground the contentious nature of these texts, and their quest for objectivity and balance is evident in the ways in which they try to make sense of the 'silences and manipulations' and writerly 'sentiments and affiliations' (p. 2) that permeate literary and journalistic representations of the conflict. The polyphonic blend of renowned academics and new voices, local and diasporic Nigerian scholars, and Western Africanists who contribute to this collection of essays further underscores the editors' quest for impartiality.

Beyond the incisive introductory chapters that set the historical and theoretical tone for the rest of the volume, the corpus of texts examined includes newspapers, political manifestos, classified correspondence, life writing and literary texts. Apart from exploring their contextual, thematic and structural dimensions, as well as questions revolving around class, gender, memory, trauma, guilt and accountability, the book's stated aim is to 'connect narrative patterns in works of fiction to contemporary challenges and prospects in Africa' (p. 5).

*Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War* is composed of twenty-one chapters, including the introduction, and is divided into four parts. The first, 'On the History of the Nigeria-Biafra War', provides a comprehensive background to the conflict, amplifying the habitual discussion of the military dimensions of the two coups and subsequent conflict to place far greater stress on the underlying ideological and philosophical factors, especially as they relate to the Ahiara Declaration and its reception and political impact in the warring territory and the global sphere. A particularly outstanding novelty is the chapter by Austine Okwu, an erstwhile Biafran diplomat's 'behind the scenes' look into the creation of the manifesto, which perceptively raises some of the still 'troubling questions' (p. 100) on the temporal configuration, ideological appropriations and ulterior aims of the document.

While not particularly ground-breaking in its scope, the second part, devoted to 'Critical Debates on the Nigerian Crisis', extends the discussion initiated in the earlier section by bringing to bear questions revolving around social and economic conflict theories on the one hand and memory and objectivity on the other to the discussion of the conflict's representations. Adebani's interesting disquisition on newspaper narratives on the eve of the war as 'paper soldiers ... critical to the resolution or exacerbation of the Nigerian crisis of nationhood' (p. 163) sits somewhat incongruously here and would have been more coherently included in the first part.

The third and longest section, 'The War in Fiction, Memoir and Imagination', offers critical readings of a number of well-known – and extensively discussed – texts. Its freshest insights emerge in two chapters: Fiona Bateman's comparative reading of two works by Irish writers, Vincent Banville's *An End to Flight* and Desmond Forristal's *Black Man's Country*, and her exploration of the liminality of 'the outsider as participant and witness' (p. 290); and Biodun Jeyifo's dialogical comparison between Achebe as 'the superb realist writer and progressive

intellectual' and as the 'wartime propaganda and media warrior and ethno-national ideological zealot' (p. 247) that emerges in *There Was a Country*. This writerly degeneration, Jeyifo asserts, results from the omission or over-simplification of questions of class, ethnicity and regionalism that would have run counter to what Jeyifo calls Achebe's 'ethnic Igbo project'. The book's final part, devoted to gender issues in Nigeria-Biafra war literature, which includes just three chapters, will be of interest to newcomers to Nigerian civil war literature, but will feel somewhat repetitive in scope and over-emphatic of Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*.

Bearing in mind the repetitive coverage of a number of civil war novels, there are some regrettable exclusions in the book, which would have benefited from a complex study of social media posts on the conflict, an analysis of idiosyncratic popular texts such as Ogali A. Ogali's post-war Onitsha Market pamphlet *No Heaven for the Priest* (1971) and other less well-known creative responses to the war. There are two lapses related to questions of genre: at some point Achebe's and Elechi Amadi's war memoirs are described as a novel and work of fiction respectively.

These minor issues, however, do not detract from the impressive accomplishment of *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, which does justice to its vast, yet nuanced, scope and remains forthright in its discussion of controversial issues. The book achieves its aim of exhaustively unravelling the historical, political, military and ideological synergies that go into the construction of the texts examined, while analysing the contemporary remembrance of the war and the current political situation. It is an excellent resource for Africanists in general and a crucial essay collection for students and scholars of Nigerian politics, history, literature and print cultures.

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Giacomo Macola, *The Gun in Central Africa: a history of technology and politics*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (hb US\$80 – 978 0 8214 2211 3; pb US \$32.95 – 978 0 8214 2212 0). 2016, xv + 249 pp.

Did the African importation of guns contribute to a growth in wealth and political centralization or did it tie Africans to cycles of violence and debt? In *The Gun in Central Africa*, Giacomo Macola replaces the technological and economic determinism of the gun–slave cycle with careful historical investigation and analysis. Guns did not determine history, Macola argues. Political elites and their warrior followers used or resisted guns in different ways and with different outcomes.

The argument is developed in case studies of various South-Central African polities through the second half of the nineteenth century. For the Lozi of present-day north-western Zambia, Macola argues that guns helped to restore royal authority after the overthrow of the Kololo usurpers. Guns here became a means and a symbol of aristocratic political centralization. In the Yeke warlord state in the south of present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, where guns were essential for harvesting ivory, capturing slaves and subduing autochthonous people, Msiri became dependent on this exogenous technology. Increasingly illegitimate, his polity suffered from an internal rebellion, collapsing after his assassination by a Congo Free State officer, with his remaining fighters absorbed into a ruthless section of the colonial army, the Force Publique. The Ngoni of