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Curbing Terrorism Through Literature: A Study of Selected Nigerian War Literature

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Abstract: *Terrorism and organised violence have become persistent threats to national security, social cohesion, and sustainable development in Nigeria. While counter-terrorism strategies have largely emphasised military and security interventions, the role of literature in promoting peacebuilding and preventing violent extremism has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. This study examines how selected Nigerian war texts function as literary instruments for curbing terrorism through the promotion of peace, reconciliation, and historical consciousness. The study analyses Eddie Iroh's Toads of War, Isidore Okpe who's The Last Duty, and Chinua Achebe's Girls at War and Other Stories using Peace and Conflict Theory and Trauma Theory as complimentary analytical frameworks. Through qualitative textual analysis, the study finds that the selected texts expose political injustice, ethnic distrust, abuse of power, and social inequalities as major drivers of violent conflict, while simultaneously portraying the devastating trauma experienced by victims of war. The texts further advocate justice, dialogue, reconciliation, empathy, and national unity as indispensable conditions for sustainable peace. The study concludes that Nigerian war literature transcends historical documentation by functioning as an important medium of peace education, ethical orientation, and cultural resistance to violent extremism. It recommends the integration of literary works into peace education initiatives and public enlightenment programmes as complementary strategies for promoting non-violent conflict resolution and curbing terrorism in contemporary Nigeria.*

Keywords: terrorism, Nigerian war literature, peacebuilding, peace and conflict theory, trauma theory, Nigerian civil war

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism remains one of the most pressing security challenges confronting the contemporary world. Characterised by the deliberate use of violence, intimidation, and fear to achieve political, ideological or religious objectives, terrorism has devastated nations, displaced millions of people, weakened institutions, and disrupted social and economic development. In Nigeria, the

phenomenon has assumed multiple dimensions, ranging from insurgency and ethno-religious violence to militancy, banditry, and communal conflicts. Although these manifestations differ in their immediate causes and objectives, they share a common consequence: the destruction of human lives, the erosion of social cohesion, and the perpetuation of trauma. While military operations, intelligence gathering, and legislative interventions remain central to counter-terrorism efforts, there is an increasing recognition that sustainable peace also depends on cultural, educational, and intellectual responses that reshape public consciousness and discourage the normalization of violence – literature occupies a significant place within this broader peacebuilding enterprise.

Literature has long functioned as a medium through which societies interrogate violence, preserve historical memory, challenge injustice, and imagine more peaceful futures. Instead of merely entertaining readers, literary texts illuminate the human consequences of armed conflict, cultivate empathy for victims, question the ideologies that sustain violence, and encourage dialogue, reconciliation, and national healing. Nigerian war literature, particularly works inspired by the Nigerian Civil War (1967 – 1970), offers profound reflections on catastrophic consequences of political intolerance, ethnic polarization, militarism, and the devaluation of human life. Although these texts are grounded in a specific historical conflict, their insights transcend the civil war and remain relevant to contemporary debates on terrorism, violent extremism, and peacebuilding in Nigeria.

Among the contributions to Nigerian war literature are : Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra,* Cyprian Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace,* Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn,* Edie Iroh's *Forty-Eight Guns for the General* and *The Sirens in the Night,* Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* and Ngozi Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun.* These works present complementary perspectives on the moral, psychological, and social consequences of war. They portray the devastating effects of violence on soldiers and civilians, expose the political and ideological forces that sustain conflict, and foreground the resilience of individuals and communities struggling to preserve their humanity amid destruction. By dramatizing the costs of violence rather than glorifying warfare, the texts advocate tolerance, dialogue, justice, and reconciliation as indispensable foundations for lasting peace.

Meanwhile, existing scholarship on Nigerian war literature has concentrated largely on historical reconstruction, nationalism, identity politics, the representation of the Nigerian Civil War, gender relations, and post-war reconciliation. While these studies have enriched the understanding of war narratives, comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining Nigerian war literature as a resource for counter-terrorism discourse and peace education. In particular, few studies have investigated how literary representations of war can challenge extremist ideologies, expose the futility of violence, foster empathy for victims, and contribute to public consciousness aimed at preventing future cycles of violent conflict. This gap underscores the need to reconsider Nigerian war literature not only as a record of historical experience but also as an instrument for promoting sustainable peace in a society still confronted by diverse forms of terrorism and insecurity.

Due to the aforementioned points, this study examines how *Toads of War, The Last Duty,* and *Girls at War* and *Other Stones* employ literary imagination to expose the causes and consequences of violent conflict while advancing values that can contribute to curbing terrorism. Specifically, the study analyses the representation of violence and its human costs in the selected texts, investigates the socio-political conditions that generate conflict, explores the traumatic experiences of individuals and communities affected by war, and evaluates the extent to which the texts promote reconciliation, dialogue, justice, and peaceful coexistence. In doing this, the paper argues that literature is not merely a reflection of conflict but an active participant in peacebuilding through its capacity to shape ethical consciousness, preserve collective memory, and inspire non-violent alternatives to social and political crises. The study is guided by Peace and Conflict Theory and Trauma Theory, which explain the roots of violence and its psychological effects. Together, they show how war literature documents suffering while supporting healing, memory, and peacebuilding.

Conceptual Clarification

Terrorism

Terrorism is a contested concept, but it generally refers to the use of threat of violence to instill fear in civilians for political, religious or ideological goals. Hoffman defines it as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence to achieve political change (Hoffman 40). Schmid similarly describes it as repeated violence where the victims are not the main targets, but a means of sending a message to influence governments or societies (Schmid 86 – 88). Thus, terrorism functions both as physical violence and symbolic communication. In essence, it involves organised violence aimed at intimidating populations, disrupting social order, and coercing political authority. In Nigeria, it appears in forms such as insurgency, extremism, banditry, and communal violence. Although the selected texts are set during the Nigerian Civil War, they reflect patterns of fear, displacement, and civilian suffering associated with terrorism. In this research, terrorism is understood as organised violence used to intimidate populations and advance ideological or political aims while causing lasting harm.

War Literature

War Literature includes works that depict the causes, experiences, and consequences of armed conflict. It covers novels, poetry, memoirs, and plays that explore both military and civilian experiences, often critiquing the ideologies behind war and exposing its human cost. The fictional works, Achebe's *Beware Soul Brother, Girls at War* and *Other Stones, Christmas in Biafra and Other in Biafra,* Cyprian Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace,* Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn,* Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* and Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* are human stories set in the tragedy of the Nigerian-Biafran war of July 1967 – January, 1970. Thus, Nigerian war literature largely stems from the Nigerian Civil War (1967 – 1970), preserving historical memory and reflecting on political failure and human suffering. The selected texts – *Toads of War, The Last Duty,* and *Girls at War* and *Other Stories* – highlight the impact of war on soldiers and

civilians, revealing moral conflict, trauma, and social breakdown. Rather than glorifying war, they emphasize its devastating consequences and the need for peace.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is the process of preventing conflict recurrence by addressing its root political, social, and economic causes. Galtung distinguishes between negative peace (absence of violence) and positive peace (removal of structural injustice) (Galtung 183-184). Lederach views peacebuilding as relationship repair through dialogue and reconciliation (Lederach 20-25), while Reardon emphasizes peace education as a tool for promoting justice and non-violence (Reardon 25-29). These views show that peacebuilding goes beyond ending violence to transforming societies. Literature contributes by fostering empathy, preserving memory, and challenging violence. The selected texts serve this role by promoting reflection, reconciliation, and social cohesion. In this study, peacebuilding is understood as a literary and social process that encourages peace consciousness and helps prevent cycles of violence and terrorism.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on Peace and Conflict Theory and Trauma Theory, which together provide a framework for examining both the causes of violence, and its psychological effects. While Peace and Conflict Theory explains the dynamics of conflict, violence, reconciliation, and peacebuilding, Trauma Theory illuminates the emotional, psychological, and social wounds inflicted by war and organized violence. Combined, they help interpret how Nigerian war literature exposes the impact of armed conflict and promotes peaceful co-existence and healing.

Peace and Conflict Theory

Peace and Conflict Theory developed after World War II as an interdisciplinary field focused on understanding the causes of violence and pathways to sustainable peace. it argues that peace is not just the absence of war but the presence of justice, equality, and strong institutions that prevent conflict. Johan Galtung distinguishes between negative peace (absence of violence) and positive peace (presence of justice and social harmony). He also identifies structural violence, which sustain inequality and legitimize oppression. Building on this, John Paul Lederach emphasizes that lasting peace requires transforming relationships and rebuilding trust through dialogue, reconciliation, and community participation. In literature, this theory helps explain how literary texts expose injustice, political failure, and social division while promoting reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. In *Toads of War, The Last Duty,* and *Girls at War and Other Stories,* war is shown as a result of political and ethnic tensions, highlighting the need for peace and unity.

Trauma Theory

Trauma Theory originated in psychology and psychoanalysis and later became an important approach in literary and cultural studies. It examines the psychological, emotional, and social effects of catastrophic events such as war, genocide, displacement, and terrorism, focusing on how trauma disrupts memory, identity, and language, and how literature bears witness to suffering. A key figure in its development is Cathy Caruth, who in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) argues that

trauma is not fully experienced at the moment of war because it overwhelms understanding, returning later through flashbacks, nightmares, and repetition (Caruth 4-12). She suggests that trauma is marked by belatedness and often resists direct narration, making literature a vital medium for expressing what cannot be fully spoken.

On this note, Dominick LaCapra in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001) explores how trauma complicates historical memory. He distinguishes between "acting out", where victims relive trauma repeatedly, and "working through", a process of gradually confronting and integrating painful memories (LaCapra 65-71). He argues that literature creates an ethical space for remembrance, empathy, and reflection, helping societies engage with violent pasts (La Capra 78-80). Trauma Theory is especially relevant to Nigerian war literature due to the lasting psychological and social effects of the Nigerian Civil War. The conflict produced widespread suffering, displacement, and loss, which continue to shape collective memory. Literary texts therefore serve as testimony, preserving experiences often excluded from official histories.

In *Toads of War, The Last Duty,* and *Girls at War and Other Stories,* characters experience fear, grief, and identity loss, reflecting Caruth's idea of trauma's lingering effects (Caruth 4-12). These works also align with LaCapra's concept of working through by encouraging reflection, remembrance, and reconciliation (LaCapra 65-80). They transform suffering into testimony that condemns violence and affirms peace and human dignity. Essentially, Trauma Theory provides a framework for understanding how Nigerian war literature represents the lasting impact of violence. It shows that these texts preserve memory, humanize victims, and support healing and peacebuilding, especially when read alongside Peace and Conflict Theory.

Application of Peace and Conflict Theory and Trauma Theory to the Study

This study adopts an integrated application of Peace and Conflict Theory and Trauma Theory in analyzing the primary texts: *Toads of War, The Last Duty,* and *Girls at War and Other Stories.* Rather than treating the two theories as separate analytical frameworks, the study employs them complementarily because violent conflict and trauma constitute interconnected dimensions of the same historical and human experience. While Peace and Conflict Theory explains the political, structural, and ideological conditions that generate armed conflict, Trauma Theory illuminates the psychological, emotional, and social consequences of that violence for individuals and communities. Their integration therefore provides a holistic understanding of how Nigerian war literature interrogates violence while simultaneously advocating peacebuilding and national healing.

Based on Johan Galtung's conception of structural and cultural violence, together with John Paul Lederach's emphasis on conflict transformation, the study examines how the selected texts expose the political failures, ethnic polarization, abuse of power, social injustice, and ideological divisions that culminate in violent conflict (Galtung 67-91; Lederach 20-35). The analysis establishes that war does not emerge spontaneously but develops from unresolved structural contradictions, exclusion, failed leadership, and deteriorating human relationships. Accordingly, the selected texts

are read as critiques of the social and political conditions that normalize violence and threaten national cohesion.

Having established the structural origins of violence, the analysis subsequently employs Trauma Theory, particularly the insights of Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, to examine the human consequences of war. Caruth's conception of trauma as an overwhelming experience that resists immediate comprehension (Caruth 4-12) provides a framework for analysing the persistent fear, grief, psychological disorientation, silence, and emotional fragmentation experienced by characters across the selected texts. LaCapra's distinction between "acting out" and "working through" trauma (LaCapra 65-80) further facilitates an examination of how literary narratives preserve painful memories while encouraging remembrance, reconciliation, and ethical engagement with the past.

The integrated application of the two theories is particularly appropriate to *Toads of War*. Peace and Conflict Theory enables the study to interrogate the political rivalries, military ideologies, and structural tensions that sustain the conflict portrayed in the novel. Trauma Theory then explains how those conflicts manifest in the emotional suffering of soldiers and civilians who experience fear, displacement, bereavement, moral uncertainty, and psychological instability. Thus, the novel demonstrates that political violence inevitably produces enduring human trauma.

Also, in *The Last Duty*, Peace and Conflict Theory provides a framework for analysing how suspicion, ethnic division, abuse of military authority, and political intolerance fracture interpersonal relationships and destabilize society. Trauma Theory complements this analysis by illuminating the emotional anguish, fear, isolation, and moral conflicts experienced by the novel's central characters as they struggle to survive amid violence and uncertainty. The interaction of the two theories reveals that the social structures sustaining conflict also produce profound psychological wounds that persist beyond the battle field.

In *Girls at War and Other Stories,* the combined theoretical approach enables the study to explore the relationship between war and civilian experience. Peace and Conflict Theory explains how political instability and armed conflict destroy social institutions, displace communities, and undermine national unity. Trauma Theory, in turn, reveals the psychological consequences of these disruptions through the suffering of women, children, refugees, and other vulnerable populations whose lives are permanently altered by violence. Achebe's stories demonstrate that the greatest casualties of war are often ordinary civilians whose traumatic experiences continue long after hostilities have ceased.

The integration of the two theories therefore enables the study to establish that Nigerian war literature performs a dual function. On the one hand, it interrogates the structural and political conditions responsible for violent conflict, thereby exposing the roots of terrorism and organised violence. One the other hand, it documents the psychological and emotional devastation inflicted upon individuals and communities, cultivating empathy, preserving historical memory, and

promoting reconciliation. Consequently, *Toads of War*, *The Last Duty*, and *Girls at War and Other Stories* transcends historical documentation to become literary interventions that encourage peacebuilding, discourage violent extremism, and contribute to broader efforts aimed at curbing terrorism in contemporary Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigerian war literature occupies a significant place in African literary discourse because it preserves the historical memory of the Nigerian Civil War while interrogating its political, humanitarian, and moral consequences. Critical scholarship has consistently emphasised that war narratives transcend historical documentation by exposing suffering. Chinyere Nwahunaya argues that Nigerian war fiction reveals the socio-political contradictions that culminated in the civil war and exposes how corruption, political opportunism, and the exploitation of ordinary citizens undermine genuine nation-building. He further contends that these narratives encourage critical reflection on the ethical and political failures that continue to challenge post-war Nigeria (Nwahunanya 50).

In the same vein, Ernest N. Emenyonu observes that African war literature constitutes one of the richest literary responses to the continent's historical experiences of violence because it transforms collective tragedy into enduring artistic testimony. According to him, African writers function as historical witness whose works preserve memories of war while exposing its devastating consequences for humanity. He maintains that war literature serves not only as historical documentation but also as a moral intervention against violence and injustice (Emenyonu 1-12). Charles Nnolim also views Nigerian literature as an instrument of social commitment that interrogates political realities and encourages ethical transformation. He asserts that contemporary Nigerian fiction reflects the nation's socio-political contradictions by exposing corruption, leadership failures, ethnic distrust, and institutional injustice, thereby shaping Nigerian society (Nnolim 5-18).

Biodun Jeyifo similarly emphasizes the social responsibility of African literature, observing that literary texts must engage critically with historical and political realities rather than merely provide aesthetic pleasure. His reflections on the Nigeria-Biafra War underscore literature's role in interrogating national crises, preserving historical memory, and stimulating intellectual engagement with questions of justice, identity, and reconciliation (Jeyiofo 15-29). Abiola Irele likewise maintains that African literature derives much of its significance from its intimate relationship with history and collective experience. For Irele, literary narratives function as cultural expressions through which societies interpret historical realities, negotiate identity, and preserve communal memory. His perspective is particularly relevant to Nigerian war literature because it highlights the relationship between literary representation, historical consciousness, and national identity (Irele 11-27).

The emergence of Trauma Theory further transformed scholarship on war literature. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is characterized by its belatedness, as victims often experience catastrophic events indirectly through recurring memories, nightmares, silence, and psychological fragmentation rather than immediate comprehension (Caruth 4-12). Building upon this argument, Dominick LaCapra distinguishes between "acting out" and "working through" traumatic experiences, contending that literary narratives create opportunities for remembrance, ethical reflection, and healing while preserving the integrity of historical memory (LaCapra 65-80). These theoretical perspectives have encouraged literary scholars to examine war narratives as testimonies that preserve both personal and collective experiences of suffering.

Peace scholars have equally highlighted literature's contribution to conflict transformation. Johan Galtung's concepts of structural violence and positive peace explain how injustice, inequality, and exclusion generate violent conflicts that cannot be resolved solely through military intervention (Galtung 183-184). Complementing this perspective, John Paul Lederach argues that sustainable peace requires reconciliation, dialogue, and the transformation of damaged relationships (Lederach 20-35). Betty Reardon extends this discourse by emphasizing peace education as a means of cultivating democratic values, tolerance, and non-violent conflict resolution (Reardon 25-29). Together, these perspectives establish literature as an important cultural instrument for peacebuilding.

Despite the fact that these studies have considerably enriched scholarship on Nigerian war literature, they have largely examined the texts from historical, political, nationalist, gender, or humanitarian perspectives. Existing criticism has paid comparatively less attention to the relationship between Nigerian Civil War literature and contemporary counter-terrorism discourse. Moreover, few studies have undertaken an integrated application of Peace and Conflict Theory and Trauma Theory to demonstrate how literary narratives simultaneously expose the structural causes of violence and the enduring psychological consequences of conflict. This study addresses these gaps by examining Eddie Iroh's *Toads of War*, Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, and Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War and Other Stories* as literary interventions that promote peacebuilding, trauma awareness, historical consciousness, and resistance to violent extremism. In doing so, it extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that Nigerian war literature remains a vital resource for understanding and curbing terrorism in contemporary Nigeria.

LITERATURE AS A COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY

The fight against terrorism has traditionally been approached from military, intelligence, legal, and diplomatic perspectives. While these measures remain indispensable for national security, they are largely reactive, focusing on containing or eliminating violent threats after they have emerged. Increasingly, however, scholars of peace and conflict studies argue that sustainable counter-terrorism requires preventive strategies that address the ideological, psychological, and structural conditions that foster violent extremism (Hoffman 1-15; Schmid 3-18). Within this broader preventive framework, literature occupies a unique postion as a cultural instrument capable of

shaping values, preserving historical memory, cultivating empathy, and promoting non-violent approaches to conflict resolution.

The selected texts show literature's educative function by exposing the devastating effects of war and violence. Rather than glorifying conflict, *Toads of War, The Last Duty,* and *Girls at War and Other Stories* highlight trauma, displacement, moral breakdown, and broken relationship. these narratives encourage readers to question violence and recognise its human cost, aligning with Betty Reardon's peace education ideals of justice, tolerance, and non-violence (Reardon 25-29). Also, literature preserves historical memory. By documenting lived experiences, it resists historical amnesia and forces reflection on past violence. Cathy Caruth emphasizes trauma narratives as a form of witnessing that challenges conventional history (Caruth 4-12), while Dominick LaCapra argues that such remembrance helps societies "work through" trauma rather than repeat it (LaCapra 65-80). The texts thus turn the Nigerian Civil War into a lasting moral warning.

Principally, literature functions in empathy-building, terrorist ideologies often depend on dehumanization, but literary narratives restore shared humanity. Through characters like Gladys, Aku, Oshevire, and Kalu Udim, readers experience fear, loss, and suffering, which fosters compassion and discourages indifference to violence. The texts also reflect Johan Galtung's view that peace requires addressing structural violence such as inequality, corruption, and exclusion (Galtung 183-184). By exposing these conditions, literature encourages critical awareness and civic responsibility. In the same vein, John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation theory is evident in the emphasis on dialogue, reconciliation, and forgiveness over revenge and force (Lederach 20-35).

In contemporary Nigeria, where extremist groups exploit poverty, ignorance, and grievances, literature strengthens critical thinking and reduces vulnerability to radicalization. As Akuto (2017) notes, education helps individuals reject violence, and literature reinforces this by humanizing its consequences. The study therefore argues that literature should be recognized as an essential component of comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies. While literary texts cannot replace military operations, intelligence gathering, or law enforcement, they provide an indispensable preventive dimension by transforming attitudes, challenging extremist narratives, promoting intercultural understanding, preserving collective memory, and encouraging peaceful methods of resolving conflict. The integration of Nigerian war literature into educational curricula, civic education programmes, community dialogues, theatre productions, literary festivals, and public enlightenment campaigns would strengthen national efforts to build a culture of peace and resilience against violent extremism.

To this end, *Toads of War, The Last Duty,* and *Girls at War and Other Stories* established that literature possesses transformative power beyond the aesthetic value. By exposing the structural roots of violence, documenting the psychological trauma of conflict, and affirming the ideals of justice, reconciliation, empathy, and shared humanity, the primary texts establish literature as a vital cultural resource for peacebuilding. In this sense, literature does not merely recount the

tragedies of war, it actively contributes to preventing their recurrence by educating citizens, shaping ethical consciousness, and fostering the social conditions necessary for curbing terrorism and sustaining national peace.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative research design based on textual and interpretive analysis. It examines selected Nigerian war-literary texts as representatives of the causes, consequences and possible resolution of violent conflict. The primary texts are Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, Edih Iroh's *Toads of War* and Chinua Achebe's "Girls at War". The texts were purposively selected because they represent different dimensions of the Nigerian Civil War, including political and structural injustice, civilian vulnerability, physical and psychological trauma, revenge and the disruption of family and social relationships.

The analysis is guided by Peace and Conflict Theory and Trauma Theory. The study employs close reading to identify significant narrative situations, character experiences, conflicts and textual expressions relevant to the research objectives. Particular attention is given to passages that reveal structural injustice, violence, psychological and social consequences, revenge and the reproduction of conflict, as well as possibilities for reconciliation and peacebuilding. Selected textual quotations are used as primary evidence and are interpreted within their narrative contexts. Rather than treating the three texts separately, the analysis juxtaposes their representations under four thematic categories : political/structural causes of violence; psychological and social consequences of violence; revenge and the reproduction of conflict; and peacebuilding implications. This comparative approach enables the study to identify both the differences and convergences in the writers' representations of war and to demonstrate how Nigerian war literature can contribute to reflection on the prevention of violent conflict and the pursuit of sustainable peace.

Political / Structural Causes of Violence

The violence represented in *The Last Duty, Toads of War* and "Girls at War" is closely connected to political injustice, institutional abuse, social inequality and wartime deprivation. Read through Galtung's (1969) concept of structural violence, the three texts reveal how oppressive structures create conditions that expose individuals and communities to direct violence. In *The Last Duty,* Oshevire's detention reflects the abuse of wartime authority and the consequences of political and ethnic suspicion. In *Toads of War,* Kalu Udim's forced deployment despite his medical unfitness exposes the misuse of military power, while "Girls at War" foregrounds the insecurity, scarcity and social dislocation that leave civilians, particularly women, vulnerable. The three texts thus suggest that violence is not simply a product of individual aggression; it is also sustained by unjust structures that deny people security, dignity and justice.

Oshevire is deprived of his freedom through Chief Toje's calculated act of revenge against his business rival. Toje admits, "Yes, I informed on Oshevire… I was in the rubber business before Oshevire came into it" (*The Last Duty* 122). His confession reinforces the Governor's earlier warning that some individuals use the tribunal to "settle old scores" (*The Last Duty* 122). With

Rukeme, a teacher and witness, recruited to give false evidence against him, Oshevire is subjected to three years of forced seclusion (*The Last Duty* 76). His detention not only violates his freedom but also separates him from his wife and son, depriving him of family life and participation. His experience therefore reveals how political and institutional abuses can penetrate private life and inflict lasting personal and familial suffering.

Oshevire detention also exposes Aku to Chief Toje's manipulation, creating another dimension of vulnerability. Aku recognises her predicament: "Toje's whoring mistress, bound to minister to his animal desire at the price of food and clothing" (*The Last Duty* 75). Okpewho thus links political and domestic violence, showing how the abuse of power extends into the home, undermining marriage, personal dignity and family relationships. A similar abuse of institutional power is evident in Iroh's *Toads of War*. Despite Kalu Udim's medical unfitness for combat, his superior, Chima Udeh, sends him to the warfront on charges of insubordination. Kalu recalls, "at exactly 6.00… three armed military policemen knocked on my door … three armed men to arrest one epileptic" (*Toads of War* 107). His subsequent injury is therefore not merely a consequence of war but of an institutional decision that disregards his vulnerability. Iroh exposes how unchecked authority can render individuals expendable, with Kalu's physical injury extending into psychological and socio-economic suffering.

Achebe presents structural violence from the civilian perspective in "Girls at War", portraying a society marked by scarcity, insecurity and social dislocation. When Gladys observes, "You have nothing in your fridge", Nwankwo reminds her that 'we are fighting a war' and that soldiers at the front survive on "garri and water" (Girls at War 58-59). The objectification and exploitation of women further reveal the social breakdown caused by the conflict. Gladys, once patriotic and confident, is gradually compelled to confront the harsh realities of hunger and survival. Through her experience, Achebe shows that war victimization extends beyond the battlefield; deprivation, insecurity and economic collapse leave her vulnerable to Chief Toje's manipulation while she struggles to preserve her family amid wartime uncertainty. Oghenovo, though only a child, becomes an unintended victim of the adults' conflict. Through their experiences, Okpewho shows how war disrupts family relationship and extends trauma beyond the immediate victims.

In *Toads of War,* Kalu's physical injury is accompanied by profound psychological and social consequences sent to the battlefield despite his medical condition, he loses his right arm and admits, "I don't like to mention my disability… it makes me bitter" (*Toads of War* 45). The injury limits his employment prospects, undermines his independence and deepens his emotional distress. His mother's death further compounds his trauma, while his bitter rejection of the injunction to "turn the other cheek" reveals his inability to move beyond the injustice he has suffered. Iroh thus shows how war extends beyond the battlefield, leaving survivors with enduring physical, psychological and socio-economic wounds.

Achebe presents Gladys's trauma less through phsycial injury than through the gradual erosion of her idealism and dignity. Once patriotic and confident, she becomes increasingly vulnerable to

deprivation, exploitation and insecurity. Nwankwo observes that she is now "in the keep of some well-placed gentlemen, one of those piling up money out of the war" (*Girls at War* 57), revealing how prolonged conflict alters both her circumstances and social identity. Achebe thus shows that trauma can result from fear, deprivation and social breakdown, not only physical violence. Across the three texts, war disrupts families, livelihoods and social relationships, confirming that its consequences are both psychological and communal.

Psychological and Social Consequences of Violence

Violence in the selected texts extends beyond physical destruction to produce enduring psychological and social wounds. Through Peace and Conflict Theory and Trauma Theory, the texts reveal how detention, injury, bereavement, deprivation and social dislocation alter the lives of individuals and families. Caruth (1996) observes that traumatic experience may continue to affect survivors beyond the original event, while LaCapra (2001) distinguishes between remaining trapped in traumatic experience and working through it.

In *The Last Duty,* Oshevire's prolonged detention generates fear, frustration and anxiety about his family. He asks, "tearing a man away from his family and wafting him so far away into detention. On what charge?" (*The Last Duty* 33). His suffering continues after his release, as he returns to a family and social environment profoundly altered by his absence. Aku also becomes vulnerable to Chief Toje's manipulation, while Oghenovo, though a child, bears the consequences of the adults' conflict. Okpewho therefore presents war as a force that damages both individual well-being and family relationships.

Iroh's *Toads of War* similarly highlights the enduring effects of physical and psychological trauma through Kalu Udim. Sent to the battlefield despite his medical condition, Kalu loses his right arm and admits, "I don't like to mention my disability… it makes me better" (*Toads of War* 45). His injury compromises his employment and independence, while the death of his mother deepens his grief. His bitterness illustrates how an injury sustained during war can continue to shape the survivor's psychological and socio-economic life long after the battlefield experience.

Achebe's "Girls at War" presents trauma through Gladys's gradual loss of youthful idealism and social security. Once associated with patriotic commitment, she becomes increasingly vulnerable to deprivation and exploitation. Nwankwo observes that she is "in the keep of some well-placed gentleman, one of those piling up money out of the war" ("Girls at War" 57). Her transformation illustrates Achebe's broader concern with the effects of prolonged insecurity on civilians, particularly women. Trauma, therefore, emerges not only from direct physical injury but also from hunger, fear, exploitation and the erosion of social values.

Across the three texts, violence consequently produces consequences that extend beyond the battlefield. Oshevire suffers prolonged psychological distress and family disruption; Kalu carries physical, emotional and socioeconomic scars; while Gladys experiences the erosion of dignity, security and idealism. Their experiences affirm that the consequences of conflict are both personal

and communal. By foregrounding these human costs, the texts challenge any understanding of violence as merely a political or military event and reinforce the need for psychological healing, social rehabilitation and peacebuilding.

Violence, Revenge and the Reproduction of Conflict

Violence rarely ends with the initial act; when injustice remains unresolved, it can generate further violence. Iroh presents this circle most clearly through Kalu Udim in *Toads of War.* Forced into combat despite his medical condition, Kalu suffers severe injury, loses his livelihood and experiences his mother's death. His unresolved bitterness is evident in his recurring memories of his former boss : "I kept seeing images of my former boss. It was not sleep inducing… the thoughts on my mind were hardly anesthetic" (*Toads of War* 59). His eventual shooting of Chima is therefore not an isolated act but the culmination of accumulated grievances and trauma. Iroh thus shows how unaddressed injustice can transform a victim into an agent of renewed violence, perpetuating the cycle of conflict.

Kalu's revenge does not restore what he has lost : his arm, his mother or his dignity. Instead, Chima's death adds another victim to the violence of war. LaCapra's (2001) concept of *acting out* is relevant here, as Kalu responds to unresolved trauma through revenge rather than constructive healing. His recurring bitterness therefore turns victimhood into renewed violence. A similar but more tragic pattern emerges in *The Last Duty.* Oshevire's prolonged detention and separation from his family leave him deeply wounded, and his return intensifies his sense of betrayal and loss. He laments:

> If there are any honest men left in this town, they should know that the dishonor brought upon my wife – on my household – was totally unjust. But then the stain remains… And what kind of a life will I be living in this town with my family, when we know that our days are haunted by an indelible shame?... What else is there but a strong likelihood that right now she is bearing within her bosom the seed of such vile communion? And what man would choose to be alive to face everyday the ill-conceived fruit of shame? No… No… (*The Last Duty* 237-238).

The destruction of the house becomes an outward expression of this inner collapse, as the house represents the family, security and belonging he believes have been destroyed. The cycle of violence culminates in his encounter with the soldier. As Oshevire walks away with Aku and Oghenovo, he ignores the soldiers command to stop and is shot. Oghenovo recalls :

> We have left our burning house far behind… suddenly i hear somebody shouting in the forest. Stop ! he says. Stop !... i think the voice is shouting at my father. Mukoro ! my mother screams. Mukoro ! … suddenly i hear the sound of gunshots from the direction of the other voice. Kr-r-r-r, kr-r-r-r-, two times. And then the sound of

> something dropping. Mukoro ! my brother screams again, then she lets go of me and drops on her knees and covers her face with her hands and begins to cry (*The Last Duty* 241-243).

The scene shows how violence produces further victims rather than resolving the conditions that created it. Oshevire suffers physical death, Aku is left traumatized by witnessing it, and Oghenovo loses his father. Violence has thus moved from the political sphere into the family and across generations, reinforcing the need to address unresolved grievances through justice, healing and reconciliation rather than retaliation.

Achebe's "Girls at War" presents a different form of the reproduction of violence. Gladys does not respond to violence through revenge like Kalu, rather, Achebe shows how prolonged insecurity gradually reshapes people's values and choices. When Nwankwo recalls her earlier commitment, noting how she "searched without mercy at the checkpoint", Gladys responds, "that time don pass. Now everybody want survival. They call it number six. You put your number six; I put my number. Everything all right". (*Girls at War* 59-60). Her response reflects a society in which insecurity and deprivation have made survival more important than former ideals. Violence therefore reproduces itself quietly through fear, desperation and the erosion of social trust, making peaceful coexistence increasingly difficult.

The three texts consequently present complementary forms of the reproduction of violence. Kalu turns unresolved trauma into revenge; Oshevire's accumulated suffering culminates in destructive action and his eventual death; while Gladys's experience reveals the gradual erosion of moral and social values under prolonged insecurity. Their different experiences show that violence may reappear as revenge, retaliation or the slow breakdown of human relationships and communal values. In all three cases, unresolved violence creates new forms of suffering, underscoring the need for justice, healing and reconciliation.

Peacebuilding Implications

The suffering represented in *The Last Duty*, *Toads of War* and "Girls at War" suggests that sustainable peace requires more than ending armed confrontation; it demands justice, reconciliation, healing and the transformation of the conditions that produce violence. In *The Last Duty,* Oshevire's experience highlights the need for justice and accountability. His prolonged detention separates him from his family, while the injustice and humiliation surrounding his return contribute to further suffering. His psychological state is captured through Aku's observation : "he has neither taken off his clothes, nor even touched the food that I cooked for him… he has been sitting on that chair in the parlor… proceeded to empty a full gallon of kerosene on parts of the house… staring blankly into the dark" (*The Last Duty* 239). The scene illustrates the destructive consequences of unresolved trauma and supports Lederach's (1997) view that peacebuilding must repair damaged relationships and address the grievances underlying conflict.

Toads of War further points to the importance of rehabilitation and reintegration. Kalu's loss of his arm, employment and social stability leaves him embittered and vulnerable to further violence. Psychological care, vocational rehabilitation, economic support and meaningful reintegration of wounded veterans are therefore essential to preventing trauma and resentment from developing into renewed conflict. Similarly, "Girls at War" highlights the need to protect and empower civilians, particularly women, whose lives are disrupted by insecurity, deprivation and exploitation. Peacebuilding must consequently include access to food, education, healthcare, employment and protection, while recognising women not merely as victims but as active participants in rebuilding their community.

The psychological dimension of peacebuilding is equally important. Oshevire, Kalu and Gladys experience different forms of suffering that persist beyond the immediate violence. Caruth's (1996) understanding of trauma and LaCapra's (2001) emphasis on "working through" suggest the importance of creating opportunities for survivors to grieve, process their experiences and recover their dignity. Without such healing, unresolved trauma can continue to affect individuals, families and communities. Reardon's emphasis on peace education is also relevant because literature can challenge violent attitudes and encourage more peaceful ways of resolving differences. By presenting the human consequences of war, the three texts move readers beyond statistics and military narratives to the loss of freedom, family, livelihood, bodily integrity and human dignity.

Literature therefore has an important peacebuilding function. Kalu's injury, Oshevire's destruction and Gladys's transformation encourage readers to confront the consequences of violence and question the idea that revenge or force can resolve conflict. The texts also make clear that peacebuilding must address, both the causes and consequences of violence through accountable institutions, protection of women and children, and opportunities for social and economic recovery. Essentially, *The Last Duty, Toads of War* and "Girls at War" establish a clear progression : structural injustice creates conditions for violence; violence produces psychological and social wounds; unresolved grievances reproduce violence; and sustainable peace requires justice, healing, reconciliation and structural change.

To sum up, Nigerian war literature offers more than a record of the past. Through the experiences of Oshevire, Kalu and Gladys, it exposes the roots and consequences of violence, humanizes its victims and encourages alternatives to revenge and retaliation. In this sense, the three texts function as forms of peace education and counter-narratives to the normalization of violence. Their contribution to curbing terrorism lies in their capacity to make readers remember violence, interrogate its causes, empathize with its victims and recognise justice, reconciliation and peaceful conflict resolution as necessary foundations for lasting peace.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This research finds that *Toads of War, The Last Duty,* and *Girls at War and Other Stories* present war and organised violence not as heroic enterprises but as destructive forces that undermine

human dignity, social stability, and national development. Through their representations of the Nigerian Civil War, the primary texts demonstrate that violent conflicts are often rooted in structural injustices, political exclusion, ethnic distrust, abuse of power, and failures of leadership. These conditions correspond with Johan Galtung's conception of structural violence, which identifies inequality, injustice, and social exclusion as underlying causes of armed conflict and instability (Galtung 183-84). The texts therefore suggest that terrorism and other forms of organized violence cannot be effectively addressed without confronting the political, economic, and social conditions that sustain them.

The analysis further reveals that the consequences of violent conflict extend far beyond physical destruction. The selected texts portray profound psychological trauma manifested through fear, bereavement, displacement, alienation, emotional fragmentation, moral disillusionment, and the collapse of interpersonal relationships. These experiences affirm Cathy Caruth's proposition that trauma persists beyond the immediate moment of violence and continues to shape the memories and identities of survivors (Caruth 4-12). On this note, the narratives illustrate Dominick LaCapra's notion of "working through" trauma by preserving painful memories while encouraging ethical reflection, remembrance, and reconciliation as essential components of individual and collective healing (La Capra 65-80).

Suffice it to say that this study significantly finds out that Nigerian war literature performs an important peacebuilding function. Rather than merely documenting historical events, the texts interrogate the structural causes of violence, expose its devastating human consequences, and advocate values that promote national unity. Through this, they reinforce John Paul Lederach's argument that sustainable peace depends upon the transformation of relationships through reconciliation and social reconstruction (Lederach 20-25). The texts also support Betty Reardon's view that education and cultural engagement are indispensable to the cultivation of peaceful values and democratic citizenship capable of resisting violent extremism (Reardon 25-29).

The study therefore concludes that literature constitutes a significant cultural resource in efforts to curb terrorism. Although literary texts cannot eliminate terrorism through coercive means, they shape ethical consciousness, preserve historical memory, challenge extremist ideologies, and encourage peaceful alternatives to violence. By exposing the catastrophic consequences of armed conflict and humanizing its victims, *Toads of War*, *The Last Duty*, and *Girls at War and Other Stories* cultivate empathy, promote critical reflection, and strengthen public commitment to peaceful coexistence. Their enduring relevance lies in their capacity to transform historical experience into moral instruction for contemporary society.

Beyond its textual interpretations, this study expands existing scholarship by affirming that Nigerian Civil War literature remains relevant to contemporary debates on terrorism, peacebuilding, and national security. Through the integrated application of the theories, it establishes that literary narratives can illuminate both the structural origins of violence and its

enduring psychological consequences, thereby positioning literature as an important complement to broader peacebuilding initiatives.

In addition, the study contributes to scholarship by demonstrating the value of integrating Peace and Conflict Theory with Trauma Theory in the analysis of Nigerian war literature. While Peace and Conflict Theory explains the structural and political conditions that generate violence, Trauma Theory illuminates the enduring psychological consequences of conflict. Their combined application provides a more comprehensive understanding of the primary texts than either framework could achieve independently. By connecting Nigerian Civil War narratives with contemporary concerns about terrorism and peacebuilding, the study broadens existing literary scholarship and underscores the continuing relevance of literature to national security, civic education, and sustainable peace.

It is therefore recommended that Nigerian war literature be more fully integrated into educational curricula and peace education programmes. Government, schools, and media should promote such works to encourage tolerance and non-violent conflict resolution. Policy makers should also address structural inequalities, injustice, and unemployment that fuel extremism. Sustainable peace depends not only on security measures but also on justice, dialogue, empathy, and shared responsibility – values strongly reflected in Nigerian war literature.

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