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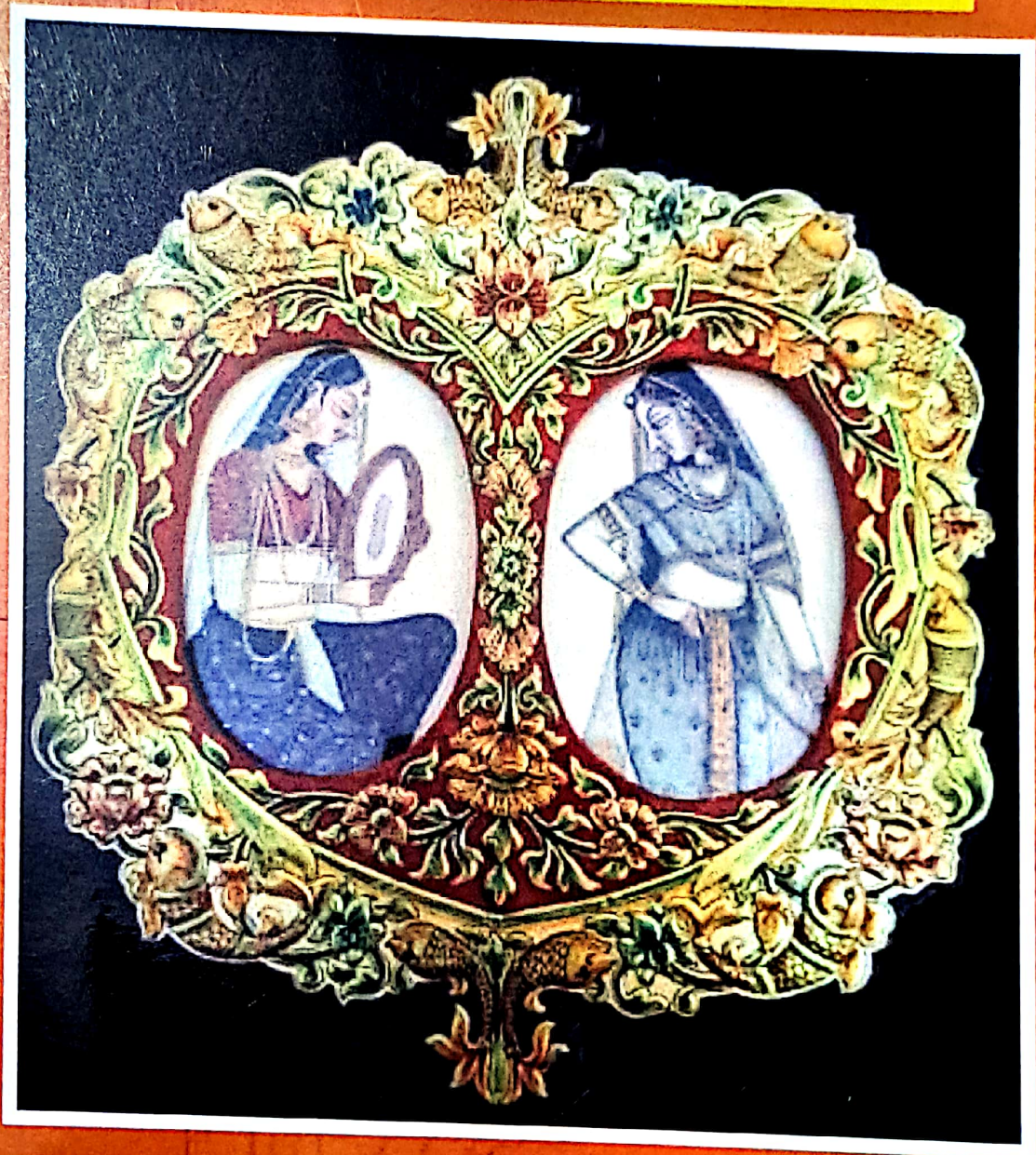
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**THE IMPACT OF BIAFRAN WAR IN BEN OKRI'S "INCIDENTS AT THE SHRINE" AND
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN***

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Abstract:

Nigeria has a long and incredibly rich history. Nigerians are traditional storytellers and have a rich oral literature. Much of pre-colonial history in Nigeria is the result of stories handed down from generation to generation. With colonization and the introduction of reading, writing and the English language, Nigerian storytellers soon began sharing their talents with a worldwide audience. Military rule in Nigeria is seen as an aberration, with no antecedents to the traditional colonial or anti-colonial past. The Biafran war singed into the traumatized memory of millions of hapless Nigerians, and this finds expression in a number of literary texts.

It's been nearly four decades since the Nigeria/Biafra Civil war ended and since then, there has been a growing interest in that dark chapter of the chequered history of Nigeria, manifested mainly in the burgeoning literary (re)presentations. But in spite of the novels, poems and plays inspired by and devoted to the civil war, Ben Okri's *Incidents at the Shrine* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* capture the realities of the vicious civil war. The searing history lesson is transformed into fictional form that poignantly reconstructs and re-enacts the horrendous events of the 60's, focusing mainly on the human tragedy and longings showing human beings at their most depraved and bestial. This paper explores the observations of the engrossing history set within the panoramic landscape of war. As Czeslaw Milosz imprints,

*He who invokes history is always secure,
The dead will not rise to witness against him.*

Key words: Biafra war, History, violence, Nigeria, destruction

Introduction:

The Nigerian Civil war, also known as the Biafran war, became one of the most divisive wars in the history of the post-Independence Africa. Its traumatic effects evident in pertinacious ethnic animosities and distrust continue to shape and redefine the narrative of Nigerian identity and the nation's future. The heinous war has plagued the political, religious, socio-economic and cultural condition of the nation stripping Africa of its nationhood and democracy. The conflicts between different communities are retold realistically in veracious narratives that could reinforce the collective memory of people in the form of epics, songs, drama, oral tradition and memoirs. Euripedes' *The Trojan Women* is a powerfully disturbing play on the theme of wars' horrors apparently critical of Athenian Imperialism.¹

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and Ben Okri's "Laughter beneath the Bridge" capture the horrors of Biafran war and the despair, suffering and psychological trauma of the people, their disintegrated dreams and dismantled lives. "Laughter beneath the Bridge" is a short story in the collection of eight stories by Ben Okri titled *Incidents at the Shrine* (1986). This paper bisects the veristic representations in both the works of art.

Chronicling the Ghastly Episodes of History: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*:

As Oladele Taiwo notes, "Nigeria, torn by internal quarrels and a series of novels culminating in the secession of Biafra has given rise to new breed of novels in the bitterest indictment". (123) Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*² covers events from 1967 to 1970, Parts I and III set in the early 1960s, while parts II and IV relive the late 1960's, registers the gruesome aftermath of war.

¹ A tragedian of Classical Athens

² Image of a Biafran flag-strips of red, black and green