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Trauma, Stereotypes and Ethnic Prejudice in Selected Nigerian Civil War Plays

¹Aiyetoro, M.B., & ²Owhorodu, V.C.

¹Department of English, University of Ibadan, Oyo State.

²Department of General Studies, Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Port Harcourt.

*Corresponding author email: vcowhorodu@gmail.com

Abstract

The Nigerian Civil War has inspired numerous creative and critical works. However, the impact of stereotypical representations among the major ethnic groups involved in the conflict remains under-researched. This paper examines two Nigerian dramatic texts, *For Love of Biafra* by Amanda Adichie and *Whispers of the Gods* by Perp' St. Remy Asiegbu, through the lenses of stereotype and Tajfel and Turner's theory of social categorisation. The study aims to expose how negative ethnic stereotypes intensified tensions between the Igbo and Hausa/Fulani communities before, during and after the war. This investigation is significant in light of the ongoing strained relations and polarised political discourses between these groups in post-war Nigeria—manifestations of unresolved transgenerational trauma and the looming threat of renewed violence driven by ethnic stereotypes transmitted through oral traditions, literature and digital media. The selected texts reveal that the same prejudices that fueled the conflict remain deeply entrenched in Nigerian society. By analysing selected characters, the paper argues that engaging with counter-stereotypical figures in literature can challenge and reshape prejudiced perceptions, fostering a more inclusive national consciousness and supporting nation-building. Consequently, this study underscores the urgent need for advocacy efforts that confront the dangers of ethnic stereotyping.

Keywords: Ethnic Stereotypes, Nigerian Civil War, Transgenerational Trauma, Social Categorization Theory, Igbo-Hausa/Fulani Relations

Introduction

War is a recurring theme in much of African national literature. Its prominence across various literary traditions underscores the deep connection between literature and the socio-political and economic forces that shape society. Literature does not evolve in a vacuum; it is influenced, directed, and often given its thematic focus by prevailing societal realities. For instance, the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, has served as a powerful foundation for literary imagination (Machiko 60). It is, therefore, not surprising that war continues to be a dominant theme in African literature. African writers, often described as writers of commitment (Nyamndi 571; Jide & Nelson 71; Odhiambo et al. 84; Amadi 35), have taken up the task of bearing witness to the realities of war, exploring its causes, the lived experiences during wartime, its far-reaching effects, and the utilitarian value of war literature in collective memory and healing, among others (Owhorodu 2).

This study offers a critical analysis of ethnic stereotypes, focusing not only on the harmful imagery perpetuated through stereotyping but also on the complex relational dynamics of power and conflict that such social processes sustain. It also considers the emotional and psychological frameworks that stereotypes generate and reinforce. Our attention is specifically directed at the Hausa/Fulani and Igbo, two of Nigeria's three major ethnic groups (the third being the Yoruba), because interactions between these groups offer a telling lens through which to assess the nature and trajectory of interethnic relations in Nigeria. Despite the fact that the civil war ended more than five decades ago, negative perceptions between Hausa/Fulani and Igbo persist. Many in southern Nigeria still view northerners, especially those of Hausa and Fulani descent, as violent, uncivilised, primitive, dirty, and the primary instigators of farmer-herder conflicts. In turn, many northerners stereotype the Igbo as avaricious, excessively money-driven, and domineering.

Stereotypes often fuel violence and discriminatory behaviours. In the post-war era, Igbo–Hausa/Fulani relations have been further strained by ethnic propaganda and mutual stereotyping. This has led to episodes of violent conflict, gross human rights violations, and entrenched mutual suspicion and hostility. Against this backdrop, this paper explores Amanda Adichie’s *For Love of Biafra* (henceforth as *FLOB*) and Perp’ St. Remy Asiegbu’s *Whispers of the Gods* (henceforth as *WOTG*) to examine the role of ethnic stereotyping in shaping Igbo–Hausa/Fulani relations before, during, and after the civil war. We argue that negative stereotyping and ethnic labelling are often at the root of destructive interethnic relationships, which undermine peace, unity and the possibilities for progressive nation-building.

Theoretical Framework

Social Categorisation Theory (SCT), a component of Social Identity Theory (SIT), was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979. Tajfel and Turner argue that due to our limited cognitive capacity to process the complexities of the social world, we tend to simplify our understanding by categorising people into groups, enabling us navigate social environments more efficiently and informing our interactions with others. As they explain, “Social categorisations are conceived here as cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of social action” (Tajfel & Turner 40).

Social categorisation involves attributing expectations, emotions and behavioural scripts to individuals based on the social groups to which they appear to belong. When such stereotypes are shared widely within a group, they become a framework through which group members interpret, justify and reinforce their attitudes and behaviours toward others (Tajfel 146). This theory provides a useful framework for analysing the development and persistence of ethnic stereotypes, particularly in conflict-prone or post-conflict societies. In this study, the theory offers insight into how stereotyping between the Igbo and Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups continue to shape interethnic relations and national discourse long after the Nigerian Civil War.

Literature Review

A Brief Background to the War and Literary Responses

Before delving into the selected texts, it is essential to situate the discussion within its historical context. Numerous scholars have examined both the remote and immediate causes of the Nigerian Civil War (Amuta 68–72; Emenyonu xi–xiv; Nwankwo 1–14; Okuyade 128–136; Uko 49–59; Hawley 15–26; Bernard & Preye 81–89; and Dalley 369–392). A recurring theme in their analyses is that, despite various constitutional frameworks and amendments made between 1914 and 1960 to unify over two hundred culturally and linguistically distinct ethnic groups, Nigeria remained deeply fragmented along ethnic and regional lines. The seeds of ethnic politics were sown during the pre-independence era, took root in the First Republic, and continued into the Third and Fourth Republics (Uwaifo 6). This is evidenced by the fact that the major political parties in the pre-independence period had distinct regional and ethnic leanings: the Action Congress, dominant in the West, was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo (a Yoruba); the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), strong in the East, was led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (an Igbo); and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), led by Sir Ahmadu Bello (a Fulani), held sway in the North.

Key triggers of the civil war include corruption in the corridors of power, electoral malpractices, and the January 1966 coup spearheaded by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu (an Igbo officer), in which mainly northern and western political leaders were assassinated. This was followed by a retaliatory counter-coup on July 29, 1966, staged by northern officers. The federal government’s failure to adequately address the widespread killings of Igbos in the North further inflamed tensions, eventually leading to the declaration of the Sovereign State of Biafra by Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. These events collectively culminated in the Nigerian Civil War. Creative responses to the Nigerian Civil War are abundant and have attracted diverse scholarly attention. Ugochukwu, for instance, explores how the war impacted daily life and relationships, particularly among the Igbo, and how the trauma of war is reflected in literature. He highlights how creative writers provide insider perspectives on the human cost of the conflict, revealing how ordinary citizens, especially women, struggled to survive amid air raids, family breakdowns, rape, and senseless killings (246). These female characters often display a mix of fragility and resilience in their efforts to preserve life and dignity.

Similarly, Gomba critiques the tendency in Biafran narratives to externalise blame for the region’s failure. In his reading of I.N.C. Aniebo’s *Rearguard Actions*, Gomba highlights internal shortcomings within the Biafran leadership, including misuse of power, egoism, and an aversion to constructive criticism. He contends that Biafra, rather than representing a break from Nigeria’s dysfunction, replicated many of its political ills (280). This critique aligns with Nadaswaran’s analysis of Flora Nwapa’s *Never Again*, which exposes the prevalence of cronyism, corruption, greed, and nepotism in both Nigerian and Biafran systems (48). Okuyade argues that ethnic identity

has historically been used by Nigeria's various groups to assert political and economic power within an imbalanced federation (20). After the civil war, this trend continued, with ethnic divisions fueling discontent over unequal access to resources and power. Although Okuyade focuses primarily on the didactic role of war poetry as a cultural repository and warning mechanism, he does not delve deeply into the issue of ethnic stereotyping. While female-authored war literature has received increased attention in recent years, Nadaswaran notes that more needs to be done. She critiques male-authored war narratives for often relegating women to the margins, portraying them as passive, immoral, or materialistic (50). Her research challenges these representations by highlighting female characters who display courage, patriotism, and a commitment to preserving life and peace. Drawing on trauma theory, De Mey examines how Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* merges literature, history, and psychological healing. The critic highlights the novel's therapeutic and memorial function, emphasising Adichie's narrative strategy, three alternating narrators, to blur the lines between personal memory and historical record (50-54).

Scholars such as Nwanyanwu and Anasiudu stress that the impact of war extends beyond physical injury, citing psychological trauma and emotional displacement as significant legacies (27). Hodges' re-reading of *Half of a Yellow Sun* invites reflection on how Biafran War literature, while seeking closure, continues to evolve as a genre concerned with memory, identity, and unresolved trauma (1). In the same vein, Oworodu asserts that war literature serves utilitarian purposes—demystifying war, promoting peace, and addressing trauma (2). Zahoor's analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun* interprets the novel's open-ended conclusion as a literary technique that reflects both personal and national trauma. He argues that Adichie's refusal to provide a neat resolution foregrounds the continued need for postcolonial interrogation and negotiation in a country still grappling with instability (65-66). Despite this growing body of literature, there is a noticeable gap in scholarly focus on how ethnic stereotyping contributed to the war and continues to undermine national cohesion. In post-civil war Nigeria, relations between the Igbo and Hausa/Fulani, along with related political discourses, remain fraught—suggestive of a looming resurgence of mass violence driven by deeply rooted stereotypes perpetuated through oral, written and digital means. Therefore, this study advocates for legislative and social interventions to counteract the dangerous spread of ethnic stereotypes. The selected dramatic texts engage in a critical dialogue that reveals the persistence of the same ethnic prejudices that fueled the war. Over five decades later, these biases still thrive, posing a significant obstacle to intentional and sustainable nation-building.

Understanding Stereotypes and the Implications of Stereotyping

Greenwald and Banaji define stereotypes as a socially shared set of ideas or beliefs about the characteristics attributed to members of a particular social category (14). Similarly, Helkama et al. describe stereotypes as generalised depictions of social groups that overlook the diversity and individuality of their members (387). This implies that individuals who are stereotyped are not seen as distinct personalities but are instead reduced to a set of uniform traits associated with their group identity. Stereotypes can thus be understood as rigid, one-sided projections or prescriptive assumptions about others, based on factors such as biology, nationality, sexual orientation, age or ethnicity, which reinforce unequal social relations. By their very nature, stereotypes reduce individuals to singular attributes or tendencies, often in ways that demean or constrain them.

These definitions highlight that stereotyping functions as a divisive social mechanism. It creates an "us versus them" dynamic that separates the stereotyped from those who perpetuate stereotypes, allowing little room for individuality or deviation from group norms. As Nwagbara notes, stereotypes distort reality, foster exclusion and entrench discrimination (22). While stereotypes are often wielded by those in positions of power, it is also possible for less dominant groups to stereotype those in authority, an act that is usually motivated by resentment, disillusionment or perceived historical injustice. Ironically, stereotypes often reveal more about the insecurities, biases and vulnerabilities of those who project them than about those being stereotyped. Importantly, stereotypes are not absolute; they are socially constructed, relative and context-dependent. No ethnic group possesses a monopoly on negative traits such as violence, corruption, greed or fanaticism, traits that are often unevenly and unjustly attributed to entire populations. In a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria, ethnic stereotypes have become potent tools in the hands of manipulative political actors who weaponise them to distract from issues of governance, accountability and social justice. By fueling inter-ethnic suspicion, these actors shift public attention away from systemic failures and encourage citizens to blame one group for the country's challenges.

Adu and Ikotun argue that stereotypes stem from illusory notions of ethnic superiority grounded in pride, ego and self-deception rather than in empirical truth (6035). Aminu similarly notes that in Nigeria, mutual stereotyping is common: many southerners regard northerners as backward, while many northerners see southerners as morally lax and untrustworthy. This study narrows its focus to Igbo–Hausa/Fulani relations because these groups were at the heart of the Nigerian Civil War, and their ongoing interactions serve as a barometer for assessing national

unity and cohesion. In Nigeria, the Igbo are often stereotypically associated with wealth and materialism. Emah and Andrew-Essien observe that when the subject of money arises, the Igbo ethnic group frequently comes to mind (76). Although this stereotype does not imply that other groups do not value wealth, it unfairly casts Igbos as excessively acquisitive—willing to engage in unethical or criminal acts to attain riches. Onwuegbuzia notes that the Hausa term *Inyaminri*, allegedly derived from the Igbo phrase for “give me water”, is used pejoratively to label the Igbo as unruly, domineering, dishonest, greedy and mysterious (16-18). Conversely, the Igbo use terms such as *Aboki* (ironically meaning “friend” in Hausa) to describe the Hausa as violent, illiterate, backward and obsessed with cattle. Further, according to Aminu, derogatory slurs like *Ewu-sa* (a combination of the Igbo word for goat, “ewu”, and Hausa) and *Fool-ani* (a pun on the Fulani ethnicity) reduce entire ethnic groups to animalistic or unintelligent caricatures. In recent years, the rise of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram has led many southerners to stereotype all Hausa/Fulani people as terrorists, a dangerous generalisation that fuels ethnic resentment.

Yet, as emphasised earlier, stereotypes present only partial truths. To equate an entire ethnic group with negative traits is to ignore the diversity, individuality and humanity of its members. For instance, Aliko Dangote, a northerner and Africa’s richest man (*Vanguard Newspaper*), represents the opposite of the stereotype of the uneducated and primitive northerner. Similarly, Allen Onyema, the Igbo CEO of Air Peace, who has repeatedly demonstrated patriotism and humanitarianism, notably by evacuating stranded Nigerians from conflict zones in Ukraine, Sudan (2022 and 2023), and during xenophobic attacks in South Africa (2019) challenges the stereotype of the dishonest, greedy and mysterious Igbo. All these and more undermine the rigid narratives that stereotypes attempt to impose. While it is essential to distinguish individual identity from group affiliation, it is equally important to avoid the fallacies of excessive individualism and essentialism. Overstating individual uniqueness in an attempt to counter stereotypes can obscure the reality that people are also shaped by group identities and cultural contexts. On the other hand, reducing individuals to stereotypical traits based on their group membership is equally problematic and unjust. Ultimately, the perpetuation of negative ethnic or cultural stereotypes in a pluralistic society like Nigeria has grave implications for democracy, social cohesion and nation-building. As Ayansola argues, such stereotypes can erode mutual trust, deepen divisions and hinder the development of an inclusive national identity (8).

Representations of Stereotypes in the Dramatic Texts

This study undertakes a close reading of selected characters in Adichie’s *FLOB* and Asiegbu’s *WOTG* to demonstrate how both playwrights represent the complex and often damaging consequences of stereotyping. In *WOTG*, characters such as Danjuma, Mr. and Mrs. Onah, Lord Lucas Jnr. and Egwuatu serve as focal points. In *FLOB*, our attention is on Adaobi, Mohammed and Mrs. Nduka. These characters reveal how literary depictions of stereotyped individuals or groups can either perpetuate or challenge societal prejudice because when readers engage with counter-stereotypical portrayals or characters, their perceptions may shift, potentially reducing their bias towards the stereotyped group. Both Adichie and Asiegbu dramatise the brutal experiences of Igbos during the 1966 pogrom and the ensuing civil war. These depictions highlight acts such as the systematic killing of entire Igbo families, the targeted assassination of prominent Igbo men and the destruction of Igbo-owned property, especially in northern Nigeria. In Adichie’s *FLOB*, Chinwe, Adaobi’s friend, is gruesomely murdered by northern assailants. In one of the most harrowing scenes, the attackers dissect the body of a pregnant woman and sever the head of her unborn child. Similarly, in Asiegbu’s *WOTG*, Egwuatu’s resolve to declare the sovereign state of Biafra is provoked by the horrific maiming, lynching and killing of easterners. These heinous acts are consistently attributed to northern perpetrators in both plays, showcasing the traumatic legacy of ethnic violence. However, the plays do not portray the Igbos as morally infallible. On the contrary, Adichie exposes internal corruption and moral compromise within Biafra during the war. In *FLOB*, Adaobi’s suitor, Nduoma Nwosu, is portrayed as a wartime profiteer. As Ebuka observes: “He is rich too; he has assets; he did well for himself during the war” (101). Nwosu, leveraging his father’s political connections, manipulates the black market and amasses wealth amid widespread suffering. Many Biafran military officials are similarly complicit, exploiting their positions to enrich themselves while the general population endures hunger and deprivation.

Gomba reinforces this view by noting that while some Biafran field commanders committed themselves to the war effort, the elite and political class often engaged in fraud, betrayal and self-enrichment (291). Nwankwo adds that in periods of societal breakdown, the ruling elite tend to scapegoat the powerless while exploiting them (5). This echoes Feuser’s argument that war literature confronts readers with fundamental questions about the human condition, including the erosion of ethical and social norms (120). Officers in charge of wartime supplies became notorious for hoarding essential goods and using their control over distribution to demand bribes, favours or sexual gratification. As Nwahunanya puts it, the war led to a degradation of moral values, even among the sensitive and upright (132). Although the primary focus of these plays is on Igbo experiences, Gomba reminds us that the

collapse of social and religious values during the war was not exclusive to Biafra—it was equally evident in the Nigerian camp (290). Thus, attributing wartime moral failings to a single ethnic group is not only inaccurate but intellectually dishonest. These two plays also engage in a thematic dialogue. While both explore ethnic stereotyping, they do so from different angles. Adichie’s *FLOB* particularly underscores how stereotyping can damage interpersonal relationships. The love between Adaobi and Mohammed is strained under the weight of ethnic prejudice. Characters like Ifeacho, Papa Onah’s friend, become disillusioned by the brutality associated with the Hausa and project their trauma and anger onto Mohammed, whose personal conduct contradicts prevailing stereotypes:

The most shocking, however, was the stories of the massacres, the one in May and this recent one which followed last week’s coup of which my in-laws were victims. The inhumanity of these acts, the wickedness in them. It is said—and I forever curse the people that allowed this to get to the ears of my mother-in-law—that my bothers-in-law were beheaded and their headless bodies ripped open at the stomach. (36)

Mohammed, who is tender and thoughtful, is nevertheless judged by the historical and ethnic baggage associated with his Hausa identity. This dramatic contrast between stereotype and lived character experience is crucial. It suggests that literature can play a transformative role by humanising the “other” and challenging fixed ideas about ethnicity. By presenting characters who defy their communities’ stereotypes, Adichie and Asiegbu open a discursive space for rethinking ethnic identities and encouraging more nuanced understandings of cultural difference. However, in Asiegbu’s *WOTG*, Danjuma, Mr. Onah’s Hausa friend, counters the stereotype of the Hausa as brutal and inhumane because he expresses care and human compassion for his Igbo friends. During the massacre, he helps Mr. Onah’s family escape:

...my friend... you have to leave... you have to leave immediately... you have to escape through the back door now... I say now... The hooligans are less than a mile away, searching every house and murdering, lynching or burning any easterner in sight. Please you have to leave now. May Allah protect you. I will forever cherish our friendship, it pains me deeply that things turned sour this way. I would keep you here and protect you if I could. (2)

Lord Lucas’ statement in *WOTG* serves as a significant counter-narrative to prevalent stereotypes about the Igbo, often labelled as aggressive, arrogant, dubious, disrespectful and tricky. He asserts that the Easterners “are very intelligent. They are in full knowledge of their rights, abilities, and, of course, treasures” (11). This acknowledgment of Igbo resourcefulness and self-awareness subverts common ethnic prejudices and affirms their intellectual and strategic capacities. A vivid illustration of this is seen in the activities of the Biafran Science Group, represented by characters such as Dr. Nwosu and Chief Michael. Despite being isolated from the rest of the world due to the Nigerian blockade, these scientists and engineers exhibit remarkable ingenuity by constructing makeshift refineries, as well as producing arms and ammunition. Their achievements underscore a narrative of resilience, innovation and collective brilliance—challenging reductive portrayals and highlighting the complex humanity of the Biafran people. This aligns with what Papa Ona points out in *FLOB*:

You know our people are ingenious. We are making improvisations with scarce commodities since the federals set up the blockade of Biafra. Coconut milk has proved as good as any brake fluid; a mixture of diesel and grease is our engine oil, worn out engine parts are being remoulded and made fit for use again, our mechanics are even building new engines from scraps. Our troops are using homemade rockets, weapons, and armoured vehicles. (52)

The ingenious survival strategies demonstrated during the war, alongside the Igbo people’s willingness to surrender and reintegrate into Nigeria, serve to counter the prevailing stereotype and one-sided narrative that portrays them as driven solely by an ambition to usurp political power and accumulate material wealth (Owhorodu 9).

Before the civil war, Adaobi counters the stereotype of the Hausa as uneducated, violent, inhuman, and brutal when she says of her Hausa fiancé:

He is such a good person, such a trusted friend. He almost grieved when I told him we were leaving. He did not understand, he does not understand violence or injustice because he is such a good person. Besides, unlike most of his people, he is well educated. He went to a very good college, and his father wants to send him to a military school in England. (25)

However, Adaobi's perception of Mohammed and other Hausa individuals shifts drastically during and after the war. Although Mohammed makes several attempts to convince her of his dissociation from the violence, emphasising that he actively campaigned against the war while in England by participating in protests and lobbying the British government for a ceasefire, Adaobi ultimately decides not to marry him. Her rejection of Mohammed is rooted in the deep psychological trauma she experiences following the brutal killing of her kinsmen in Sabon Gari and the widespread suffering of the Igbo during the war. This emotional burden overshadows Mohammed's personal convictions and actions. When he visits Papa Nduka to formally declare his intention to marry Adaobi, Papa Nduka expresses doubt about the viability of such a union, shaped as it is by the scars of ethnic hostility and the transgenerational and enduring distrust between the two groups. He comments thus:

Adaobi cannot cook your favourite meals, and the soup that she prepares are not the type to which you are accustomed. Adaobi cannot speak your native tongue and you cannot speak hers. Will you not one day get tired... Adaobi does not profess the same faith as you and worships in a way different from yours... (15)

Although Papa Nduka attributes the challenges to Adaobi and Mohammed's proposed union to differences in language, culture and religion, an informed reader knows that these are not the true impediments. The underlying cause of Adaobi's refusal to marry Mohammed lies in her unresolved emotional and psychological trauma inflicted by the war. Her deep-seated pain stems from the loss of her father, who was shot by Nigerian soldiers, and her cousin, who died of diarrhoea due to the Nigerian blockade of essential medical supplies in Biafra. Other members of her family also grapple with the lingering psychological effects of the war. The brutal murder of her friend, Chinwe, who is butchered with a machete, and Adaobi's haunting memory of a pregnant woman whose abdomen was slit open and whose unborn child was beheaded, only intensify her bitterness towards the Hausa. Thus, her rejection of Mohammed is a product of collective trauma rather than ethnic or religious incompatibility. Adaobi affirms her stereotypical opinion about Mohammed: "You cannot change the fact that you're Hausa, Mohammed. I will look at you sometimes and see the soldiers that shot my father or the pilot that bombed the busy market in my home town" (107).

Adaobi does not conceal the fact that her refusal to marry Mohammed is informed by ethnic sentiment. She asserts, "You cannot ask me to ignore the war; it happened, and it left in its wake very strong ethnic resentments" (107). Her statement underscores how individuals often internalise ethnic stereotypes, projecting the actions of a few onto an entire group. Adaobi's disposition reflects a common cognitive bias wherein perceivers attribute uniform characteristics to members of a stereotyped group, regardless of individual differences. Despite Mohammed's personal stance against the war and his advocacy for peace, Adaobi is unable to dissociate him from the collective identity of his ethnic group. This exemplifies the insidious nature of stereotypes: they obscure individuality and breed prejudice. As Matusitz argues, stereotypes not only involve the act of prejudging individuals or groups but also foster cognitive rigidity, where a person remains unyielding to contrary evidence, even when such evidence is compelling (91). In this light, Adaobi's persistent mistrust of Mohammed, despite his demonstrable opposition to the war, illustrates how trauma can reinforce and perpetuate ethnic bias. Speaking about her refusal to accept the marriage tie with Mohammed, Adaobi says, "I never forgot you, how could I? I tore your photograph at one point but your face was lodged in my heart. I never forgot you. I often wondered despairingly why you had to be Hausa" (107).

Mama Nduka, Adaobi's mother, believes her daughter's decision to marry Nduoma instead of Mohammed is misguided: "You should not have sent Mohammed away, your whole life will be a sad song. ... Mohammed is the only one you love, I think I always knew it, your father knew it too" (110). Mama Nduka, a character that counters stereotypical narratives, represents the voice of reason, but Adaobi's decision is shaped by an ethnic stereotype. Her firm stance is evident when she insists, "I love him. But I love Biafra more, always I will love Biafra more" (110). This statement marks the end of her relationship with Mohammed. When stereotypes are allowed to take root, they generate false beliefs based on sweeping generalisations about members of specific ethnic groups. This undermines meaningful intergroup communication. However, by engaging in intercultural dialogue and reading diverse narratives—both fictional and non-fictional—we can uncover the rich, positive dimensions of other cultures that challenge and correct harmful generalisations. It is in this context that we come to appreciate one of the vital functions of literature: to dismantle stereotypes and liberate minds from what Adichie describes as "the danger of a single story". In her widely acclaimed TED Talk of the same title, Adichie asserts that stereotypes are formed by repeatedly portraying people as one thing. While they may contain elements of truth, the danger lies in their incompleteness—they reduce people to one flat perspective.

Similarly, Achebe affirms that one of the major objectives of early African literature was to counter stereotypes, myths and colonial misrepresentations of Africans by telling alternative stories. He states, “A major objective was to challenge stereotypes, myths and the images of ourselves and our continent, and to recast them through stories” (53). Although Achebe’s primary concern was with the West’s portrayal of Africa, the need for this literary function has become even more imperative today, especially within Africa itself. Modern Africans are now also susceptible to internalised stereotypes—becoming, in effect, students of a global system where these stereotypes are reproduced. Adichie reiterates that the problem with stereotypes is not that they are entirely false but that they are incomplete, making one perspective become the only perspective. In this light, the stereotypical portrayals of the Igbo and Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups, while possibly rooted in certain historical realities, should not be universalised. To always emphasise only the negative traits is to obscure the richness and complexity of these cultures.

Our goal has been to highlight some of the ethnic stereotypes surrounding the Igbo-Hausa/Fulani conflict, especially regarding the causes of the Nigerian Civil War and the lingering distrust that continues to obstruct national unity. Unfortunately, the same ethnic biases and stereotypes that contributed to the war continue to persist in Nigeria, even over five decades after its end. Dismantling entrenched stereotypes remains a formidable challenge, as illustrated in Adaobi’s emotionally charged reflection on her former love. When asked what became of her feelings for Mohammed, she replies, “No, the war did not take my heart; the war only froze it permanently” (109). Asiegbu’s *WOTG* and Adichie’s *FLOB* are in implicit conversation with each other. While a significant portion of Adichie’s drama unfolds through Adaobi’s stereotyped lens, Asiegbu’s offers a counterbalance through the character of Danjuma—a compassionate, humane Hausa man. Asiegbu does not deny the atrocities committed by some members of the Hausa ethnic group during the war; rather, her aim, arguably, is to complicate the narrative by foregrounding the possibility of individual deviation from collective guilt. Her social vision as a playwright committed to national healing invites readers to re-evaluate their biases and embrace a more inclusive, nuanced understanding of identity and difference. Through such literature, we can begin to dismantle the walls of prejudice and foster genuine national reconciliation.

Conclusion

More than five decades after the end of the Nigerian Civil War, many of the factors that triggered the conflict remain unresolved. Corruption and ethnic bigotry, often sustained by deep-seated stereotypes, are still prevalent across the country. Many Igbos and other southerners continue to describe northerners, especially the Hausa and Fulani, in derogatory terms such as bandits, uncivilised, primitive, dirty and violent. Conversely, many northerners view Igbos as greedy, money-driven and domineering. While Nigeria continues to explore viable strategies for promoting national unity and inclusiveness, literature stands out as a powerful tool for reorienting the collective consciousness of its citizens. This study has attempted to illustrate how literature, particularly war texts, can be employed to interrogate and expose the damaging effects of negative ethnic stereotypes. The selected texts demonstrate that ethnic stereotyping not only distorts interpersonal relationships but also undermines national cohesion. In a multi-ethnic and multicultural society like Nigeria, it is crucial to challenge such stereotypes. Their continued promotion can only deepen divisions and pose serious threats to democracy and the nation-building process. Literature, therefore, should be embraced not merely as art but as a transformative force capable of fostering empathy, dismantling prejudice and laying the groundwork for lasting peace.

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