masquerades to expand their influence, and thereby to redefine themselves without losing their distinctive identity. *Gelede* practice, originally linked to the celebration of communal peace and well-being, shifted in response to Dahomey's attack on Otta. The powerful and aggressive *Gelede Idahomi* masks confronted and threatened the enemy, thereby reconfiguring *Gelede*'s traditional role as a protector of the town. Similarly, masks that were substantially shaped and developed by women transformed *Egungun*, which had previously been associated with typically male forms of competition and even warfare. Yet while Otta's new *Egungun* masks celebrated prosperity and splendour rather than force, they nonetheless continued to foster competition.

Willis's careful documentation of female agency in relation to *Egungun* reveals that women could engage with male-controlled masquerades as daughters, wives, and mothers. By mobilising specific resources at particular historical junctures, women (and men) challenged and transformed existing gender roles and norms. As new *Egungun* or *Gelede* masks did not necessarily supplant older masks, exceptional gender performances took place alongside more typical masquerades. Politically and aesthetically, masquerading therefore ordered social practice by revealing radical change, such as the active engagement of women with *Egungun*.

Illuminating the historical contingencies of masquerades, and their ability to reflect, facilitate, and structure social and political change, *Masquerading Politics* makes a significant contribution to debates about gender and power in Africa.

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THE BIAFRAN WAR FIFTY YEARS LATER

Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War.
Edited by Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem.
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As the fiftieth anniversary of the Nigeria-Biafra War approaches, the Republic of Biafra has re-emerged as a topic of sharp contention in Nigeria. This volume, edited by Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem, presents a cross-section of recent scholarship on the war and its representations. The book raises many compelling questions, and it is rich with interpretive differences. The editors do not attempt to resolve these contradictions, instead allowing each of the 21 contributors to draw a slightly different picture from the literary, journalistic, and personal sources they analyze. The volume is a mix of primary and secondary texts, and it blends history, memoir, literature, and political mythology in a way that leaves the reader with much to think about. Methodological approaches vary widely, from Wale Adebanwi's empirical reading of the antebellum Nigerian press, to Hugh Hodges' theoretical treatment of Chris Abani's novel *GraceLand*. Concerns with objectivity and the difficulties associated

with reconstructing what 'really happened' run through the book; the chapters by Christian Chukwuma Opata and Olukunle Ojeleye address this anxiety most directly.

One of the most important contributions of *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War* is the bid it makes for the importance of fiction and memoir in the war's public memory. The long period of military rule that followed Biafra's defeat made it difficult for historians and other scholars to research the war, or to discuss it openly. Many Nigerians turned to novels and memoirs — genres which were less likely to attract the state's attention — to come to terms with the recent past. As Falola and Ezekwem demonstrate, memoirists and novelists have long grappled with Biafra and its place in Nigeria's history in ways that historians and social scientists have only recently begun to do. In Nigeria and elsewhere the war is known through novels like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (the topic of a chapter by Meredith Coffey), Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (considered by Françoise Ugochukwu and Ofure O.M. Aito), and memoirs like Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country* (dissected by Biodun Jeyifo). It is worth noting that most of the intellectuals discussed here supported Biafra. Some works from the Federal side are represented, including Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* as interpreted by Cyril Obi, but the volume reflects the fact that the most widely-read narratives of the war were written by Biafrans and their partisans. As wars go, Biafra is unusual in that its most enduring accounts were written by the vanquished rather than the victors.

The book consists of four parts. The first comprises four general articles on the war, two of which concern the 1969 Ahiara Declaration. One, by Austine S.O. Okwu, provides a personal account of Biafra's diplomatic activity during the war. The second part turns to debates emerging from historical literature, especially around questions of ethnicity both within Biafra and vis-à-vis Nigeria. The third section brings together nine studies of the war in 'fiction, memoir, and imagination' — ranging from well-known accounts like S.O. Mezu's *Behind the Rising Sun* (analyzed by Ode Ogede) to others less remembered, like the Irish novelist Vincent Banville's 1973 *An End to Flight* (by Fiona Bateman). Finally, the fourth section turns to questions of gender. Egodi Uchendu and Jane Bryce consider how gender has shaped the war literature, paying close attention to the constraints that operated on women writing on the war.

The scope of these contributions is broad, but there is an important body of writing on the war that they do not address. In addition to these relatively high-profile works, there are many memoirs by individuals who were not at the center of the conflict; in these works one can find the voices of ordinary people who served in the Biafran and Nigerian armies, worked for the Biafran state, or found ways to survive the hardships of the war. Most are privately or locally published, and few rise to the kind of literature that contributors to *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War* analyze. But these everyday accounts, many of which are bitter ripostes to the better-known works discussed here, are an important part of the war's literary inheritance. *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War* is an important contribution, which will appeal not only to literary scholars, but to historians, political scientists, and others who are engaged in work on the war and on postcolonial Nigeria. Several chapters would be appropriate for undergraduate or graduate courses, especially if paired with the texts they interpret.

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