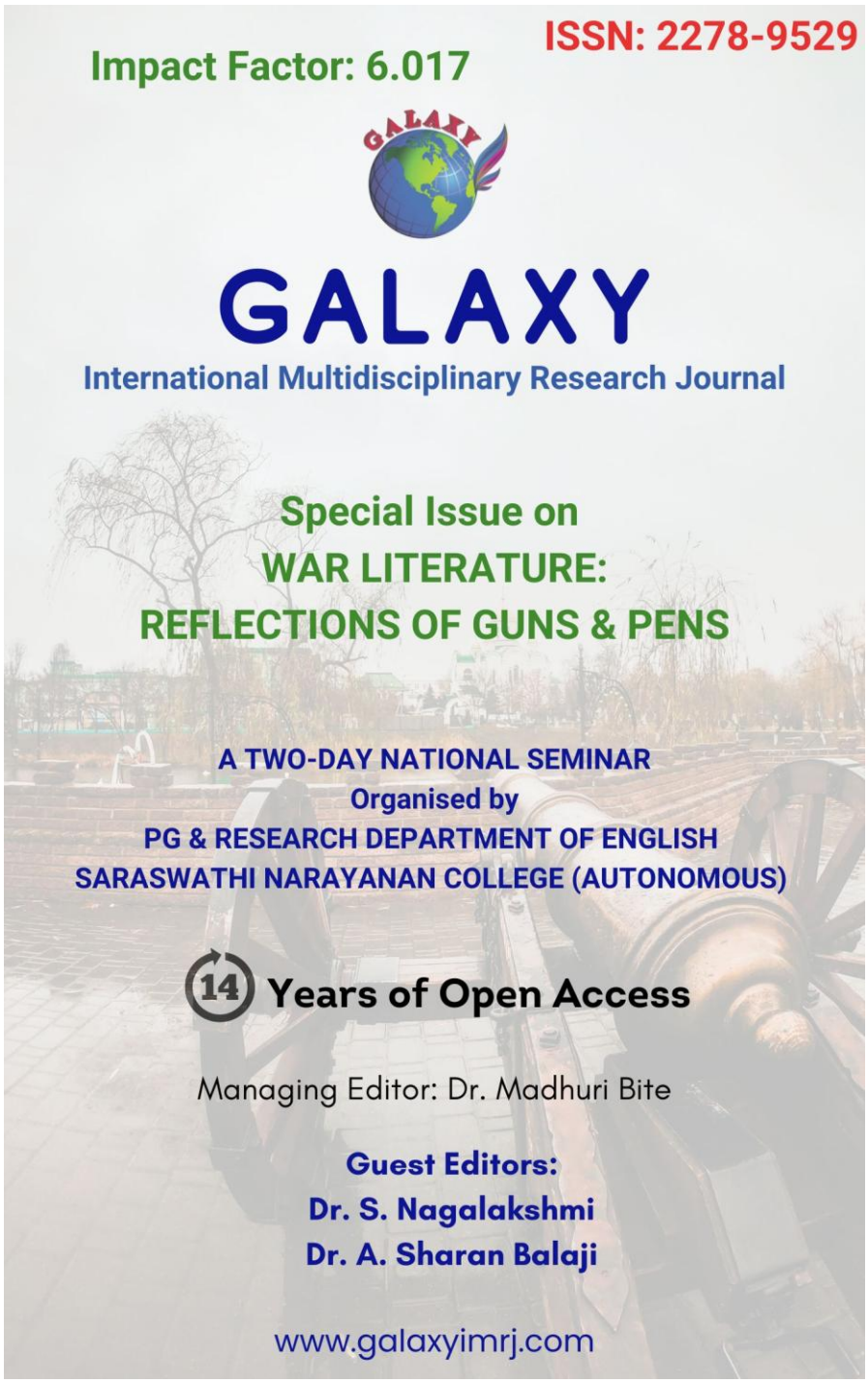


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War and Colonialism: Postcolonial Perspectives on the Nigerian Civil War in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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Abstract:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) is a significant literary work that examines the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) through a postcolonial lens. It explores the intersection of war, colonial legacies, and ethnic divisions. This paper examines how Adichie accounts the colonial policies that fueled ethnic tensions and contributed to the Biafran Independence. The novel mirrors the difficulties faced by a recently liberated country attempting to reconcile imposed divisions. Adichie offers a multi-perspective story that emphasises the individual and societal effects of war through the characters of Olanna, Odenigbo, Ugwu, and Richard. The study also highlights the novel's criticism of Western media, which frequently reduced the war to a humanitarian crisis while overlooking its political complexities. Drawing from postcolonial theories, including the works of Frantz Fanon and Gayatri Spivak, this analysis argues that *Half of a Yellow Sun* serves as both historical revisionism and literary resistance, challenging dominant narratives about African conflicts. The novel's engagement with personal testimonies, particularly through Ugwu's transformation from an innocent observer to a soldier burdened by war trauma, emphasises the psychological scars left by colonial histories. Adichie's writings affirm the importance of indigenous viewpoints in historical discourse by reclaiming African voices and presenting the Nigerian Civil War beyond Western historiography. This

paper situates *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a crucial intervention in postcolonial literature, reaffirming the importance of literature in revising history and amplifying marginalized voices.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Nigerian Civil War, Colonial Legacies, Identity, Trauma, War Literature.

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie' is the powerful voice from Nigeria. Her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) examines the consequences of the Nigerian civil or Biafran war from a postcolonial perspective. The novel sensitively interweaves individual stories with historical events, presenting a critique of colonial legacies and how they contributed to the formation of ethnic divisions and national identity in post-independence Nigeria. The causes of the civil war and the ethnic, political, and economic tensions between Nigeria's major ethnic groups were deeply connected to colonial period. The borders and policies imposed by the British further nurtured ethnic animosities and economic inequalities. This paper examines how Adichie's novel deconstructs the colonial roots of the conflict as well as themes and issues of identity, resistance and trauma through its characters. Through the use of postcolonial theories and the engagement with critical scholarship, this research emphasis how the novel Half *of a Yellow Sun* reveals the intricate dimensions of African conflicts to the world powerfully articulating human dimension and psychological impact of war.

Literature Review

Scholars have extensively analyzed *Half of a Yellow Sun* in the context of postcolonial studies, memory and historical representation. Elleke Boehmer asserts that “postcolonial narratives often serve as counter-discourses to colonial historiography, reclaiming marginalized

voices" (Boehmer 112). Similarly, Ato Quayson highlights the novel's role in revising colonial and Western narratives of the Nigerian Civil War, arguing that "Adichie foregrounds personal testimonies as a means of resisting hegemonic histories" (Quayson 204). According to Ernest N. Emenyonu, Adichie's work represents a "new wave of African literature that seeks to reframe national history through fiction" (Emenyonu 86). These perspectives emphasize the novel's function as both historical revisionism and literary critique. In examining war narratives, Peterson notes that "Adichie's use of multiple perspectives creates a layered representation of conflict, avoiding a singular nationalist viewpoint" (Peterson 71). This critical engagement provides a framework for analyzing the postcolonial narrative present in Half *of a Yellow Sun*.

Colonial Legacies and Ethnic Divisions

Half of a Yellow Sun is a novel set in Nigeria in the 1960s and deals with the central political issue of the Biafran War (Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970). The Igbo, who live in the southeast of Nigeria, proclaimed an independent state of Biafra as a result of discrimination, marginalization, and ill-treatment by the Nigerian government. The novel traces the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group as it focuses on the Biafran Civil War, mirroring problems like ethnic divisions, political instability, and the post-colonial issues of newly independent Nigeria.

The novel is based on politics and war and describes the ways in which African civil wars impact the life of the populace. In the novel, during political unrest as a backdrop, the novelist Adichie subtly intertwines her characters' individual lives – Ugwu, Odenigbo, Olanna, Kainene, and Richard. Ugwu, the central character is a 13-year-old Igbo boy who moves from his village Opi to Nsukka to work as a houseboy for Odenigbo, a university professor. The novel presents the complex and evolving love relationship between Odenigbo with Olanna, a daughter of a wealthy Nigerian businessman. The privileged background and social status of Olanna threatens

Odenigbo's mother. Intending to secure a more traditional match to her son, Mama brings Amala, a village girl, into Odenigbo's home. It creates an emotional as well physical distance between Odenigbo and Olanna. Another significant pair in the novel is Richard and Kainene, Olanna's twin sister. Unlike Odenigbo, who is deeply rooted in Nigerian politics and intellectual circles, Richard is a British expatriate and journalist fascinated about Igbo-Ukwu art. As a result of Odenigbo's brief relationship with Amala, she delivers a baby girl. Emotionally devasted Olanna seduces Richard as a revenge. They confess it to Odenigbo and they decided not to share it with Kainene. When Kainene learns about it, out of furious she leaves her sister. During the childbirth Amala dies leaving her newborn daughter. Deeply moved by the tragedy Olanna decides to raise the child and names her Chimaka.

Odenigbo and Olanna travel to Kana in Southeast Nigeria with their baby to see their relatives. Shortly after, the Biafran Civil War erupts. The southeastern region of Nigeria is declared as the independent Republic of Biafra by the Colonel Ojukwu, Igbo leader. This proclaims heavily infuriated the Nigerian government. There is violence against the Igbo people, with many Igbo soldiers massacred, and Igbo women subjected to inhumane atrocities. Nigeria makes a declaration of war against Biafra. The United States and Canada, however, are neutral, while Britain and Russia provide Nigeria with military aid. Britain's white settler neighbors in East Africa, including most Black African states, also align themselves with Nigeria. France and China alone provide limited aid to Biafra. Widespread massacres, famine, and misery mark the war. Children perish from hunger and disease. Odenigbo, Olanna, and her infant, Chimaka, escape to Nsukka, where they find their house ransacked. Odenigbo loses his mother and gets drunk. Richard becomes a recluse, writing about the plight of the Biafran people, and Kainene relocates to a refugee camp. In search of food, she ventures across enemy lines and is detained.

Ugwu's tragic life testimonies the profound psychological and physical impacts of civil war on the vulnerable. Her lover Eberechi has been sexually abused by the Nigerian soliders, and Ugwu is too forcibily recruited into army. Upon fighting in multiple battles, he sustains severe injuries and returns home to his village to discover that his sister, Anulika, had been gang-raped by Nigerian soldiers. Ugwu begins chronicling the gruesome effect of the war, with the title "The World Was Silent When We Died." He dedicates this document to "Odenigbo, Master, and my good man." With the killing of more than a million individuals, the war ends, and Biafra is reintegrated into Nigeria. The title of the novel features the Biafran flag, which consists of a half-yellow sun with horizontal red, black, and green stripes. The red represents the blood of dead Igbo soldiers, black represents mourning, and green signifies future prosperity.

The civil war in Nigeria profoundly alters relationships and family ties. Odenigbo and his friends, who were previously involved in scholarly debates, now have their interactions filled with political tensions. War compels Olanna and Odenigbo to leave Nsukka, destroying their roles as parents and partners. The relationship between Richard and Kainene too is affected, and Ugwu's sense of love and protection is shattered. Adichie effectively portrays how war and violence shatter the serene, warm atmosphere of life in Africa, leaving lasting scars on individual and communal relationships.

Adichie's novel highlights the manner in which colonial sowed the seeds of ethnic conflict that finally gave rise to the Nigerian Civil War. British colonial rule, through indirect rule and arbitrary boundary-making, heightened tensions between the leading ethnic groups: Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. As Walter Rodney argues, "colonialism did not unite African nations but instead fostered disunity, making ethnic rivalry a central feature of post-independence politics" (Rodney 237). *Half of a Yellow Sun* captures this legacy through the lives of its

protagonists, Olanna and Odenigbo, as they live through a war forged by colonial boundaries. Odenigbo, a radical thinker, consistently condemns colonialism, saying, "The only authentic identity for the African is the tribe" (Adichie 25). In referring to British policies, Odenigbo indignantly declares, "They have succeeded in making us hate ourselves" (Adichie 78), highlighting the psychological wounds inflicted by colonialism.

The War as a Struggle for Self-Determination

Biafra's secessionist struggle in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is depicted as a quest for self-determination, driven by the Igbo people's desire for independence. Frantz Fanon, in The Wretched of the Earth, contends that "postcolonial struggles are often a continuation of anti-colonial resistance, as newly independent states grapple with imposed structures" (Fanon 154). This theme resonates throughout the novel as individuals' rally behind Biafra, believing in the possibility of a just and sovereign country. The British expatriate Richard becomes deeply involved with the cause of Biafra, saying, "Biafra was an idea before it was a place" (Adichie 181). His transformation demonstrates that the war was not only a war but also a battle on a symbolic level against neocolonial power. Olanna, who witnesses the havoc caused by the war, deeply laments, "There was no longer a before and after. There was only the clamoring now of survival" (Adichie 289), highlighting the urgency and desperation of Biafra's struggle.

Western Media and the Erasure of African Voices

A key postcolonial critique in Adiche's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is how the novel depicts the influence of Western media on global views of the Nigerian Civil War. Adichie emphasises that Biafra was often portrayed merely as a humanitarian crisis, overshadowing its political dimensions. This connects to Spivak's idea of the "subaltern," where African stories are

frequently eclipsed by Western narratives (Spivak 89). Kainene's pointed remarks about Western journalists highlight this issue: "They will only show our children with bloated bellies and fly-covered faces" (Adichie 374). This perspective resonates with Teju Cole's assertion that "Western humanitarianism often strips African conflicts of historical and political complexity" (Cole 102). By incorporating these critiques, Adichie confronts prevailing media portrayals and advocates for an indigenous viewpoint of the war. Olanna, expressing her frustration over the misrepresentation, states, "They make it seem as if we do not bleed like them, as if we do not think like them" (Adichie 312), further emphasising the novel's challenge to colonial narratives.

Personal Narratives and the Trauma of War

The novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a powerful exploration of war trauma through Ugwu's journey from a naive houseboy to a soldier who witnesses horrific events. His transformation reflects the disillusionment of many who once had faith in the Biafran cause. As Caruth observes, "war literature often conveys trauma through fragmented recollections and a focus on personal suffering" (Caruth 67). Adichie skillfully uses this approach, especially in Ugwu's reflections after the war, where he grapples with feelings of guilt and the weight of memory. For instance, he states: "He knew the faces of the men he had killed, and he would always know them" (Adichie 421). The psychological effects of war are central to Adichie's story, emphasising the postcolonial view that war is not just a political event but a profoundly personal and destructive experience. Ugwu's realization, "War is not life; it is the absence of life" (Adichie 403), captures the existential emptiness left in the wake of conflict.

Conclusion

Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* offers a profound critique of colonialism's lasting impact on African nations, demonstrating how the Nigerian Civil War was the direct result of colonial rule's policies of division. In its multiple narrative perspectives, the novel heightens African voices, refutes Western characterizations of the war, and develops themes of identity, resistance, and trauma. Being a postcolonial novel, it explores the intricacies of self-determination and the price of war. Drawing on historical scholarship and postcolonial theory, this paper contends that Adichie's novel is not just a historical narrative—it is a vital contribution to contemporary discussions on war, colonialism, and African identity.

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