

Media Framing, War Narratives and the Construction of Postcolonial Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Reginald Chimnechenum Igirigba, PhD^{1*}, Eberechi Emmanuel-Okogbule, PhD², Endurance Okanezi Oleka²

¹Department of English and Literary Studies, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt

²Department of Mass Communication, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt

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*Corresponding author: Reginald ChimnechenumIgirigba

Department of English and Literary Studies, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt

Abstract

This paper investigates media framing and its impact on the postcolonial identity construction of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a novel set in the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970, by the author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, which prefigures conflicting narratives based on local propaganda, foreign journalism, and political discourse. Using the Media Framing Theory and Postcolonial Theory, this paper questions the ways in which information propagation, selective reporting, and ideological bias constitute divergent perceptions of Biafra, nationhood and identity. This study will claim that by revealing the politics of representation in the media discourse related to war time, Adichie reclaims narrative authority. The textual analysis of this paper shows that literature is a counter-frame to misconstrued media histories, thus re-creating postcolonial Nigerian identity internally.

Keywords: Media Framing, War Narratives, Construction, Postcolonial, Identity.

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The issue of media, war and identity formation in relation to media has been a major focus in the literary and communication studies in postcolonial literature. In the postcolonial societies of Africa and especially in Nigeria, conflict narratives have not only written about historical events but have actively contributed to formation of collective memory, national consciousness and identity construction. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), also known as the Biafran War, is one of the most traumatic periods in the history of Nigeria. The symbolic landscape of the media representations, propaganda, and rival versions of legitimacy and victimhood was also a battlefield where the war was fought. It is in this discursive battlefield that literature is created as an alternative archive as well as a corrective medium.

The novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie revisits the Nigerian Civil War in a very human and postcolonial way. The novel, which was published in 2006, recreates the Biafran experience by using both personal and political stories. Through foregrounding of ordinary lives Ugwu, Olanna, Odenigbo and Richard the novel challenge the manner in which narratives of war are produced, circulated, and

internalized. Notably, Adichie is not just narrating the history; she is re-telling it, with a challenge to the mainstream state-centered narratives and placing emphasis on the framing of media in the molding of the popular imagination.

One of the theories that have been advanced by researchers in communication studies through the selection, emphasis, exclusion, and interpretation of the events is media framing theory, which argues that media do not merely report but do so in a manner that they frame the stories in a way that is interpretable, perceivable, and memorable. Frames define what is seen, what is left aside, and the meaning perceived by audiences. In the Nigerian Civil War, the federal Nigerian media and the Biafran propaganda machinery would formulate conflicting narratives: one based on national unity and the oppression of rebellions, and the other on genocide, marginalization, and the right to self-determination. The international media made this situation even more complex; through media, starving children of Biafra were exhibited as humanitarian displays, which resulted in putting Africa in the context of pity and tragedy.

Adichie critically interacts with these overlapping media representations in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The manuscript that is enclosed inside the novel. *The World Was Silent When We Died* is a metaphor of the politics of telling stories and being an author. The issue of story-teller comes to the fore of postcolonial discourse. This echoes the wider postcolonial theory which is expressed by postcolonial thinkers like Edward Said who questions the ways in which the imperial governments develop knowledge on colonized subjects, and Homi K. Bhabha who theorizes the hybridity and identity formation in colonized and postcolonial worlds. By reconstructing of narrative, Adichie challenges hegemonic frames and is engaged in the reclaiming of African historical voice.

The memory of the Civil War is entangled in building postcolonial identity in Nigeria. Past colonial experiences of ethnic fragmentation, administrative disintegration, and imbalanced development provided the foundations of post-independence tensions. The war raised the issue of belonging, citizenship, ethnicity and nationalism. Accordingly, the issue of postcolonial identity in Nigeria is unable to be detached of war discourses and their image. Literature turns into a place where silenced histories are re-articulated, trauma is negotiated, and the identity is reimaged.

Moreover, identity, as it was defined in the story by Adichie, is not defined as a given, unchanging entity but rather as something disputable and in flux. Characters maneuver ethnic pride, intellectual nationalism, diasporic alienation and moral ambiguity. It is through this complexity that the novel demonstrates how media framing in times of war affects collective memory and consequently, postcolonial self-understanding. The images of humanitarian crisis spread around the world in the Biafran crisis helped to create an international idea of Africa as a land of never-ending war and interdependence, which strengthens the problematic global frames which postcolonial authors attempt to break.

This work thus comes out at the crossroads of media studies and literary criticism. It tries to explore how *Half of a Yellow Sun* works as a story of war and as a meta commentary on politics of representation. The research will add to the current discussion on the power of narrative, historical memory, and identity formation in postcolonial Africa by interrogating media framing in the novel and contextualizing it with historical realities of the Nigerian Civil War.

Essentially, it is an acknowledgment in this study that wars can be fought by use of words and images besides weapons. By critically examining the media framing and war discourses in the novel of Adichie, one can get to see how literature reclaims agency in creating

postcolonial identity and how storytelling can be a form of resistance to silence and distortion.

Statement of the Problem

Although the Nigerian Civil War has been widely discussed in historical and media accounts, many narratives were shaped by political propaganda and foreign journalistic framing. This representation often reduced complex identities to simplify binaries (victim / aggressor, tribe / nation, rebel/state). There is limited interdisciplinary scholarship examining how Adichie interrogates media constructions within the novel and how those constructions shape postcolonial identity consciousness.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine media framing and its influence on the construction of Postcolonial identity in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The objectives of this study are:

1. to examine how media framing operates within the novel,
2. to analyze representations of war journalism and propaganda;
3. to investigate how frame narratives shape postcolonial identity and;
4. to explore literature as a counter-media discourse.

Research Questions

1. What framing devices (related), emphasis, (exclusive) are evident in the novel?
2. How did Adichie portray media coverage in Nigeria civil war?
3. How do these media frames influence perceptions of Biafra and Nigerian identity?
4. In what ways does the novel function as a counter-hegemonic narrative?

Theoretical Framework

a) Media Framing Theory

Media framing Theory explains how media selects certain aspects of reality and make them more salient in order to promote a particular interpretation of events. It focuses not just on what the media tells the public but how they tell it.

This concept was developed by scholars such as Erving Goffman (frame analysis), Robert Entman and Todd Giflin.

According to Robert Entman, framing involves selecting some aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in a communication text" (11).

Endman identifies four core framing functions:

1. Define problems
2. Diagnose causes
3. Make more judgments

4. Suggest remedies

His research has become the most cited operational model in communication research

Key concepts in media framing are:

- I. Selection media choose certain facts while ignoring others,
- II. Saliency: some aspects are emphasized repeatedly to shape perception;
- III. Exclusion: what is omitted can be as powerful as what is included;
- IV. Emphasis Headlines, images, tone, and word choice guide perception.

Types of Frames

- a) **Conflict Frame:** This type of frame focuses on disagreement between individuals or groups.
- b) **Human-interest Frame:** This type of frame lay emphasis on emotional and personal stories.
- c) **Economic Consequence Frame:** This type of frame focuses on and highlighting financial impact.
- d) **Morality Frame:** This is the type of frame that places issues on either religion or ethical context.

Difference between Framing Vs Agenda-Setting

- 1) Agenda-setting tells us what to think about while framing tells us how to think about it.
- 2) Framing focus on interpretation while agenda-setting focuses on saliency.
- 3) Framing is associated with Endman while Agenda-setting is associated with McCombs and Shaw.

Framing in War and Political Communication

In conflict reporting, one side may be framed as a free-done while the other side may be framed as “rebels” or terrorists.

Casualties may be framed as “Collateral damage” Human suffering may be selectively highlighted. Thus, framing influence’s public opinion, natural identity, and policy support.

b) Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory is a critical theory that examines the cultural, political, psychological and linguistics impact of colonialism and imperialism on formerly colonized societies. It interrogates how power, representation identity, and knowledge were shaped during colonial rulers and how those structures persist after independence.

Postcolonial theory emerged strongly in the late 20th century as scholars began challenging Eurocentric narratives that portrayed colonized peoples as inferior, primitive or voiceless.

Foundational thinkers in Postcolonial therapy are:

- a) **Edward Said:** In his *Orientalism* (1978), he argued that the west constructed the ‘Orient’ as backward and inferior to justify dominance. He introduced the idea of representation as power.
- b) **Homi K. Bhabha:** He developed concepts like hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence. He emphasized identity as unstable and negotiated.
- c) **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:** He explored marginalization and saliency voices.
- d) **Frank Fanon:** He wrote *The Wretched of the Earth*. He focused on psychological violence of colonialism and decolonization.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a qualitative research design specifically employed textual analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The qualitative approach is appropriate because the research seeks to interpret meaning, representation, ideology, and identity construction within narrative discourse.

This research is interdisciplinary, combining, literary analysis (close reading), media studies (framing analysis and post colonial critique)

Background to the Nigerian Civil War (1967- 1970)

The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran war, was fought between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the secessionist state of Biafra from July 6, 1967 to January 15, 1970. The conflict remains one of the most defining events in Nigeria’s post-independence history and continues to shape natural identity, politics and literature.

The root of the war can be traced to British colonial rule.

In 1914, the British amalgamated diverse ethnic nationalists into one political entity without full integration of their political systems.

Major regions that emerged were:

- 1) Northern Region (largely Hausa-Fulani)
- 2) Western Region (largely Yoruba) and;
- 3) Eastern Region (largely Igbo)

Colonial policies deepened regional divisions by encouraging indirect rule in the North, expanding western education in the south and creating uneven political and economic development.

When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, these structural imbalance remained unresolved.

Nigeria became independent on October 1, 1960. However, ethnic rivalry, electoral fraud and political corruption seen destabilized the first Republic.

In January 1966, a group of young military officers carried out a coup, assassinating key political leaders. The coup was perceived by the North as being Igbo-dominated, even though its motivation were officially nationalistic.

In July 1966, a counter-coup led by Northern officers resulted in the assassination of General Aguiyi-Ironsi and the rise of Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon as Head of State widespread anti-Igbo violence followed in Northern Nigeria, leading to the massacre of thousands of Igbos and mass displacement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Framing and War Narrative in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Scholarship on *Half of a Yellow Sun* has engaged questions of memory, trauma, nationalism, and postcolonial identity; however, fewer studies explicitly integrate Media Framing Theory with postcolonial discourse to interrogate how war narratives are constructed, circulated, and contested within the novel. This review synthesizes major critical positions relevant to media representation, war discourse, and narrative authority, establishing the theoretical grounding for this study.

Media Framing and the Construction of Meaning

Media Framing Theory offers a theoretical basis on which the narrative structure of war is analyzed. Robert Entman has defined framing as a process of choosing certain features of a perceived reality and rendering them more prominent in a communicating text (Entman 52). The formulation of Entman highlights that there is no neutral representation, but instead, some interpretations are favored at the expense of others. Within the framework of civil war reporting, framing defines the conflict as rebellion, genocide, humanitarian crisis, or national defense.

In the same manner, Erving Goffman claims that people have interpretive frameworks which structure the experience and direct perception (Goffman 1011). When applied to the discourse of war, these frameworks determine the ways the audiences comprehend violence and political legitimacy. The Nigerian Civil War is thus not only a history event but a mediated event as the result of ideological choice and narrative focus.

Furthering this argument, Stuart Hall believes that representation is creation of meaning via language (Hall 16). The theory of representation advanced by Hall reinforces the argument that media narratives do not reflect but actively construct war realities. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, radio broadcasts, foreign journalism and propaganda speeches depict the way in which language turns into a space of ideological conflict.

Postcolonial Representation and Politics of Voice

Theorists of postcolonialism offer a critical understanding of the functioning of power in the realms of representation. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said illustrates that the non-western societies were, in the past, created in discourse by the West as lesser entities that had to be interpreted by Europe (Said 6). This concept of representational supremacy applies to representations of Biafra in the international media, where African suffering is at risk of being organized through a Western humanitarian gaze.

To make the issue of voice even more confusing, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak infamously poses the question, Can the subaltern speak? Spivak argues that the marginalized groups are generally spoken on behalf of, but not heard (Spivak 271). This concern is staged in the novel of Adichie as Richard first tries to write the ultimate Biafran story. Eventual relocation of authorship to Ugwu can be symbolically interpreted as a reclaiming of narrative power, a critique of the colonial modes of mediation.

Homi K. Bhabha also adds to this discussion by defining the nation as a hybrid and ambivalent space where identities are negotiated instead of determined (Bhabha 23). The disintegration of the Nigerian national identity in the course of the war is in line with the theory of hybridity as characters are in the swing of ethnic allegiance and national affiliations.

War Narrative, Memory, and National Trauma

War literary scholars highlight the use of narrative in the formation of shared memory. Paul Ricoeur claims that identity is produced through narration, and he claims that narrative gives unity to the disjointed historical experience (Ricoeur 246). Here the novel by Adichie is a reconstruction of a traumatic national past as a narrative.

The effectiveness of critical commentary on Biafran memory also adds to the perennial importance of the war. According to Biodun Jeyifo, the Nigerian Civil War is one of the most significant historical cleavages of the country that affected the political and cultural consciousness well beyond 1970 (Jeyifo 45). This trauma is manifested in literary efforts to recover suppressed histories.

Furthermore, Chinua Achebe supports the significance of narrative agency, which states that until the marginalized people narrate their stories, history will continue to be distorted (The Novelist as Teacher 45). This insight made by Achebe closely aligns with the narrative approach of Adichie that disputes state records of the war.

Preexisting Scholarship *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

The interest in how Adichie deals with memory and historiography is often the subject of critical analysis of her novel. According to the scholars, the text is against unitary narratives as it offers various positions elite, subaltern, diasporic, and foreign. Nonetheless, these studies do not ignore narrative multiplicity, and the number of studies that take a closer look at media framing as a structural and thematic issue in the novel is smaller.

This work builds on the existing body of research by combining the Media Framing Theory with the Postcolonial Theory to illustrate that *Half of a Yellow Sun* does not just narrate the Nigerian Civil War but also critiques the processes by which the war was framed in both home and foreign countries. Placing the story of Adichie in the context of larger frames of framing, representation, and subaltern voice, this study adds to the interdisciplinary discourse between Literary Studies and Mass Communication.

Secession of Biafra

After the unsuccessful peace talks, the Aburi accord in Ghana, the tension worsened, on May 30, 1967, the Military Governor of the Eastern Region, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu proclaimed the Eastern Region as an independent Republic of Biafra.

Strong military operations, economic isolation of Biafra, devastating famine and humanitarian disasters, and high civilian casualties were rejected by the Federal Government under Yakubu Gowon. Pictures of Biafra children looking at each other spread all over the world attracting international humanitarian concern.

The involvement of foreign powers was indirect: Britain and the Soviet Union were on the side of the Federal Government, France and a part of the African states were on the side of Biafran.

The Nigerian civil war was not merely fought on the battle field, but it was fought via radio broadcasting, newspapers, pamphlets, diplomatic messaging and international journalism, communication was used as a strategic weapon to raise support, keep morale, influence opinion internationally, and legitimize political power.

Radio stations, regional broadcasting services, national and regional newspapers were government controlled in Nigeria before the civil war.

Nevertheless, the ownership of media was mainly regional and publicly adjacent to each other, which strengthened the ethnic polarization. With the increase in tension following the 1966 coups, media rhetoric became more pronounced, and distrust and fear were intensified.

The strongest communication tool in the conflict was radio since it appealed to both literate and the non-literate. It spread rapidly across territories and it could be utilized to make propaganda and morale boosts.

On the side of the Federal Government used radio to portray the war as a “Police acting rather than full-scale war. They radioed to highlight the unity of the nation and make the secession of Biafra appear rebellious.

Biafran set up Radio Biafra which was utilized to put the war in perspective as genocide against Igbo, organize emotional assassination, stimulating international sympathy and advanced the legality of Biafra as an autonomous state.

Framing Media and *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Not just a historical novel of the Nigerian civil war, *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Adichie is also an argumentative work on the politics of media representation, narrative power and the politics of war narration. The novel dramatizes the way wars are framed and by whom to frame wars, and the effects of that framing on postcolonial identity and world perception.

The Nigerian civil war in the novel is never presented as a neutral event. Instead, it appears through radio broadcasts, newspaper reporter, propaganda, foreign journalism and personal diaries and manuscripts.

Each medium offers a different version of reality. Through this multiplicity, Adichie demonstrates that war is not only fought militarily but narratively.

The Role of Richard’ the Foreign Correspondent

Richard, the English writer in the novel, embodies the tension between representation and appropriation.

Initially, he attempts to write the definitive book of Biafra but his position as an outsider complicates his authority, Adichie’s subtly critiques the western gaze, the power of foreign journalism and the commodification of African suffering.

Ultimately, the novel suggests that war narrative must belong to those who lived it.

The final twist – that Ugwu writes the war book – reclaims narrative authority from colonial mediation. International media within the novel focus heavily on starvation, malnourished children and emotional sufferings.

While this generates sympathy, it also reduces the war to images of helplessness, reinforcing stereotypical portrayals of Africa as perpetually traffic.

Adichie exposes the limits of humanitarian framing by showing the intellectual, political, and cultural dimensions of Biafra society that such coverage ignores.

Narrative Structure as Counter-Frame

The novel's shifting perspectives (Ugwu, Olanna and Richard) functions as a structured reframing techniques instead of a single alternatives voice, Adichie presents elite intellectual viewpoint on the Odenigbo's circle Adichie also presented a female experiential viewpoint through Olanna. The rural/subaltern viewpoint by Ugwu and foreign observer viewpoint through Richard.

This multi-perspective narratives resists simplicity media binaries.

Media framing often involves omission. In the novel, Federal atrocities are underreported, international politics behind the war are simplified and ethnic tensions are strategically emphasized.

War Narrative and Postcolonial Identity

Through competing frames, the novel interrogates; what it means to be a Nigerian; what it means to be a Biafran and whether colonial borders can sustain national identity.

The war narrative becomes a site of identity negotiation. Media framing influences how individuals understand themselves with the postcolonial nation.

According to Paul Ricoeur on narrative identity: "Narrative identity is constituted by the stories we tell about ourselves" (Ricoeur, 14).

The above assertion supports that war memory shapes postcolonial identity.

Literature as a Corrective Media in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Literature functions not merely as a storytelling but as corrective media – a counter-discursive space that challenges wartime propaganda, international misrepresentation and official historical silence about the Nigerian civil war. Adichie's novel rewrites mediated narratives by restoring complexity, inferiority and indigenes voice to conflict often simplified by state rhetoric and global humanitarian framing.

Throughout the war, the Federal Military Government frames the conflict as a "Police action" designed to preserve national unity. This euphemistic framing minimizes the scale of violence and obscures civilian suffering.

Adichie counters this though detailed depiction of bombings, refugees' displacement, starvation and emotional drama.

For example, scenes of aerial raids and sudden dislocation directly undermines sanitized official terminology. The narrative does not abstract violence; it embodies it through Olanna's psychological breakdown after witnessing massacre through Ugwu's forced conscription. The lived experiences of war becomes a corrective to political language.

Thus, this novel exposes how state discourse manipulates terminology to shape perception, while literature restores experiential truth.

Language as Resistance

The recurring motif of silence in the novel reflects global indifference to African suffering. The manuscript titled: *The World War Silent When we Died* emphasizes; international political apathy, selective humanitarian intervention and strategic global alliances. By narrating their silence, Adichie transforms absence into testimony. Literature speaks where diplomacy failed.

Memory Against Erasure

Post-war Nigeria promoted the slogan "No Victor, no Vanquished", encouraging national reconciliation but also collective amnesia. Public discourse often avoided deep interrogation of the war.

The novel resists the erasure by naming atrocities, depicting hunger vividly, recording ethnic tensions honesty and preserving memory through fiction. In this way, literature becomes an archive of suppressed history.

CONCLUSION

Adichie, though *Half of Yellow Sun* literature function as counter propaganda, counter-humanitarian simplification, counter-colonial narration and counter-natural amnesia. Adichie demonstrates that story telling is political power. By relocating authorship to Ugwu and embedding multiple perspective, the novel reclaims nation sovereignty over the Nigerian civil war.

Thus, literature operates as corrective media, not by denying and ethically reworking them.

FINDINGS

Through textual and discourse analysis of the novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, using media framing and postcolonial theories, findings are presented as follows:

1. The war is constructed through competing frames: The study finds that the Nigerian civil war in the novel is not presented as a single historical truth but as a contest of narratives.

2. Two dominant frames emerge; Federal frown and Biafran frame.
3. Three competing frames align with Robert Entman's four framing functions, problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and suggested remedy. The novel demonstrates that war meaning is shaped by narrative emphasis rather than objective neutrality.
4. International media Reduce complexity to humanitarian spectacle: The analysis reveals that foreign media coverage within the novel prioritizes frame imagery and starving children.
5. While this generates sympathy, it oversimplifies political crisis; reinforces stereotypes of African helplessness and marginalizes intellectual and ideological dimensions of Biafra.
6. Multi perspective structure undermines propaganda simplification unlike propaganda, which relies on singular ideological narrations, the novel employs multiple focalizations.
7. This structure reveals contradictions in perception, prevent moral absolutism and complicates binary thinking(Hero /Villain)
8. Literature corrects media distortion not by inversion but by ethical complexity.

Contributions to Knowledge

- 1) This research bridges literacy studies and mass communication.
- 2) It explains civil war discourse beyond documentation

- 3) It demonstrates fiction as media criticism and;
- 4) It contributes to scholarship on narrative power in post-colonial societies.

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