RETELLING AS A POSTCOLONIAL MOTIF IN ADICHIE'S *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN* AND ADIMORA-EZEIGBO'S *ROSES AND BULLETS*

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Abstract
War has been a recurring theme in human affairs throughout history. Myths, legends, epics and other forms of oral and written literature preserve traditional stories of past wars. Nearly every society has its own war narratives, recorded in history books and in fictional works. For example, the Nigerian Civil War - also known as the Biafran War (1967–1970) – remains a turning point in the country's history, with its wounds deeply etched into the collective consciousness of its citizens. The literature on the Nigerian Civil War is vast and diverse, encompassing a wide range of voices and perspectives. According to scholars like Quayson (2019), postcolonial African literature frequently challenges hegemonic history by functioning as a "counter-archive." Similarly, Newell (2013) argues that women's war narratives, by foregrounding home and postcolonial communal pain, challenge "masculinist historiography," according to Newell (2013). A key feature of war literature - including Nigerian war fiction-, is the recurring motif of **retelling**. This study, therefore, examines retelling as a postcolonial motif in two landmark Nigerian feminist novels: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* (2011). In these texts retelling is more than simple repetition; it is a process of identity reconstruction within a fractured postcolonial context. The act of retelling in these works is intentional, revisionist, and restorative. Analysis of the two works reveals that retelling serves to challenge dominant historical and patriarchal narratives, reclaim marginalized voices, and negotiate the trauma of war. These personal narratives underscore the human cost of conflict and illuminate the lived experiences of women and communities. in understanding the impact of war on individuals and communities. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the function of retelling in feminist war fiction and its broader implications within postcolonial and historical discourse. It also highlights the need for greater inclusion of feminist war narratives in African literary studies.
Key terms: Nigeria-Biafra War, Postcolonial Theory, Feminist Fiction, Polyphony, Decolonization, and Intertexuality

1.1 Retelling as Postcolonial Motif in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

The famous postcolonial novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie recreates the Biafra War. It highlights the shortcomings of nationalism after independence and the legacy of colonialism via the linked lives of its heroes. It delves deeply into postcolonial identity and historical reclamation as well. By highlighting the ways that colonial legacies sustain ethnic strife, cultural erasure, and institutional violence through the use of rich symbolism, metafictional techniques, and polyphonic narrative, Adichie challenges the politics of historical representation. Scholars have examined the conflict's representation in great depth, concentrating on its themes of suffering, nationalism, and cultural forgetfulness. In addition to exploring the structural, personal, and gendered traumas of the Biafran War, Adichie's novel like Williams' version highlights its exploration of the intricate and enduring impacts of colonialism on Nigerian postcolonial society. According to other critics, Adichie's work was inspired by Anthills of the Savannah by Chinua Achebe, especially in its postcolonial depiction of the Nigerian Civil War.

In addition to its nuanced depiction of the War, the recognition Adichie's writing receives recognition on its narrative technique strikes a balance between realism and reconciliation. It dives into the complexities of postcolonial identity and the contradictions between traditional culture and modernity in order to provide a powerful critique of the errors in postcolonial nationalism and the legacy of colonialism.

1.1.2 Polyphony and the Decolonization of History

Adichie employs three narrators, Ugwu, Olanna, and Richard, to call into question conventional colonial narratives and elevate overlooked voices. Ugwu, the houseboy who eventually became a writer, personifies the novel's fundamental retelling motif. Thus, Adichie opposes androcentric war narratives. Underrepresented voices, especially those of women and domestic workers whose experiences are left out of official narratives, are elevated while colonial history is criticized through the narrative structure of the novel, which alternates between pre-war optimism and wartime destruction. The story starts in the early 1960s, soon after Nigeria gained its freedom from British domination. Although it was a hopeful period, political and ethnic problems were nevertheless prevalent. The narrative is told from the viewpoints of the three primary characters:

1. A 13-year-old Igbo child from a small village named Ugwu works as a houseboy for Odenigbo, a radical UNN professor. Ugwu's transformation from illiterate to educated reflects the larger postcolonial quest for identity. In stark contrast to his subsequent disenchantment, his amazement at the contemporary world

("He had never seen a refrigerator before") reveals the illusory promises of progress under the shadow of colonialism. His manuscript, "The World Was Silent When We Died," both echoes Adichie's own endeavor to rescue African history from Eurocentric distortions and questions Western indifference during the Biafran crisis. Ugwu's work serves as a critique of colonial historiography through metafiction. The transformation of Ugwu from a houseboy who was hushed to a historian represents the reclaiming of agency: "The more he wrote, the less he dreamed."

Adichie criticizes the marginalization of African viewpoints in international historiography as Ugwu fights to record the horrors of the war. Ugwu's frustration, for example, "He would never be able to capture that child on paper… the fear that dulled the eyes of mothers," illustrates how colonial archives were unable to adequately document indigenous trauma.Richard's unsuccessful attempt to construct a "definitive" Biafran history is compared by Adichie to this. His unfinished manuscript illustrates how inadequate outside narratives are. On the other hand, despite its flaws, Ugwu's art focuses on Igbo lived experiences. This supports the thesis made by Na'Allah that African literature needs to "reclaim epistemological sovereignty," giving indigenous knowledge and oral traditions precedence over colonial archives.

2. Olanna, an affluent Igbo woman with a London education, leaves her family in Lagos to live with Odenigbo, her lover and a staunch advocate for Biafran independence. The tensions of the postcolonial elite are embodied by her dual identity, which is steeped in Igbo traditions but educated in the colonizer's culture.
3. A writer and British expatriate, Richard is drawn to Nigeria by his interest in Igbo-Ukwu art. While exposing the remnants of colonialism, his outsider viewpoint criticizes the exoticization of Africa. His friendship with Olanna's acerbic twin sister Kainene further muddies the balance of power between the colonized and the former colonizer. Richard's character makes narrative authority even more difficult to understand. Even though he feels sympathy for Biafra, his position as an outsider represents the colonial gaze. "This is the way if you truly want to contribute," Kainene rebuked. "The world must know the truth"—emphasizes the conflict between African self-representation and Western "objectivity." Richard's war manuscript is exploitative and exemplifies what is known as "a foreigner's shallow curiosity" (Adichie, 2006). This is consistent with the criticism of "Western sensationalism" in African war narratives made by Gikandi (2011). Conversely, Ugwu's manuscript—written in makeshift conditions—symbolizes what Krishnan (2019) terms "subaltern historiography," privileging lived experience over detached observation.

By giving Igbo voices like Odenigbo, who claims, "I was Igbo before the white man came," more prominence, Adichie subverts the colonial tradition of "speaking for" marginalized groups. The pre-war sections emphasize the postcolonial state's failures, including ethnic rivalries fueled by British divide-and-rule policies, corruption among the new elite, and the growing divide between urban intellectuals like Odenigbo and rural populations like Ugwu's family. A crucial event occurs when an Igbo-targeted coup in Northern Nigeria foreshadows the war's ethnic violence.

The tone of the novel changes from idealism to horror as Igbo pogroms in Northern Nigeria intensify. Citing the need for Igbo self-preservation, the Eastern region secedes to form Biafra. Adichie painstakingly details how the violence is exacerbated by borders that were arbitrarily defined by British rulers during the colonial era. After their cosmopolitan identities were destroyed by ethnic essentialism, characters who once discussed politics in Nsukka's salons now run from massacres. For instance, Olanna sees Igbo bodies lying about the streets of Kano following a slaughter ("A woman's head lay severed near a gutter"). Since her British education provides no defense against racialized aggression, this pain compels her to face her own privilege. Odenigbo's revolutionary fervor, which waned as Biafra's leaders replicated the corruption of the Nigerian state, is another example. The hypocrisy of postcolonial nationalism, which frequently upholds the same repressive systems it aimed to destroy, is criticized in the novel.

The destruction caused by the war also reveals class and gender hierarchies by tearing down social façades. Once characterized by their money and education, Olanna and Kainene now exchange jewels for food. The impotence of male intellectuals like Odenigbo, who turn to drink, stands in stark contrast to their tenacity. Reiterating how Adichie challenges the androcentric war narrative is important. The novel's depiction of victims is complicated by Ugwu's misdeeds, which haunt him when he is forced into the Biafran army. The metafictional core of the novel is his memoir, "The World Was Silent When We Died," which questions Western accounts of the conflict. Richard's abandoned literary project, a history of Biafra, symbolizes the impossibility of a single, authoritative account, while Adichie favors fragmented, subjective stories: Ugwu's memoir, written in stolen moments, asserts the right of the marginalized to reclaim history, and Kainene's disappearance (presumed dead) leaves her fate

unresolved, resisting narrative closure. The war ends with Biafra's surrender, leaving characters to deal with trauma and disillusionment.

1.1.3 Gender and the Double Colonization of Women

Half of a Yellow Sun addresses a postcolonial critique of gendered injustice. Women like Olanna and Kainene have to deal with colonial and postcolonial patriarchal brutality. Olanna's resilience—teaching in refugee camps in the midst of bombings—contrasts with Richard's privilege, emphasizing the intersectionality of marginalization. Kainene's power play in a male-dominated war economy "scrubbing floors for coins" criticizes the feminization of poverty in neocolonial institutions. Adichie's characterization of women as cultural and resistance caretakers is consistent with Nnaemeka's concept of "negofeminism," in which African women plan within postcolonial patriarchal restrictions. For example, Olanna's preservation of Igbo rituals—"kola nut, alligator pepper, and bitter leaves"—becomes an act of cultural defiance against colonialism.

Olanna's frequent nightmares about the Kano massacre are especially noteworthy because they perfectly illustrate the idea of trauma as "unclaimed experience."(Caruth, 1996) In the end, her choice to testify before students breaks what Ebereonwu (2020) refers to as the "culture of silence" that Nigeria's post-war governments imposed. Boehmer (2005) contends that postcolonial masculinity needs to "unlearn its hubris" which is reflected in Odenigbo's ideological change from rejecting "women's stories" to embracing humility (Adichie, 2006).

As a landmark piece, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* reframes postcolonial storytelling style as a kind of resistance. The novel challenges the shortcomings of post-independence nationalism, recentres underrepresented voices, and deconstructs colonial myths through polyphony and symbolic depth. According to Ugwu's text, storytelling is not only remedial but revolutionary, regaining one's voice in a society that aimed to stifle it. Adichie sees literature as a tool and a mirror that can both reflect colonial divisions and pave the way for futures free of colonialism.

1.2 Retelling as Postcolonial Motif in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*

As a polyphonic retelling of the Nigerian Civil War through the experiences of women, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* (2011) is a landmark work in the canon of Nigerian war literature. Adimora-Ezeigbo's novel "subverts the dominant narrative of the war, centering women's experiences and perspectives" (Anyanwu, 2015). This narrative technique highlights the significance of women's voices and experiences in forming our understanding of the conflict and its effects on civilians.

Adimora-Ezeigbo challenges the official history of the conflict and subverts prevailing narratives through the use of retelling as a postcolonial motif. The novel provides a complex and multidimensional depiction of the conflict and its effects on people and communities by giving women's experiences and viewpoints a higher priority. The statement "We must tell our stories, we must write our history" by Lulu emphasizes the importance of inclusive and varied historical narratives. Adimora-Ezeigbo's account "challenges the official history of the war, offering a counter-narrative that privileges women's experiences" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 2013). Understanding the intricacies of the conflict and how it affected women requires an awareness of this counter-narrative. The novel presents a complex depiction of the conflict that subverts prevailing narratives by emphasizing the experiences of women.
In the face of patriarchy and war, the story emphasizes the value of female resistance and togetherness. During difficult and uncertain times, Lulu finds strength and support in her interactions with other women. According to Ezenwa-Ohaeto, "the novel celebrates the ways in which women come together to support each other and challenge patriarchal structures."*Roses and Bullets* is a potent critique of patriarchy and the omission of women's stories from official war narratives through the use of retelling and counter-narrative. The novel emphasizes the necessity of inclusive and varied historical narratives and the significance of giving women's experiences and viewpoints a central place in our knowledge of the past.

1.2.2 Structural Innovation and Hybrid Resistance as Postcolonial Critique

A conscious decision, the novel's fragmented retelling style captures the confusion and upheaval of war. Through the division of the story into three interconnected threads—Lulu's diary, the collective narratives of the Umuada women, and official documents—Adimora-Ezeigbo exposes the systems that devalue particular experiences and mute particular voices. An effective illustration of how official narratives can obfuscate and misrepresent the realities of marginalized populations is the juxtaposition of Lulu's handwritten account of a massacre with a military news release characterizing it as "an operation to restore order" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2011). The conflict between the official narrative and the firsthand, lived experiences of people like Lulu is brought to light by this contrast.

Nnaemeka (2005) refers to this combination of resistance and negotiation as "nego-feminism," which is exemplified by the Umuada Collective, a group of women who use oral testimony to preserve accounts of rape

and resiliency. Their ceremonies, which combine Christian hymns with Igbo cosmology, are a reflection of the idea of "hybridity as subversion" (Bhabha, 1994). According to the novel, "The Umuada women sang songs that encoded historical events, songs that seemed innocent on the surface but held deep meaning". Because it describes the hardships of the Biafran soldiers without specifically mentioning them, the song "The Leopard's Children Are Hungry" is an especially potent illustration of this encoding.

In addition, the Umuada women's group uses "an archive of feelings" in their group storytelling sessions (Cvetkovich 2003). As one of the women observes, "We didn't simply mention what had occurred. We demonstrated how it felt, including the chilly weight of a child's body and the lingering stench of burning the significance of maintaining the emotional and psychological effects of traumatic events is highlighted by this focus on the emotional and sensory components of experience.

Another example of how the Umuada women establish a "third space" of cultural resistance in the novel is the employment of hybrid spiritual practices. The women are able to develop a distinctive spiritual practice that represents their multifaceted cultural identities by fusing Igbo ikenga symbols with Catholic rosaries. According to Bhabha, this kind of hybridity can be a potent subversive tool that enables people to question prevailing narratives and produce original works of cultural expression. The novel provides a potent critique of the ways in which official narratives can be distorted through the use of oral testimony, fractured narrative structure, and hybrid spiritual practices. The narrative emphasizes how crucial it is to preserve the experiences and tales of people like Lulu and the Umuada group.

1.2.3 Intertextuality and Gendered Cartographies of War

Through Lulu's aunt quoting Okuata's "never again", the novel alludes to Nwapa's *Never Again*, creating a literary lineage similar to Andrade's concept of "feminist intertextuality." By citing Nwapa, where Okuata states, "My sister carried yams in her womb during the hunger years. You think these scars are just marks? They're letters in a book nobody wanted to publish "offers a metafictional moment regarding the alternate archive that women's bodily experiences form. Ojaide's claim that "genre-blurring" in African literature enacts cultural resistance is further supported by Adimora-Ezeigbo's combination of poetry and prose in "Bullets birthed roses / in the ashes of our homes" (177). The novelist embraces intertextuality as a form of postcolonial and feminist resistance.

Additionally, the novel painstakingly illustrates how women's bodies are contested spaces during conflict. The trip taken by Lulu reflects the breakdown of the country. An educated middle-class life where colonial hierarchies are still discreetly present is portrayed in the first few chapters. In the British company where Lulu works, "the white managers' wives still called us 'girls'"—this creates the neocolonial backdrop that feeds the tension. A metaphor for cultural return is created by Lulu's forced relocation to her ancestral hamlet with the outbreak of conflict in Phase 2: "The Mercedes couldn't take me where I was going." Like a dead fish, my high heels hung from my palm as I walked the final miles barefoot. Finally, women's secret networks are documented in the novel's core. The "pot-and-pan telegraph" is described by the writer as a technique of communication in which women use market tunes to transmit messages in the kitchen.

1.2.4 Synthesis and Implications

These novels collectively position retelling as a decolonial praxis, destabilizing monolithic war narratives through marginalized voices. Divergences in their methods reflect broader trends in postcolonial literature. While Nwapa adopts communal orality with indigenous epistemologies as resistance,Adichie’s polyphonic historiography reflects subaltern narratives vs. colonial archives, as Adimora-Ezeigbo uses genre hybridity as artistic experimentation of political defiance. Retelling, thus, is not passive nostalgia but a dynamic process of “re-membering” dismembered histories (Mbembe, 2001). It demands accountability from postcolonial states still haunted by Biafra’s ghosts, urging what Mbembe (2017) terms “the right to narrate otherwise.”

Together, these novels present retelling as a decolonial practice that destabilizes monolithic war narratives through marginalized voices. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a third generation artistic creation. Adichie's polyphonic historiography reflects subaltern narratives versus colonial archives, as Adimora-Ezeigbo uses genre hybridity as an artistic experimentation of political defiance (Mbembe, 2001). Retelling, then, is not passive nostalgia, but a dynamic process of "re-membering" dismembered histories (Mbembe, 2001). It calls on postcolonial states that are still plagued by Biafra's ghosts to take responsibility, urging what Mbembe (2017) refers to as "the right to narrate otherwise. Adichie clearly criticizes British colonial complicity and global apathy, employing the perspective of Richard, a British character, to challenge both external and internal forces—acting as a contrast to highlight colonial ignorance. Her characters display disillusionment not only with warfare but also with the post-independence elite class that betrays revolutionary principles. Adimora-Ezeigbo illustrates the spiritual and psychological fragmentation of her characters, reflecting the sociocultural disintegration that resulted from the war.

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