

DECOLONIZING TRAUMA THEORY IN ADICHIE'S *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN* AND WIWA'S *SOZABOY***PRASHANT V. TAKEY^{1*} AND DR. DURGESH RAVANDE²**¹Asst. Prof. Dept. of English, D. B. College, Bhokar. Affiliated to S.R.T.M. University, Nanded (MS) India.

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²Associate Prof. & Research Supervisor, Dept. of English, K.K.M. College, Manwat, Dist. Parbhani (MS) India.**ABSTRACT:**

The narration of a story is important, but its reception is much more important. The way fictional narratives depicting events related to the problematic histories of the third-world countries are received, studied, and theorised makes a significant difference. Half of a Yellow Sun (2006) by Chimamanda Adichie and Sozaboy (1985) by Ken Saro Wiwa fictionalise the horrific events of the Biafran conflict (1967-1970). Adichie gives the account of the extraordinary war sufferings from many perspectives. Sozaboy, on the other hand, is a first-person autobiographical account of the protagonist Mene, a Biafran child soldier. The Caruthian trauma hypothesis is based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. It deals with particular character's fundamentally pathological trauma. In the story, it focuses on individual recovery. It does not present a persuasive argument for social healing. Several critics including those involved in the StiN project have reconsidered trauma theory in postcolonial contexts. This study assumes that analysing these narratives of Nigeria's devastating civil war using a single paradigm of classical Caruthian trauma theory is insufficient. It compromises Adichie's postcolonial rehistoricizing as well as Wiwa's advocacy against the futility of war and ethnic nationalism. In the light of postcolonial setting of these novels, this study aims to decolonize trauma theory. It progresses from individual and pathological aspects of trauma to political and social consequences of traumatic sufferings.

Key Words: Biafran War, Decolonising, Postcolonial, Pathological, Rehistoricizing, Trauma**Introduction:**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of the Yellow Sun* (2006) is her masterpiece. It is a fictionalised account of the tragic history of the Biafran war (Nigeria's civil war from 1967 to 1970). This novel is credited with bringing this forgotten conflict to the attention of the world. The story was told in the third person from the perspectives of three Biafran characters. Olana, a professor at Nsukka University, Ugwu, the houseboy of Olana's revolutionary lover professor Odenigbo, and Richard, a British journalist who has become an ardent supporter of Biafra. Ken Saro Wiwa's *Sozaboy: a Novel in Rotten English* is the other novel chosen for this study. It tells the story of a child soldier (*Sozaboy*) and his hopes for the glory of a soldier's life and his ultimate disillusionment with the war effort.



The idea of decolonizing trauma studies is tackled in a special issue of the journal *Studies in the Novel* (Spring 2008). The contributors to this project have revisited literary trauma theory to incorporate these new ideas into postcolonial studies. We argue that the trauma paradigm is inappropriate to address the distress of non-Western others because of its Eurocentric foundation and bias, and therefore attempt to decolonise trauma in the selected novels.

In *Half of the Yellow Sun* the two sections entitled ‘the Early Sixties’ portray the vigour of the newly independent Nigerian life on Nsukka campus, the intellectual discussions in joyful parties at Odenigbo’s house, his disgust for British colonisers and their Eurocentric neo-colonial interests in Nigeria. Olana and Kainene’s distancing from their corrupt and rich parents in pursuit of individual identity. The aspirations Ugwu has about a new life in Nsukka. Richard’s dispassionate quest of the Ibo-Ukwu art is portrayed in detail. Olana remembers how the astute radicalism of Odenigbo attracted her towards him. It was two years before they were the strangers standing in a queue to buy tickets at a University theatre. The ticket seller called a white man from behind and offered him ticket. Olana noticed the man shouting at the ticket seller. ‘You miserable ignorant’, You see a white person and he looks better than your own people? You must apologize to everybody in this queue. Right now.’ (HYS 29) The vigour of Nigerian life may be seen in the pre-war days in Nsukka. Several black professors used to congregate at Odenigbo's home to take part in a socialisation programme he had initiated for African professors at Nsukka University, which was dominated by Western professors.

The turbulent war years are described in detail in two sections entitled as ‘the Late Sixties’. The coup led by the Ibo leader, the counter coup and massacre of Ibo people in the North and South-west Nigeria, migration of Ibo minority from the North and South-West states of Nigeria to the Ibo heartland, session of six eastern states from the Nigerian federation, proclamation of the new independent state of Biafra, the catastrophic war that followed, blockade of Biafra, alienation, refugee predicament, starvation, and surrender by Biafra. As Novak observes “the novel belongs to the genre of contemporary trauma fiction because of its focus on the massacres of Ibo, ensuing civil war, and the deaths and starvation of a million or more Nigerians and because of its exploration of the difficulty of recounting and voicing trauma.” (33) Adichie succeeds in documenting the traumatic history of the war without vivid descriptions of the violence on war fronts. She presents her protagonists as the victims engulfed by atrocities of the war. These civilian victim survivors, their recurring traumatic memory, the impediments in addressing it, and their inability to assert identity have become the central issues in the narrative.

Massacres and mass migration of Ibo people from northern and south-west Nigeria occurred in the late 1960s. Madu, a Nigerian army Ibo officer, manages to flee. He informs Kainene. ‘So many of us are gone’ he said. ‘So many solid good men – Udodi, Iloputaife, Okunweze, Okafor – and these were men who believed in Nigeria and didn’t care for tribe.’ (HYS 141) As a result, the army became polarised, Northern officers assumed command, and the Ibo were massacred. At Odenigbo's house in

Nsukka, the news of the coup changes the atmosphere. Odenigbo is warned by Miss Adebayo. ‘There is a trouble in the north.’ and his mouth went dry because Miss Adebayo was not an alarmist and whatever was happening in the North had to be serious and Olana was in Kano.’ (HYS 142) Odenigbo was unable to comprehend what was going on. His living room's pleasure is no longer there. Even before the real event happens to them or in their presence, the trauma has reached them. The situation is described in this way “The conversations no longer ended in reassuring laughter, and the living room often seemed closed with uncertainties, with unfinished knowledge, they all knew something would happen and yet did not know what.” (HYS 142) The radio news as well as the stories, that people brought back from the north infected Odenigbo and his visitors with a type of neurosis.

When the crowd arrived at Olana's former Hausa lover Mohammed's house in Kano, they were searching for any Ibo who could be slain. Mohammed took her to the train station through safe routs, but she insisted on going to look for her Uncle's family. The house had been set on fire. Her uncle and aunt's mangled bodies were lying around the balcony. She was traumatised by the incident. “Olana felt watery queasiness in her bowels before the numbness spread over her and stopped at her feet, Mohammed was dragging, pulling her, his grasp was hurting her arms.” (HYS 147) She remained silent in the face of this traumatic occurrence. He told her to hide her face on the way to the train station, and she silently followed his orders. In her book *Unclaimed Experiences* Caruth based her conceptualization of trauma on the definition by Figley, she considered it as the most general definition, according to him “trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic event in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearances of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. “Lana has been affected by this traumatic encounter. Olana was unable to respond to her trauma and is now speechless. She suffers hallucinations as she is unable to narrate it.

The trauma stuck to Olana after her return to Nsukka. ‘Olana’s dark swoops began the day she came back from Kano, the day her legs failed. Her legs were fine when she climbed down the train.’ (HYS 156) Odenigbo looked after her. Soon after, she was able to walk again. But, for the most part, she was silent. Olana's silence resumed when Odenigbo informed her that they were leaving Abba for Umuahia. ‘Olana had come home in a strange silence. She spoke melancholically. She did not laugh.’ (HYS 194) The melancholy brought on with a single catastrophic occurrence marks this sort of literary trauma.

In Caruthian trauma theory, speechlessness and melancholia are the fundamental pathological manifestations of individual trauma. At Umuohia, Odenigbo's demeanour reflects the same melancholy. He has started drinking the local wine. Here he kept generally quiet, unlike in Nsukka, where they used to have heated discussions while drinking in the living room. This silence is not the result of a single horrific incident; rather it is the result of the context of losing the Biafran cause. Roger Lukhurst in his book *The Trauma Question* outlines the depoliticizing tendencies inherent in trauma theory by pointing to ‘it’s shocking failure to address atrocity,

genocide and war. ‘Thus, by attaching melancholy and speechlessness to the victim, trauma theory depoliticizes and dehistoricizes their pain.

The aim of trauma theory has always been to have an ethical response to other people's suffering. Sonya Alexander summarises the origin of Trauma theory as:

The field of trauma studies emerged in the early 1990s as an attempt to construct an ethical response to forms of human suffering and their cultural and artistic representation. Born out of the confluence between deconstructive and psychoanalytic criticism and the study of Holocaust literature, from its outset trauma studies mission was to bear witness to traumatic histories in such a way as to attend to the suffering of other.” (500)

Trauma theory's beginnings imply a Eurocentric foundation; its ethical engagement appears to be limited to Western sufferings. There is a need to reconstruct a postcolonial trauma theory in contexts dealing with the sufferings of the non-Western other. This theory has been criticized by postcolonial critics. According to them, trauma theory ignores the historical context of what is lost under the cover of incomprehension and inability to confront the trauma as well as the abrupt onset of a stressor. In the postcolonial contexts, the trauma theory is being reconsidered from pathological to political and from melancholic to recuperative dimensions of traumatic experience.

In his book *'The World Was Silent When We Died'* Ugwu claims that Britain was responsible for this silence. Nigeria was formed by the arms and advice that Britain provided. ‘In the United States, Biafra was ‘under Britain’s sphere of interest’ In Canada the prime minister quipped ‘Where is Biafra?’ (HYS 258) Despite the fact that the media was flooded with information about Biafra, sovereign countries had no idea where she was or what was happening to her. Amy Novak observes “Unlike Trauma theory’s formulation, the position of impossibility is not in the others. The difficulty of communicating lies in the addressee, who cannot hear.” (41) Thus, the incapacity is not always due to the addresser, but also to the addressee, who chooses not to hear or understand. This shows that the perpetrators silenced the victims by ignoring them. Victims are pushed to the margins. The limiting focus of trauma theory on non-Western histories has been highlighted by Stef Craps and Gert Buelens.

“Instead of promoting solidarity between different cultures, trauma studies risks producing the very opposite effect as a result of this one sided focus: by ignoring or by marginalizing non-Western traumatic events and histories of non-Western theoretical work, trauma studies may actually assist in the perpetuation of Eurocentric views and structures that maintain or widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world.” (2)

Critics argue that trauma theory's one-sided approach hinders the cross-cultural engagement that the theory envisions. As a result, the mainstream model of trauma theory is insufficient for interpreting postcolonial trauma novels. The ethical engagement with other people's suffering that trauma theory proposes is challenging. The transmissible, trans-generational aspect of trauma underpins this concept of ethical participation. In their book *Testimony*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub offer the reader

the position of a ‘secondary witness’ to whom the trauma is transformed as if they were the victim survivor. According to Laub this secondary witness “is a party to the creation of knowledge de novo, the testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is so to speak, a ‘blank screen’ on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.” (57) This sort of trauma witnessing ensures an ethical response to others' suffering. However, the prejudiced views of Western journalists in Adichie's work reveal that their conscience was not a ‘blank screen,’ but the conventional image of a barbaric Africa was still imprinted on it. The tragedy in Biafra was reported in the Western press via these lenses. This is how the media has portrayed the Biafran situation.

“The international press was simply saturated with stories of violence from Africa, and this one was particularly bland and pedantic, the deputy editor wrote, but perhaps Richard could do a piece on the human angle? Did they mutter any tribal incantations while they did the killings? For example? Did they eat body parts like they eat in Congo? Was there a way of trying truly to understand the minds of these people? (HYS 167)

The trauma of the African other is not transmitted through such a witness. Though Cathy Caruth says that “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures”, the advocates of a reconstructed trauma theory question the transmissibility of trauma. On the role of western media Mustafa Kharona objects “Instead of chronicling the particularities of the starvation, their focus is on the visual representations deemed sufficient to satisfy the western readers’ fascination with images concentrating on African savagery” (301) They have commoditised the victim's victimhood rather than empathising with them. In Biafra's neo-colonial context, trauma theory's ethical connection with other people's suffering appears to be a myth. The authors convey the experience of suffering with historical realism; this historical context is not addressed by trauma theory.

Ken Saro Wiwa's *Sozaboyis* a novel that can be read as an anti-war novel. It stands out from the vast canon of Biafran war fiction. Adichie and other Ibo writers have depicted their protagonists fervently seeking Biafran glory. Unlike them, Wiwa never used phrases like Biafra, Hausa, vandals, in his story. He utilises battle songs sparingly, makes no mention of external countries' involvement in fuelling the war, and avoids utilising actual geographical names. By employing a little educated child soldier as the narrator, he has brought impartiality to his account. Wiwa is a member of the Ogini ethnic group, which lives in the oil-rich Niger Delta region and is part of the Biafran enclave. He has been a close observer of the war, crossing the borders he served as civil administrator of Bonny state for the federal administration during the war time.

The protagonist Mene, the sozaboy (army boy), is his widowed mother's sole child, educated to sixth grade and employed as an apprentice Lorry driver. He is constantly thinking about getting his driving licence, which will serve as his passport to prosperity. Another worry was marrying Anges, the most attractive girl in his village, who had recently returned from Lagos. Eventually he married Anges and began a happy life with her and his mother.

On the other side, rumours of an impending battle reached their town of Dukana. Until then, it had not been a severe concern for Dukana. The new administration of soldiers and police, which promised freedom and prosperity, has begun to demand food and money for the soldiers. Mene has been asked to join the military by the greedy Chief Birabee, the outspoken and lame Duzia, his friend Bom, and the former soldier Zaza on several occasions. It will assist in reducing the government's continuous demands and increasing Dukana's glory. Anges has already indicated that she wants her spouse to be tough like a soldier so that he can defend her in a crisis. Mene is forced to become a soldier in order to accomplish the heroism that had been waiting for him.

Mene's participation in the conflict highlights the troops' plight and the futility of war. The Sozaboy has to deal with a lot of difficulties. Most of the symptoms of trauma, as described in the formulations of trauma theory, are present in his autobiographical tale, such as speechless terror, melancholia, bewilderment, and so on.

The novice soldiers were assigned to the front after a little training with dummy guns of sticks. Mene was finally pleased to have become a proper soldier with a uniform and a gun. The enemy's handkerchief man routinely visits the boys and offers them wine for four days. The boys are unconcerned about him. They name him Manmustwak. He informs them that their captain enjoys plenty of fine food and drink. Mene and his fellow soldiers were working hard with empty bellies. So, on Bullet's orders they peered in the captain's tent. "When we got there, I see plenty of bottles of drink plenty of cigar. He told me that when we went to the soza captaintent. And the soza captain was sleeping well well with one young girl". (*Sozaboy* 100) The drinks were well received by the soldiers. The next day all of the soldiers were transported to Kampala prison by the captain. He thrashes them mercilessly. He urinates into a bottle and hands it to Bullet to drink. Internal colonialism is exemplified here. Bullet responds by gunning down the captain. In the absence of the experienced commander, the enemy planes destruct their camp the next day. The most of the youngsters were slain, including Bullet, but Mene survived.

Mene flees from the army, is injured in the forest, and eventually ends up in the opposition camp. He is taken aback to find Manmustwak, the guy responsible for the slaughter of his fellow troops, treating and caring for him at a hospital. Mene is undecided about whether to call him a friend or an opponent. They discover that he is a soldier, an enemy soldier, after he recovers from his illness. He is punished as a result of his deception. They would have killed him if it hadn't been for his driving talents. He is unable to communicate his trauma because of the severity of the punishment.

"Immediately Manmustwak took me away and he marched me to one part of the field. Left, right, left, right, left, right, left. Only god can tell me what Manmustwak did to me that day. By the time he has finished flogging me with horsewhip or koboko my body was covered with blood. I began to pray to die...I began ask myself why I disobeyed my mama and went to join the army". (*Sozaboy*123, 124)

He is disillusioned by the war effort. He dismisses the conflict as futile. He seizes the opportunity to drive to Dukana in quest of his mother and Anges. When he arrives at Dukana, he discovers town to be virtually deserted. He is rendered speechless. “Oh, god of mercy when I see my hometown Dukana, I could not talk.” (*Sozaboy* 129) This speechlessness and the inability to narrate is the characteristic of trauma theory. Only Duzia and Bom were there sheltering in the fields. When he inquires about his mother and Anges, both of them give him a different account of what happened. It simply added to his perplexity. Mene has changed into a different boy, according to Chijioke:

From the plot of this novel, the reader is made to see an attempt by Saro-Wiwa to show the psychobiological and physical effects of the civil war on Mene and his people. Mene and the people of Dukana, represent the Ogoni who have according to Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni activists have been subjected to the status of “subjects” and exploited by the majority ethnic groups in Nigeria, oil multinationals and the Nigerian state itself. (21)

Finding his mother and Anges has now become his life's purpose. On his trip to Pitwaka, the likely destination for Anges, he conveys his frustration with the conflict and its futility thus, “As you know, I call all of them sozas now because I have seen that they are all two and two pence. I will not allow anybody to tell me that this is enemy and the other one is not enemy. They are all doing the same thing and as Manmustwak and Tam Papa used to say, “war is war.” (*Sozaboy* 139) In instances where his Biafran army trainers or his friend/enemy Manmustwak failed to explain or define it adequately, they utilised the roundabout term ‘war is war’ to mask the conflict's inhumane, cunning, and unethical aspects. Wiwa isn't blaming one side or another. He is blaming the war itself. He is not a partisan either of the warring parties because he is a disinterested minority. Wiwa's novel is notable for its lack of interest in the war effort and disenchantment with military conflicts. A single touchstone of trauma theory is insufficient to interpret the socio-political context of this disillusionment.

Conclusion:

The repetition of successive traumatic occurrences in these war narratives also demonstrates the all encompassing, pervasive nature of trauma in the postcolonial context. This approach to war trauma undermines the basic tenet of trauma theory, which describes a traumatic experience as ‘an extraordinary and sudden event.’ It becomes clear that viewing these war narratives through the lens of a single trauma theory paradigm ignores the historical and social context of the sufferings the characters face throughout the novels. Literary trauma theory's depoliticizing and marginalising tendencies. These works, like the majority of postcolonial fiction, rely on historical realism, yet the trauma paradigm has blind spots for this historical context. The decolonised trauma theory must take into account socio-political aspects in the conflict. We emphasise the necessity to reconsider this model of literary trauma theory for a more fruitful engagement with postcolonial trauma novels and recommend a multidisciplinary approach appropriate for postcolonial studies.



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