



A Different Story of War

Women writers countering stereotypes and writing agency into the story of conflict

Humanities Honours Thesis

Author: Veerle H. van Lieshout

Student Number: 4098706

Studies: Liberal Arts and Sciences

Major: Postcolonial and Gender Studies

Date: June 19th, 2017

Supervisor: MA Vasiliki (Vasso) Belia

Second Reader: Dr. Katrine Smiet



Utrecht University

INDEX

SUMMARY	2
INTRODUCTION	3
METHOD & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	6
CONFLICT STUDIES: INSIGHTS & GAPS	11
ANALYSIS	15
PART 1) BREAKING STEREOTYPES BY AUTHORS	15
BLACK & NATIVE MASCULINITY	15
GENDERED WARFARE	17
ANALYSIS	21
PART 2) AGENCY	21
AGENCY AS RESISTANCE	21
AGENCY IN LIVING THROUGH WAR	22
AGENCY ENABLED THROUGH SEX	25
AGENCY ENABLED THROUGH FRIENDSHIP	26
CONCLUSION	29
BIBLIOGRAPHY	31

SUMMARY

Within Conflict Studies, wars are discussed and analysed from a perspective that gives insights into the dynamics and tactics of conflicts. This thesis argues that the danger of focusing on these aspects of conflict is that the multiplicity of stories in conflict situations can be overlooked. The conflict is reduced to a single story that sometimes reduces the protagonists of conflict to stereotypes. Furthermore, the agency of people living through conflict situations is sometimes denied. Those that are denied agency, for example women in conflict situations, are often seen as victims in need of protection. Denial of agency means denying human dignity and the assumption of victimhood might lead to false justifications of (violent) intervention to protect the assumed helpless. This thesis argues that to avoid falling prey to a discourse of stereotypes and denial of agency, the stories of people living through conflict situations need to get a place within the dominant story of conflict in the field of Conflict Studies. In this thesis, it is argued that a literary analysis informed by postcolonial and gender theory can fill this gap by answering the question: 'How do Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World* counter gendered stereotypes and show different kinds of agency within a conflict situation?' The analysis of these novels shows how the authors have countered gendered stereotypes in the story of conflict, such as 'the violent and hypersexual black or native man' and 'the helpless woman that needs to be saved'. Furthermore, it shows how female characters show different kinds of agency, in the form of resistance and as the ability to endure and persist in a painful situation. Thereby, this thesis argues that postcolonial literary works can offer an important contribution to Conflict Studies by imagining new perspectives on conflict.

INTRODUCTION

Within Conflict Studies, wars are discussed and analysed from a certain perspective. According to the website of the Conflict Studies minor at Utrecht University, the field of Conflict Studies explores theories that pertain “to conflict causes, to local dynamics of conflict, and the political processes and wider dynamics brought about by international interventions” (Conflict Studies, 2017). The theory on local dynamics sheds light on state collapse, the role of political elites, nationalist myth making, transitions to democracy, governance, ethnicity and group identity (Conflict Studies, 2017). This perspective gives valuable insights into the dynamics and tactics of conflicts. The danger of focusing on these aspects is that the multiplicity of stories in conflict situations can get overlooked. Conflicts are sometimes reduced to a single story that underrepresents other stories. Feminist international relations (IR)¹ theorist J. Ann Tickner has argued that the field of IR has based its assumptions and explanations almost entirely on the activities and experiences of ‘masculine’ men (1992, 6). The subject matter of the field is based on a history “from which women are, for the most part, absent. Little material can be found on women's roles in wars; generally they are seen as victims, rarely as agents” (Tickner, 1992, 47). Women are assumed not to have agency in conflict situations because they often do not actively participate in fighting in the war. Next to this denial of agency, the single story of conflict sometimes reduces those involved in conflict to gendered stereotypes such as ‘the helpless woman’ or ‘the dangerous black or native man’.

This thesis will form a disruption of this perspective by looking at the Biafran War (1967-1970), also known as the Nigerian Civil War, and the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) from a new lens. The wars will be discussed through the novels *Children of the New World* by Assia Djebar and *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Children of the New World* is a novel about one single day in the lives of twenty characters living in Blida, a city in Algeria while the Algerian War of Independence lingers over their

¹ International Relations (IR) is a field that is very similar to Conflict Studies. At Utrecht University, the major International Studies is split into Conflict Studies and IR. IR focuses on political and historical aspects of international state building and relations, while Conflict Studies focuses on the dynamics of more recent conflicts. Therefore, the way that knowledge is produced and the assumptions on which this knowledge is based in these two closely related fields is similar. Because International Studies is an interdisciplinary field, texts in this field, used in this thesis, use different names to describe this field, sometimes it is referred to as Peace Studies, International Politics or Civil War Studies/literature.

daily lives. The novel is about Hassiba who joins the revolution, about Cherifa and Lila who get left behind by their husbands who joined the revolution, about Touma who is an informer for the French police, about her brother Tawfik who is angry at her for informing the enemy and there are many more characters portrayed in the novel. The novel focuses on the experiences of women. This is significant for this research as women had a big and sometimes non-stereotypical role in the Algerian War of Independence. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a novel about the lives of multiple characters that are related to each other through the twin sisters Olanna and Kainene. The sisters are part of the Igbo-tribe, they live in Nigeria during the war. Olanna lives together with Odenigbo and their houseboy Ugwu. Later, their child Baby is added to the family. Kainene lives by herself but she spends the weekends with her British partner Richard. The novel describes how the lives of the characters and their relationships to each other change due to the Biafran War. The works I discuss are seemingly about very different wars due to their disparate location and context, but Algeria and Nigeria do share a history of European colonialism. Next to this, they are connected by long term conflicts that resulted from those colonial histories (Shringarpure, 2015, 23). Therefore, the stories on these conflicts can be analysed together to provide new insights that can shed light on underrepresented perspectives of conflicts. In my analysis of these novels I will ask the question: How do Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World* counter gendered stereotypes and show different kinds of agency within a conflict situation? To answer the research question, the novels will be analysed by using concepts, such as stereotypes, black masculinities, gendered warfare, resistance and agency, that stem from postcolonial and gender theory, as tools for a close reading of the novels.

Using this combination of Literary Studies and Postcolonial and Gender Studies offers new ways to analyse conflict. Literary Studies demonstrates how literary works can play an important role in imagining new perspectives to look at reality and society. Postcolonial and Gender Studies focusses on how society is formed by different power relations based on different identity markers such as gender, race and class. Furthermore, it examines how emancipation is possible from the different positions in society based on those same identity markers. Through the combination of these two disciplines new insights will be drawn from the literary works by Adichie and Djebar that allow me to fill some of the gaps that the already interdisciplinary field of Conflict Studies leaves behind, such as the lack of personal accounts of living through conflict and the use of stereotypes in their discourses.

Reflexivity or the ability to stay critical about your own work and position in and to your work, is an important part of feminist research (Hesse-biber, 2013, 3). That is why I want to note that as a white European woman who has never lived in a conflict situation I want to stay away from any essentializing conclusion about experiences of black and Muslim women in conflict areas. Equally important is that during my research I want to stay aware of the fact that conclusions about the social realities surrounding conflict situation cannot be drawn from the experiences of the fictional characters in the novels. What the novels can do is encourage the reader to identify with and embody the experiences of unusual protagonists of the story of war through the poetics of literary writing. To show that the novels by Djébar and Adichie can provide a more complete picture of conflicts I will first examine how the Biafran War and the Algerian War of Independence have been discussed in the academic field of International Relations and what gaps and faulty assumptions can be recognised in this discussion. Second, I will show how the authors of the novels have countered gendered stereotypes in war situations. Third, I will discuss how the characters in these novels express different kinds of agency. I will conclude that it is important for Conflict Studies to include more diverse stories in order to resist a discourse of gendered stereotypes. Furthermore, I argue that a broader perception of agency is needed to show the self-reliance of those that live in violent conflict situations instead of assuming that they are victims in need of protection. Denial of agency not only means denying human dignity but the victimization might also lead to false justifications of (violent) intervention to protect the assumed helpless. A more complete and non-stereotyped story of conflict might lead to more comprehensive and gender sensitive interventions or non-interventions in conflict areas.

METHOD & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The common approach to doing research on wars is to perform a conflict analysis from a Conflict Studies perspective. This will be discussed more in depth in the next section. This perspective on conflict offers valuable insights into the local and international dynamics of conflict and intervention and sheds light on its political processes (Conflict Studies, 2017). Insights are provided into how groups are formed and how the state and rebels can use incentives such as fears or rewards to mobilize actors (Conflict Studies, 2017). This analysis of war focuses on people that make decisions about conflicts or fight in them. However, sociology professor Nira Yuval-Davis argues in her book *Gender & Nation* that for some of those involved in conflict:

War becomes a total experience which completely transforms and often destroys the lives of the people in the country. Most or even all of the determinants of one's daily life and personal identity before the war came can disappear in a few hours: place of work, properties, homes, personal effects and, worst of all, friends, relatives and members of one's family. Even if one is not injured, abused or tortured by the enemy, the brutal stripping of all that has been nearest and dearest has devastating long-term if not permanent effects on people's lives (1997, 109).

The approach that Conflict Studies uses to analyse conflicts sometimes overlooks these experiences that have an enormous impact on people's lives. Tickner has argued that it is mostly women's lived experiences of war that are not represented (1992). She explains that this is due to the fact that traits of war such as toughness, courage, power, independence and, physical strength are associated with a stereotypical image of masculinity (1992, 6). For this reason, women's experiences of war are seen as inauthentic (Tickner, 1992, 4). The discourse of international politics has been tied to heroic stories of male warrior-patriots (Tickner, 1992, 137). This focus on the fighting men, has led attention away from the experiences of women. This has led to a stereotype that women in war situations are victims in need of protection, which subsequently justifies (violent) intervention in order to provide protection (Tucker, 1992, 58). The perspectives of Conflict Studies and IR, with their main focus on the fighting men, perpetuates gendered stereotypes and places people that are not engaged in the fight in a position of helplessness where their agency is denied. Little attention is paid to their personal experiences of living through the war. I will try to fill the gap of stories that are overlooked by making use of a combination of literary analysis and postcolonial and gender theory.

I will analyse two novels on different experiences of two wars. My analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Children of the New World* will be a close reading that is informed by postcolonial and gender theory. I will answer my research question of how the novels counter gendered stereotypes and show different kinds of agency within a conflict situation by using concepts as tools to read and analyse the novels together. I will bring significant scenes from the novels into conversation with different concepts from postcolonial and gender theory, such as stereotyping, masculinity, resistance and agency. The (post-)colonial novels by Adichie and Djébar provide personal insights into the minds and intimate moments of the characters. They have included a multiplicity of characters in these novels from different genders, ethnicities, classes and ages, who all deal with the wars in different ways. Thereby, they give a voice to the rich and complex stories of different people living in conflict areas. My literary analysis of these novels will show the complexities and differences in the lives of these characters. At the same time, it will show similarities in the dynamics and strategies of surviving as an individual during war-time. The stories of the characters in the novels are not only important because there are a lot of (auto-)biographical aspects to the novels and thereby they show real life experiences that often stay unheard, but also because the novels imagine alternative perspectives on conflict that give room to marginalized voices and experiences. The novels that I will analyse would normally be seen as hardly insightful for conflict analysis because they are not about fighting in the war or the tactics and incentives for the war but about individual lives that change due to war. Throughout my analysis, I will argue that these experiences are equally important to be heard in the story of war.

My analysis is twofold. First, I show how the authors have countered gendered stereotypes that are part of conflict and its analysis. After that, I will discuss what different kinds of agency can be found in the behaviour of the characters in the novels. In the focus on one kind of story of conflict, that of the fighting men, Conflict Studies might perpetuate harmful gendered stereotypes about the roles of (racialized) men and women in war. In his book *Representation*, on cultural representations and signifying practices, cultural theorist Stuart Hall explains that being stereotyped means that one is “reduced to a few essentials, fixed in Nature by a few, simplified characteristics” (2013, 237). Stereotyping includes the construction of otherness and the exclusion and fetishizing of that constructed Other (Hall, 2013, 247). In the (post-)colonial context, in which the Biafran and Algerian War can be placed, stereotypes have functioned to create an Other that is inferior to the Western white self. The Other is capitalized because it has a very specific meaning: it is not just something other, but it refers to a specific other created out of this dualism of the white Western self and

the Other (Hall, 2013). Colonial discourse has relied on stereotypes; portraying the Other as inferior and dangerous justified colonial, imperial and postcolonial presence and violence (Stanovsky, 2007, 3). Racial stereotypes drawn from colonial and slavery days never entirely disappeared from mainstream media (Hall, 2013, 240). They remained part of the story of conflict as well. Tickner uses an example of Latin American (usually black) males portrayed by American diplomats as brute, feminized and infantile, to show that IR in the nineteenth century made use of stereotypes to justify intervention policies of the West (1992, 49).

According to her: “Such images, although somewhat muted, remain today and are particularly prevalent in the thinking of Western states when they are dealing with the Third World” (Tickner, 1992, 49). One of those stereotypical colonial images that continues to exist nowadays in mainstream media is that of the black or native man as “inactive; uncritical; uncaring; violent and oversexed” (Shange, 2014, 16). The hypersexual black man was assumed to be a threat to white womanhood, which needed to be protected (Shange, 2014, 12). These essentialized views of postcolonial masculinities obscure actual diversity and plurality of black masculinities (Stanovsky, 2007, 3). The stereotype of the ‘aggressive black man’ is in line with the stereotype that men in general are more closely linked to warfare. Political and cultural sociologist, Joane Nagel explains that warfare and nationalism are attractive to men because they are linked with attributes that are also linked with stereotypical masculinity such as honour, patriotism and bravery (1998, 252). According to Nagel, masculinity can therefore be “won” by joining the fight for nationalism (1998). Yuval-Davis argues that there indeed exists a stereotype where men are linked to warfare and women to peace:

Wars are seen to be fought for the sake of ‘womenandchildren’, and the fighting men are comforted and reassured by the knowledge that ‘their women’ are keeping the hearth fires going and are waiting for them to come home (1997, 111).

In Yuval-Davis’ opinion, this view does not align with the facts. She has argued that women have always played vital roles in warfare. Instead of participating directly in the fighting, which also happened sometimes, “the women took care of the dead and wounded or became embodied possession of the victorious” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 95). The exclusion of women from the nationalist discourse, while participating in the fight for the nation, has to do with a gender divide in the public and private sphere. Yuval-Davis has argued that nationalism and nations are topics usually discussed and decided on in the public political sphere, a sphere that often excludes women as they are thought to be located in the private sphere (Yuval-Davis,

1997, 2). I will discuss how in their novels Adichie and Djébar have countered these gendered stereotypes of black and native masculinities and gendered notions of warfare by portraying nuanced pictures of people in war and by telling the story of war from multiple different perspectives.

The second part of my analysis focuses on agency. When agency is discussed in the analysis of conflict it is often only ascribed to a small group of leaders or fighters. To answer the question of why individuals would ever take up arms against, for example, a government, given the risks and uncertain payoffs of those actions, theoretical literature on conflict focused on the role of leadership and organization and their framing processes and mobilizing structures (Mason, 2004, 39). Professor in Peace Studies Richard Jackson and Lecturer in International Politics Helen Dexter, have explained in their article ‘The Social Construction of Organised Political Violence: An Analytical Framework’ that two types of agents are necessary for organised and sustained political violence (2014, 7). First, leaders are needed that can mobilize aggrieved societies or groups into active participants of violence (Jackson & Dexter, 2014, 7). Second, large-scale violence needs several human agents to actually participate in the violence (Jackson & Dexter, 2014, 7). Jackson and Dexter have argued that while the idea of elite-led violence is well theorised, the agency of the masses is barely mentioned: “There is an assumption that for violence to break out, the masses or ordinary non-elites must simply accept or be persuaded by a core set of beliefs and narratives perpetuated by elites” (2014, 8). Hereby, ordinary people in situations of violent conflict are sometimes denied agency. In a liberal humanist framework, agency can be defined as “the free exercise of self-willed behaviour” (Bilge, 2010, 12). In this framework, a person is considered an agentic subject, because *he* speaks for *himself* and accepts responsibility for *his* actions (Davies, 1991, 42). Historically, groups such as women, non-whites and the insane were excluded from the liberal account of agentic subjects that is why “[a]sserting and denouncing women’s lack of agency has been politically foundational for feminism” (Bilge, 2010, 12). Therefore, in feminist theory, agency is often understood as the capacity to resist customs, traditions, domination and other obstacles in order to realise one’s own interest (Mahmood, 2001, 206). During my analysis, I will discuss how some of the characters in the novels show agency by resisting gendered norms. However, an analysis wherein agency is only viewed as resistance and self-empowerment against norms is too narrow. Anthropology professor Saba Mahmood has argued, using an example of the agency of women in Islamic movements, that agency can also be the capacity to realise one’s own interests not only against normative customs but also within the historically specific relations of subordination

that one lives in (2001). Mahmood and anthropology professor Talal Asad argue that there is agency in the ability to suffer, endure and persist in a painful context (Mahmood, 2001; Asad, 2000). Adichie and Djébar have depicted the agency of some characters that are normally not considered as agentic subjects. I examine how in the novels different kinds of agency in the form of resistance and as the ability to endure, suffer and persist are visible. Next to this, I study how the novels show that female friendship bonds and sex can be enablers of the latter kind of agency. The common association between war and sex is often a violent one: rape is often used as a war strategy (Norridge, 2012). In opposition to this, the novels will show how sex can also signify joy in times of pain and tragedy (Norridge, 2012). My findings on the ways in which the authors of *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Children of the New World* have countered gendered stereotypes and the different ways in which their characters show agency will shed a new light on the role and experiences of people living in conflict situations.

CONFLICT STUDIES: INSIGHTS & GAPS

Books written by authors in the field of IR and political history such as *Decolonization and the French of Algeria* by Sung-Eun Choi (2016), *Struggle for Modern Nigeria: The Biafran War 1967-1970* by Micheal Gould (2012), *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970* by John Stremlau (1977) and *The Algerian War* by Heather Wagner (2012), have discussed the Biafran and Algerian War along the lines of conflict theory. They have paid attention to incentives for starting and joining the war. Within Conflict Studies incentives are viewed as a solution to the free-rider problem. This problem is the question of why individual members of large groups would voluntarily support the group goal, and join in the fight for this goal, when individual support will not be decisive for achieving the goal and when one “would be as likely to get the benefits from the attainment of that goal whether he had worked for its attainment or not” (Moore, 1995, 426). Therefore, incentives are needed to mobilize people to join the fight (Moore, 1995). Incentives can be economic grievances, fear of death or they can come in the form of material/monetary rewards. In the field of IR, authors on the Algerian War of Independence and the Biafran War have discussed different ways in which people were mobilized during these wars.

The Biafran war was a result of the tribal tensions after Nigeria became independent from British rule in 1960. The country, originally rich with 250 linguistically distinct (tribal) groups, was by then divided into two administrative regions: the North and the South (Gould, 2012; Stremlau, 1977). The Igbo and Yoruba in South and West Nigeria were afraid that the Muslim Hausa people in the North would gain too much power after they won the election. In January 1966, a coup took place. A group of mainly Igbo officers tried to get the sitting government out of office. The same year, a counter-coup by the North took place. Ironsi, an Igbo-man who assumed control after the first coup, was arrested and Igbo people were attacked and slaughtered (Gould, 2012, 33). Lt-Col. Yakubu Gowon became the de facto leader of Nigeria (Gould, 2012, 32). But Lt-Col. Ojukwu, an Igbo military governor of the Eastern Region, did not accept Gowon as head of the state (Gould, 2012, 32). On May 30th, 1967, Biafra was declared independent by Ojukwu. The Federal government reacted by blocking Biafra economically and declaring total war in August 1967 (Stremlau, 1977, 73). While both parties were short on arms, the war lingered on a long time. In January 1970, the Biafran situation had become untenable and it ended abruptly (Gould, 2012, 108). The story of the Biafran War is explained by academics in IR as a story of a strong leader, Ojukwu, being able to mobilize a fearful mass, the Biafran people, into war (Stremlau, 1977, Gould,

2012). Killings of Igbo people in the North of Nigeria, by aggrieved Muslim populations, sparked fear among the Igbo population (Stremlau, 1977). Fear of violence can easily be used by political entrepreneurs or elites to further polarize the society (Lake & Rothchild, 1996). Ojukwu, indeed framed the killings of Igbo people as an important incentive to join the fight for Biafra (Stremlau, 1977). In conflict theory, leaders are viewed as decisive agents of war (Nepstad & Bob, 2006). Ojukwu as a leader has been ascribed a critical role in shaping the Biafran movement. His story is considered worth telling.

The Algerian War of Independence was a reaction to unequal colonial power relations. Algeria officially became a part of France in 1847 (Wagner, 2012, 9). Land was taken away from the native Algerians and they were denied equal French citizenship rights (Choi, 2012, 13). Out of grievances about their unequal position, a group of Native Algerians started the political organization *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) with a military wing named *Armée de Libération Nationale* (ALN). They planned their first scattered terrorist attack on November 1st, 1954: also known as the start of the Algerian War of Independence (Wagner, 2012, 71). The FLN was determined to gain independence for Algeria. They launched terrorist attacks in both Algeria and France, and in 1958 they announced a provisional government (Wagner, 2012, 84). Negotiations between the French government and the FLN began in 1961 and on July 3rd, 1962, de Gaulle, the French president at the time, publically declared Algeria independent (Wagner, 2012, 91). The story of the Algerian War of Independence is explained in the academic field of IR as a story of an aggrieved native population, angry about unequal economic, educational and societal chances (Wagner, 2012; Choi, 2016). The Algerian War of Independence is described as an irregular war where there are no front lines and the war is fragmented over several spaces (Kalyvas, 2006, 88). Because the ALN had lesser resources than the French army, they made use of guerilla tactics. They planned small attacks in several different places which made it seem as if they had many men and resources (Wagner, 2012, 72). These tactics and other tactics to gain international attention for the war by emphasising inhumane actions by the enemy, are widely discussed in the academic field of IR.

What is highlighted in this perspective on conflicts are the tactics of either the leaders or the groups and the way in which grievances and fears are used to mobilize people. Little attention is paid to the experiences and stories of people living in the war. In her TEDtalk 'The Danger of the Single Story' Adichie explains how telling a single story about a person or a place creates stereotypes. She explains how this is a process of power differences. How a story is told, who tells it and when is all dependent on power (Adichie, 2009). Being in power

means being able to tell the story of another person and more importantly to make this story the definitive one (Adichie, 2009). The final consequence of telling a single story is, according to Adichie, that “It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar” (2009). Not paying attention to stories of people living through conflict is not only a painful process caused by unequal power relations, that robs people of human dignity, but it might also have negative influences on foreign intervention in conflict areas. The academic fields of Conflict Studies and IR have an influence on the decisions made around Western and UN interventions in conflict areas. Peacebuilding missions and humanitarian aid organizations can base their work on research done in academia. Next to this, on the Conflict Studies website of Utrecht University it is claimed that 30% of their alumni come to work for national NGO’s in the field of conflict, humanitarian aid, transformation and peacebuilding (Career Prospects, 2015). This means that a lot of knowledge gained in the academic field is brought to the practical field of intervention in conflicts. When this knowledge is built on an incomplete discourse of which stereotypes are part and that only recognises agency in some people, it might influence the quality of the humanitarian aid and intervention. Tickner provides the example that if women are assumed to be un-agentic victims it might falsely justify violent intervention in order to protect them (Tickner, 1992). A wider range of stories on people living in conflict situations and how they can survive in times of war by drawing strength from friendship and love need to get a place within the dominant story of conflict in the field of Conflict Studies, to show the agency and self-reliance of those people and to avoid falling prey to a discourse of stereotypes about who is dangerous and who is in need of protection.

Literature can function as a way to address and counter the problematic single story that reduces people to stereotypes and denies them agency. In the same way that one story about conflict has denied people their agency, stories can also function to empower and humanise (Adichie, 2009). Literature can show characters from multiple sides and thereby show their humanity. In some ways literature can do this more powerfully than other academic stories, because literature makes us live through the novel (Rosenblatt, 1978). Novels let readers participate in the story through sympathy and compassion. Rememorating the past through novels has an impact on the readers in a unique way, as the story is passed on in such a way that it becomes real and embodied (Donadey, 2008, 69). The stylistic devices of a novel make the experience of reading more complex, nuanced and intense (Nussbaum, 1992) than a purely informing text on the conflicts. According to American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, people care for the books they read, and they are changed by what they

care for (1992, 231). Postcolonial writers, such as Djébar and Adichie, have rewritten the past in order to overwrite the blanks, gaps and misrepresentations that dominant versions of history have left behind (Donaday, 2008, 66). They have used fiction as a medium to fill its blanks and respond to its misrepresentations (Donaday, 2008, 66). In the next sections, I illustrate how Adichie and Djébar have used the medium of literature to resist stereotypes in the story of conflict and how their female characters show different kinds of agency that can broaden the concept of agency from which the academic field of Conflict Studies reasons.

ANALYSIS

PART 1) BREAKING STEREOTYPES BY AUTHORS

In this section, I will show how Assia Djébar and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have countered or rejected gendered stereotypes that are a part of conflict and its analysis. I will analyse how the authors have made use of multiple characters in their novels to reject, counter and broaden stereotypes.

BLACK & NATIVE MASCULINITY

The first stereotype that is countered and rejected in both novels is that of black and native men as dangerous hypersexual beasts (Stanovsky, 2007, 1). Djébar has quite literally opposed the stereotype in *Children of the New World*. In the novel, there is a short section about a married French woman and Saidi, a bar-owner and a revolutionist that later gets tortured and killed by the French police. Saidi gets arrested and is accused of raping the French woman. The local and capital city's daily papers speak of "A Three-Day Rape!" (Djébar, 2005, 105). Algerian people showed each other French newspapers in which Saidi was portrayed and framed in a certain way:

the portrait- an identity picture in which Saidi, with bare neck, jutting jawbones, and a frozen stare, the way simple people look into the camera- now with the expression of a "dangerous brute" as the caption stated (Djébar, 2005, 105).

By showing this reaction of the newspaper Djébar directly addresses the stereotype of the threatening native man forming a danger to white womanhood, which needs to be protected (Shange, 2014, 12). This stereotype was created to justify colonial presence and keep colonial power relations, such as those between the Native Algerians and the French, intact (Stanovsky, 2007). During the war the stereotype of the dangerous native and oppressive Muslim Algerian man, as a threat to white and Algerian women was used on the French side to justify their fight. The story of Saidi overturns this stereotype as it turns out to be a story of love, rather than a story of rape. This is shown in a short section of the novel dedicated to the feelings of the French woman when she leaves the bar after Saidi gets arrested:

Her head lowered, she follows her husband straight down the street in this town where she's suffocating, where she'll die of boredom after these three days of overindulgence. She sighs, "He made me drunk... drunk with passion, with love, with... (Djebar, 2005, 105).

Even though the section is short, the choice of words makes that we can immediately relate. We are provided with a quick look into the mind of the French woman and we can see how overwhelming this experience of passion, love and drunkenness was for her in contrast to the boring and suffocating life she normally lived. Djebar gives a story of a woman driven by passion and thereby counters the idea of the white woman in need of saving from the dangerous native men. By shortly reminiscing this incident between Saidi and the French woman, Djebar reminds us that media such as newspapers are not to be trusted in times of war. She demonstrates how stereotypes can create a harmful image of the native Algerian as a dangerous brute: an image that from then on can be used to justify attacks on native men.

While Djebar showed the opposite of the stereotype surrounding native and black masculinity, Adichie brought more nuance to the stereotype instead of completely countering it. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* Adichie engages with the story of war rape in the Biafran war. The threat of rape lingers over the whole novel. Adichie seems intrigued by the perpetrator perspective (Norridge, 2012, 26). Or what she herself calls an interest in a less obvious narrator (Adichie, 2006, 5). One of the main and narrating characters in the novel, Ugwu, Olanna and Odenigbo's houseboy, is forced to join the Biafran army. He is surprisingly good at fighting and killing so he gets the nickname 'Target Destroyer'. His troop pressures Ugwu into partaking in a group-rape of a female bartender. What is significant is that in spite of Ugwu's sexual violence, the reader is still encouraged to identify with him (Norridge, 2012, 26). We get to read the rape from Ugwu's perspective:

'Ujo abiala o! Target Destroyer is afraid!' Ugwu shrugged and moved forwards. 'Who is afraid?' he said disdainfully. 'I just like to eat before other, that is all.' 'The food is still fresh!' 'Target Destroyer, aren't you a man? *I bukwa nwoke?*' On the floor, the girl was still. Ugwu pulled his trousers down, surprised at the swiftness of his erection. She was dry and tense when he entered her. He did not look at her face, or at the man pinning her down, or at anything at all as he moved quickly and felt his own climax, the rush of fluids to the tips of himself: a self-loathing release. He zipped up his trousers while some soldiers clapped. Finally he looked at the girl. She stared back at him with a calm hate (Adichie, 2006, 365)

The fact that we read it from Ugwu's perspective does not excuse him from his horrible deed. The pressure on him by his groupmates is not an excuse: he chooses to rape the girl when his masculinity is questioned. Furthermore, Adichie does not deny how traumatizing the experience of the group-rape must be for the woman. The words that are used in this quote 'dry', 'tense' 'calm hate' and the way it is earlier described that she is being held down, sobbing and begging, gives the reader a sickening insight in how horrible it must be. While the words do evoke a response of horror and hatred, Adichie's story refuses the possibility of reducing Ugwu to a stereotype of a hypersexual brute. She refuses to adhere to the stereotype of black men as oversexed, violent and uncaring (Shange, 2014, 16). Through his narrator function in the novel we get to see multiple sides from Ugwu. Earlier depictions of Ugwu portray him as kind and loving. For example, when Eberechi, a girl he likes tells him about her negative sexual experiences:

He thought, in the following days, about him and Eberechi in bed, how different it would be from her experience with the colonel. He would treat her with the respect she deserved and do only what she liked, only what she wanted him to do (Adichie, 2006, 294).

As a result, Adichie shows that it is possible to depict Ugwu as loving, caring, afraid, a cold killer, a rapist and guilty. She has portrayed him as a dynamic character having multiple sides instead of as a flat character that can be reduced to a stereotype.

GENDERED WARFARE

The authors do not only counter and nuance stereotypes of native and black masculinities. Equally important, the stereotypical role of women in war is questioned throughout the novels. The idea that women are more closely related to peace than warfare and that they inactively wait until the war is over while the men protect them (Yuval-Davis, 1997) is overturned in these novels. Assistant professor in English Literature Bhakti Shringarpure, who has also written on these two novels, concludes that: "Gender roles can often intensify during war, and the female body often becomes the first site for violent interventions" (2015, 38). But in these novels the victimized representation of the female body is overturned and replaced by a narrative of the female body "as an agent of resistance and autonomy" (Shringarpure, 2015, 38). Women's stereotypical role in war is that of the caretaker on a familial, private level, while men are assumed to take care and protect the community or the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Adichie plays with this gendered difference in her novel,

contrasting the two sisters who have very different roles in the war. One of the sisters Olanna takes care of the family and teaches children while her husband Odenigbo works for the Biafran directorate contributing to the Biafran cause:

When [Odenigbo] stood up and kissed her goodbye, [Olanna] wondered why he was not frightened by how little they had. Perhaps it was because he did not go the market himself. He did not notice how a cup of salt cost a shilling more each week and how chickens were chopped into bits that were still too expensive and how nobody sold rice in large bags any more because nobody could buy them. That night, she was silent as his thrusts became faster. It was the first time she felt detached from him; while he was murmuring in her ear, she was mourning her money in the bank in Lagos (Adichie, 2006, 262).

Odenigbo's view is a national one, he is preoccupied with the Biafran cause, while Olanna's worry is one about the private sphere, about her own family. She does not worry about national survival for Biafra but their own survival. She worries about the food and the money, about the health of the family and her biggest fear is not that they are going to lose the war, but she fears that they will lose someone in their own small household. This plays into the stereotype of women functioning in the private sphere where they are excluded from discussions of nationalism, politics and war (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2). For some women, this stereotype might be true and to hear and value this story is important as well, otherwise the agency of women living through war would be denied. I will go into the importance of recognizing agency in the next part of the analysis, but first I want to show that *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Children of the New World* also tell other stories about the role of women in war. As Adichie herself would say: they avoid making one story the *only* story of war (Adichie, 2009).

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, there is also the story of the other sister Kainene, who has always been a business woman, moving in public spheres. Her life is so busy that her partner Richard feels bewildered by it:

Seeing her in Lagos, in brief meetings at the hotel, he had not realized that hers was a life that ran fully and would run fully even if he was not in it [...] Her work came first, she was determined to make her father's factories grow, to do better than he had done (Adichie, 2006, 78).

Her driven economic mindset is clear from the beginning of the war, as she considers donating money to the war cabinet in order to get easier access to contracts after the war

(Adichie, 2006, 180). Later in the conflict Kainene explains to her sister that she was able to make a profit of the war:

‘I was an army contractor, and I had a licence to import stockfish. I’m in Orlu now. I’m in charge of a refugee camp there’ ‘Oh.’ ‘Are you silently condemning me for profiteering from the war? Somebody had to import the stockfish, you know’ Kainene raised her eyebrows; they were pencilled in, thin, fluid arcs. ‘Many contractors were paid and didn’t deliver. At least I did.’ ‘No, no, I wasn’t thinking that at all.’ ‘You were’ (Adichie, 2006, 343).

In this quote, it becomes clear that Kainene is convinced that people will judge her because of her economic mindset during the war. She is afraid that she will be judged because she does not fit into the stereotypical role of a passive caretaker ascribed to women in war (Yuval-Davis, 1997). By making a profit from the war, Kainene’s character goes against patriarchal norms of women as peacekeepers that should stay within the private sphere (Yuval-Davis, 1997). What is interesting about Adichie’s novel, is that she included two different stories of women in war. She recognises that women can indeed take on stereotypical roles in war, but through Kainene’s character Adichie shows that women do not always have the same role or act the same way in a war situation and are therefore cannot be reduced to a stereotype.

In *Children of the New World*, Djebbar has included a female character, Hassiba, who actively resists the idea that only male combatants can make the active decision to join the war: “I’ve thought about it a lot: the revolution is for everybody, for the old and the young. I want to shed my blood for the revolution” (Djebbar, 2005, 148). Hassiba has practiced that she is going to say this when one of the revolutionary brothers would ask her why she wants to join the revolution, because she feels like she must justify herself as a young girl. When she meets the man that is going to take her to the revolution in the mountains he questions her about her heels, assuming that she made a mistake by putting them on, confirming his idea that women are unfit for the revolution. But Hassiba, proves him wrong by explaining that she only wears them because she was told not to stand out during the train ride (Djebbar, 2005, 148). With the claim that ‘the revolution is for everybody’ and the fact that she wants to shed blood for the revolution, Hassiba resists the idea that fighting for one’s nation is always a masculine practice (Yuval-Davis, 1997). She has decided to go against gendered norms to get rid of colonial oppression. Hassiba’s active participation in the Algerian revolution is not merely fictional as according to some feminist and postcolonial academics, such as Frantz Fanon, Algerian women had a unique position in the Algerian War of Independence (Quinan,

2011). This was partly due to the veil: the French wanted to unveil women and thereby save them from oppressive Arab men, while on the Algerian side “the veil would also be used as a tool in guerilla warfare, a way to hide bombs, grenades, and firearms” (Quinan, 2011, 723). Djébar shows that the war was not only fought on and via women and their veils but also by women, such as her character Hassiba. Though it is questionable how many women entered the war out of free will, Hassiba’s quote shows that in her case it was explicitly her own choice. Hassiba can be seen as an agent of resistance, not conforming to the stereotype that women need to wait to be saved in times of war.

Adichie and Djébar have both countered and sometimes affirmed gendered stereotypes. But according to Adichie “the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (2009). Both authors have avoided telling a single story about war, to avoid that this story could be seen as the only story. A discourse that rejects the use of stereotypes should be a priority for Conflict Studies as well, because a single story would lead to misinterpretations about who is dangerous and who is in need of saving. Those stereotypes need to be avoided in a discipline that influences intervention in conflict areas.

ANALYSIS

PART 2) AGENCY

The concept of agency is limited within the field of Conflict Studies. There is a focus on the activities and decisions of the great powers at the center of the system (Tickner, 1992, 18). The idea of elite-led violence, where a powerful agent uses structural potentials of societies and groups to mobilize them into violence is well theorised (Jackson & Dexter, 2014, 7). Leaders are seen as decisive agents in conflicts: “They define goals and advance strategies. They mobilize followers, galvanize indigenous organizations, and forge coalitions. They influence responses to external repression, and their action, rhetoric, and style affect conflict outcome” (Nepstad & Bob, 2006, 1). But, the agency of ordinary non-elites is sometimes overlooked due to the assumptions that they are forced or persuaded by the narratives of elites (Jackson & Dexter, 2014, 7). Thereby, the role of women in war often stays underrepresented, as they often do not fulfill these leadership positions. When women are discussed they are seen as victims in need of protection and rarely as agents (Tickner, 1992, 47). The denial of agency implies that people are not able to make decision or act upon their free will (Mahmood, 2001). They are sometimes falsely assumed to be oppressed and in need of protection. This assumption means to underestimate their self-reliance and to deny them dignity and humanity. Next to this, the protector/protected myth contributes to legitimization of (violent) intervention (Tickner, 1992, 58). To come to a more inclusive discourse, in which faulty assumptions about victimhood are avoided, we need to look at “the many ways in which women's life experiences have an impact on and are affected by the world of international politics, even if they have been largely invisible” (Tickner, 1992, 144). In the following section I want to show how the female characters in the novels *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Children of the New World* show and express different kinds of agency, to show that agency is broader than “the free exercise of self-willed behaviour” (Bilge, 2010, 12) but can also be found in small acts of empowerment or mere survival.

AGENCY AS RESISTANCE

As discussed in the last section on breaking stereotypes, in *Children of the New World*, Hassiba actively resists gendered norms. The normative idea about women in war is that they do not actively participate in the war because warfare is seen as a masculine practice (Yuval-

Davis, 1997). In her decision to join the fight against the French colonizers, Hassiba shows the agency to actively and openly resist both gender and colonial oppression. The feminist notion of agency focuses on this capacity to resist norms (Mahmood, 2001). The repudiation of gendered norms is important because it shows how agency is not something that only can be ascribed to male, white and sane people, as historically has been done (Davies, 1991, 42). Therefore, denouncing women's lack of agency has become a foundational mission for feminism (Bilge, 2010, 12). But to view agency merely as the capacity to subvert norms is still too narrow. While Hassiba shows agency by resisting gendered norms, this is still the kind of agency that is similar to the agency that is ascribed to male combatants making rational decisions in war. In their novels Adichie and Djébar also included stories of female protagonists that do not participate in the war in conventional ways but in their own ways (Shringarpure, 2015, 37). In the next part of this section I will therefore focus on alternative forms of agency using anthropology and sociology professors Saba Mahmood's, Talal Asad's and Sirma Bilge's conceptualizations of agency.

AGENCY IN LIVING THROUGH WAR

While, except for one female character, the women in *Children of the New World* do not actively struggle to overthrow French colonialism they do seek agency within their family and society. While in the novel, men fight against colonialism, women seem to seek ways to deal with an oppressive patriarchal society at the same time (Mortimer, 2015, 148). These different gendered experiences are illustrated by Djébar through spatial terms: women witness the war from their homes and men are under direct threat of the French army in the streets (Mortimer, 2015, 149). The first chapter of the novel illustrates this spatial gendered difference:

In the coolness of their room, the women sometimes don't move; they grow tense momentarily, eyes wide, staring into space, hearts pounding like those of the children, as each imagines her husband up against a wall in the sun at high noon, no doubt shaking with a fear that he must make every effort to conceal. [...] Wordlessly, they watch the wounded moaning on their stretchers in the back of military trucks, scenes that the army unsuccessfully tries to hide from the eyes of the population... (Djébar, 2005, 3).

In this quote, Djébar chooses to depict the immobility of these Algerian women in their rooms: they can only imagine the dangers that their husbands are in. This immobility and wordlessness can be attributed to a patriarchal society that cloisters women (Mortimer, 2015,

149). The feminist tendency of eagerly wanting to read resistance into agency sometimes ignores these kinds of power relations that can make resistance impossible (Bilge, 2010, 19). Djebbar does show that the female body can sometimes become a victim of exacerbated violence in times of war: Touma gets killed in broad daylight in the street by her brother because she is an informant for the French police (Djebbar, 2005). And indeed, it is important to note that sometimes war can be so violent that one can only act out of fear or lack of power and to recognise that one is not always in a position to show resistance. Therefore, it is important to see that there exist non-resistant forms of agency (Bilge, 2010).

The narrative style and setting that Djebbar chose in her novel enables us to see the agency of different characters making different decisions in conflict situations, which makes a reductive view of Algerian women, their capabilities and limitations impossible (Mortimer, 2015, 153). The novel is set in one day, in one city, the characters in the novel all live in the same threatening circumstances. Djebbar uses an all-knowing, omniscient narrator, who knows what each character is thinking and feeling (Hill, 2017). We follow one character for a few pages, then the story switches to another character again (Hill, 2017). This narration style results in the fact that the reader can follow Hassiba's active resistance but the reader also gets to follow stories of women, such as Lila and Cherifa, who are left alone by their husbands who joined the resistance in the mountains. These women live by themselves and try to survive in the threatening times of war. Throughout the chapters of the novel we follow Cherifa who goes out of the house to warn her husband Youssef that the French police is finding out about his role in the Algerian resistance movement. It is unusual for her to leave the house: people on the street are not used to seeing a veiled woman outside by herself and they harass her. A ten year old boy assumes that she is a prostitute and "let out a cheerful series of obscenities" (Djebbar, 2005, 141). The upcoming threat of the war offered a new role for Cherifa. She explains her unexpected visit to Youssef: "Hakim came home that morning to question his wife about Youssef. Amna, a true sister said nothing. But the danger's still there" (Djebbar, 2005, 143). Through a silence, based on a bond between women, Amna contributes to the resistance. By lying to her husband, who works as a police agent for the French government, she shows that agency and resistance can be found in personal actions in the family sphere. For a split second, Cherifa wants to ask Youssef to take her along to the mountains but she decides to stay and wait for Youssef. After her decision to act outside of norms by leaving the house by herself, Cherifa seems to have decided that she wants to stay and "spend her life waiting in her room, in patience and love" (Djebbar, 2005, 144). Her friend describes how: "Cherifa is now actively preparing herself to wait" (Djebbar, 2005, 146).

Cherifa's decision not to join the revolution, but to wait and trust in the love for her family, is as much an expression of agency as Hassiba's decision to join the war. Bilge has argued that to recognise female agency merely in actions that go against the grains, such as Hassiba's resistance against gendered norms, would mean to fall into the trap of subtle Western ethnocentrism hidden in the universal discourse of women's human rights that is based on Western liberal values and which implicitly offers a prescription of when women are oppressed and when they are emancipated or have agency (Bilge, 2010). The Western liberal philosophical view of agency entails 'the individual's capacity to act consciously and *voluntarily* upon the world' (Asad, 2000, 32). This view assumes that a person only shows agency if he or she actively opposes or resists (repressive) external powers and norms (Asad, 2000, 32). This model of agency forms limits for analysing the lives of women whose desires and wills are not shaped entirely by liberal traditions (Mahmood, 2001, 203), such as the Algerian women in the novel. Therefore, agency should not only be recognised in the resistance of dominant discourses but also in the work that one does to become subject of a particular discourse (Bilge, 2010). For IR to perceive agency as something broader than the capacity to make one's own decisions from a position of power or leadership, can open eyes to the agency of the ordinary non-elites in acts that normally would get overlooked; such as Cherifa's decision to prepare herself to wait.

An analysis of agency should always keep in mind the limits of the "capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (Mahmood, 2001, 203). Next to this, it should take into account the fact that from different social contexts different forms of agency can arise (Bilge, 2010, 23). Therefore, agency can also be found in the way that Olanna in *Half of a Yellow Sun* keeps her family together during the war. At one point during the Biafran War, Olanna lives in a building full of refugees, because she had to flee the war. Together with Odenigbo, their daughter Baby and their houseboy Ugwu they share one single room. One of Olanna's newly made friends Alice tells her: "You are lucky. You have your husband and daughter. I don't know how you do it, keeping everything together and teaching children and all that. I wish I were more like you" (Adichie, 2006, 335). This is exactly where Olanna's agency lies: the fact that she manages to get through the conflict. According to Mahmood the capacity to endure, suffer and persist that can be seen as agency (2001, 217). While living in pain is often perceived as inactive and something that progressive agency aims to eliminate, the endurance of pain and suffering can also be an agentic action: "[the body's] ability to suffer, to respond perceptually and emotionally to external and internal causes, to use its pain in particular ways in particular social

relationships, makes it active” (Asad, 2000, 49). A focus merely on the capacity to eliminate pain or oppression, diverts attention away from how people in different traditions live through painful situations (Asad, 2000, 43). The inventive ways in which Olanna manages to build up a life each time their world gets destroyed, their money disappears, their friends and family die, is impressive and powerful. Olanna teaches herself how to make meals and things to sell from the little things that they have (Adichie, 2006, 283). I would argue that most importantly she has the ability to stay human while enduring the pains of the war. Despite the world that falls apart around them, despite the horrible things that they have seen while fleeing the war, Odenigbo and Olanna still have moments where “they have loud sex and fall asleep giggling and gasping” (Adichie, 2006, 282).

AGENCY ENABLED THROUGH SEX

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, sex functions as an important way for Olanna and Kainene to make it through the war. Sex in war is often associated with rape, but Olanna and Kainene show that sex does not only have to be traumatic in war, it can also be “pleasurable, supportive, loving and empowering” (Norridge, 2012, 28). For Kainene and Richard, intimacy becomes a new ritual within the chaotic times of war. After dinner:

They would go out to the veranda and he would push the table aside and spread out the soft rug and lie on his naked back. When she climbed astride, he would hold her hips and stare up at the night sky and, for those moments, be sure of the meaning of bliss. It was their new ritual since the war started, the only reason he was grateful for the war (Adichie, 2006, 308).

The intimate moments on the veranda are a reaction to the war situation that they live in. Within the horrifying chaos of the war, their intimacy gives them a moment of pleasure and peace, something to be grateful for when everything falls apart. Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature, Zoe Norridge, has argued that sex can also be a way to work through loss and trauma (Norridge, 2012). When Olanna goes to visit her family in Kano, she pays a visit to her Hausa ex-boyfriend Muhammed as well. When she visits him a riot breaks out against Igbo’s. Muhammed wants to take Olanna to the train station, but she first wants to pick up her family. She finds the village and her family destroyed:

Uncle Mbaezi lay facedown in an ungainly twist, legs splayed. Something creamy-white oozed through the large gash on the back of his head. Aunty Ifeka lay on the

veranda. The cuts on her naked body were smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips (Adichie, 2006, 148).

While Olanna is able to safely return home with the help of Muhammed, the trauma of seeing the mutilated bodies of her slaughtered family stays with her. She begins to experience ‘dark swoop’, her legs fail her and she is not able to do anything but lay in bed. When she manages to walk again for the first time she asks Odenigbo to touch her (Adichie, 2006, 160). Norridge explains that the physical experience of touch and sex can trigger emotions which can lead to the recounting of physical loss or pain (Norridge, 2012, 34). For Olanna sex seems to be such an emotional trigger:

‘Touch me,’ She knew he didn’t want to, that he touched her breast because he would do whatever she wanted, whatever would make her better. She caressed his neck, buried her fingers in his dense hair, and when he slid into her, she thought about Arize’s [Olanna’s niece’s] pregnant belly, how easily it must have broken, skin stretched that taut. She started to cry (Adichie, 2006, 160).

The sexual experience makes Olanna recount the traumatizing experience of seeing the bodies of her killed and abused family. Odenigbo’s safe physical touch, that Olanna initiated, makes her recount the trauma and she finally seems able to cry. After being able to cry, Olanna slowly gets stronger and stronger.

Throughout the novel sex is an important aspect: sometimes it is depicted as a negative and traumatizing experience but sometimes as a pleasurable routine in chaotic times of war. The novel shows that sex can even function as a way to recount and work through trauma. Sex gives Olanna and Kainene more strength to live through the painful times of the war. It provides them with what Mahmood calls the agency to endure, suffer and persist (2001, 217). This shows that women can find enablers of agency within the private sphere of sex. Hence, agency should not solely be sought in the public or political sphere.

AGENCY ENABLED THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

Not only sex but also female friendship bonds come forward in the novels as a way to empower oneself and in that sense as an enabler of the agency to live through the war. In the last chapters of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, in the midst of the war, the twin sisters Kainene and Olanna meet each other again after not having spoken to each other in a long time because Olanna had sex with Kainene’s partner Richard. At this point in the story, Kainene has been struggling with nightmares about her housekeeper’s head that she saw getting blown of his

body. Right after she saw this happening, she asks Richard whether he knew that Olanna “saw a mother carrying her child’s head” (Adichie, 2006, 318) and she tells him that she wants to see Olanna again. When they meet Kainene asks Olanna about this traumatic experience:

‘Do you ever dream of that child’s head in the calabash?’ she asked. Olanna looked out of the window and remembered the slanting lines crisscrossing the calabash, the white blankness of the child’s eyes. ‘I don’t remember my dreams.’ ‘Grandpapa used to say, about difficulties he had gone through, “It did not kill me, it made me knowledgeable.” *O gburo m egbu o meek a m malu ife.*’ ‘I remember.’ ‘There are some things that are so unforgivable that they make other things easily forgivable,’ Kainene said. There was a pause. Inside Olanna, something calcified leaped to life. ‘Do you know what I mean?’ Kainene asked. ‘Yes’ (Adichie, 2006, 346).

The ‘things that are made forgivable by the unforgivable actions of war’ refers directly to the last time that the twin sisters spoke to each other over the phone. During this phone call Kainene confronts Olanna with the fact that she slept with Richard and asks her why she did it. Olanna responds: “I don’t know, Kainene, it wasn’t something I planned. I am so sorry. It was unforgivable” (Adichie, 2006, 245). To which Kainene responds “It *was* unforgivable” (Adichie, 2006, 245) and she hangs up. The narrative of the novel is structured in such a way that we get to read the thoughts and feelings of three different main characters. While some other characters are equally present in the novel, we do not get to know what they think and feel in between their sentences. Olanna is one of the characters whose thoughts and feeling we do get to know: we get to know how her thoughts change during the war and we get to know her fears and weaknesses. That is why in this encounter between the sister we sympathise with Olanna’s feeling of relief or something even bigger than relief: ‘something calcified’ that ‘leaped to life’. A bond is (re-)created in the moment that Kainene tells Olanna she forgives her. Interesting in the quote is that the creation of this bond is contrasted with the traumatic experiences of war: this positive bond is (re-)created due to the negative experience of pain and trauma in war. The bond makes both women more resilient during the rest of the war. According to Richard, Kainene laughs more since she has seen Olanna again (Adichie, 2006, 374). Olanna has someone to share her worries about her family with, for example when Ugwu gets kidnapped by the army “she told Kainene how afraid she was for Ugwu, how she felt as if she were about to turn a corner and be flattened by tragedy” (Adichie, 2006, 376). Kainene and Olanna are able to empower themselves against the war through their bond.

Through this bond, they (re-)find agency in the form of the ability to live through the pain of war.

According to Tickner international politics have devalued women's activities in the private sphere, because those are not seen as agentic, conscious or voluntary activities (Tickner, 1992, 137). Instead it has focused on male experiences in the public realm. While it is important to pay attention to leaders and male combatants to get insights into the dynamics of conflict, it is also important to pay attention to experiences of conflict and recognise agency in the private sphere. Especially, since denial of agency led to the assumption that women are in need of protection which justifies violent intervention to protect them (Tickner, 1992). My suggestion is that IR and Conflict Studies should step away from a discourse of victimhood and instead open their eyes for the agency 'hidden' in women's (in-)actions and self-reliance. Women's self-reliance and strength can be recognized by looking at how loving interactions of friendship and sex in the private sphere empower women's ability to survive the painful situation of war. So, the private sphere should be revalued as a place where insights about conflict dynamics can be drawn from. To see that women are in fact agents in war, even if they do not contribute to the fight, we need a broader perception of agency in Conflict Studies than the ability to make decisions about the conflict. Through our sympathy with the female characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Children of the New World* we get to see that there is agency in the ability to live through pain. It shows that agency can be recognised in the capacity to realise one's own interest not only against normative customs but also within the historically specific relations of subordination that one lives in (Mahmood, 2001, 203). Being able to recognize multiple forms of agency might lead to a more complete image of when and in what way protection and intervention is really needed.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have argued that it is important to avoid stereotypes in the story of conflicts. Next to this, I have argued that it is important to recognise that there are different kinds of agency and that it is too easy to say that women in war are oppressed and need to be saved. I have shown how literature can help avoid stereotypes and how it can make us see that agency can be present in unexpected ways. To show how literary works can do this I have answered the question: How do Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World* counter gendered stereotypes and show different kinds of agency within a conflict situation?

I looked into how gendered stereotypes, such as 'the helpless woman' or 'the dangerous and hypersexual black or native man'. Stereotypes about black masculinities, that functioned as a way to justify colonial violence and oppression of black and native men, are still not completely rejected in IR and Conflict Studies discourses. Similarly, stereotypes of helpless women are perpetuated due to the lack of stories on women in war situations. My analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Children of the New World* has shown that the story of war can be told without partaking in the practice of stereotyping. First, because the authors have both chosen 'less obvious' narrators, that make us look at stereotypical characters from a different perspective, for example in the case of Ugwu and the perpetrator perspective. Secondly, because through their narration styles they have included a multiplicity of characters that all have their own reaction and take on the conflicts that they live in. The fact that the authors included so many different possible stories, combined with the fact that the readers sympathise with these characters because we get to read their thoughts and fears, makes that it becomes impossible to reduce these characters to stereotypes.

In the second part of my analysis I have, based on Mahmood's theorizations of agency, considered the different forms of agency that the characters in the novels express. Women are often denied agency in the story of war: they are seen as helpless and in need of saving. On the one hand, some characters have shown agency in the form of resistance to gendered norms of warfare, by participating in the war or profiteering from the war as women. On the other hand, the female characters have expressed agency, not by getting on egalitarian foot with men, but in their own specific ways. They express it through their choices of not violently participating in war and, more importantly, through their ability to get through the war, to survive and to still be human.

I have argued that it is important within the field of Conflict Studies to pay attention to those stories as well. A single story on conflict moves attention away from a whole other body of human experiences of conflict. Based on this incomplete story about conflict, which according to Tickner has a focus on masculine experiences of war (1992) and according to Jackson and Dexter is focused on (male) leaders and elites (2014), assumptions are made about who has agency and who is oppressed. This can lead to stereotypes about who is dangerous and who is a victim in need of protection. This thesis argues that through the inclusion of more diverse stories of war, Conflict Studies and IR can work towards a discourse that moves away from harmful stereotypes. Furthermore, a too narrow definition of agency has sometimes denied people their agency. Tickner has argued that it is mostly women that are not seen as agents but as victims (1992). According to her this falsely justifies protection of women in the form of violent intervention (Tickner, 1992). I have suggested to broaden the definition of agency, using Mahmood's theorization of the concept, to include 'the ability to suffer, endure and persist in a painful context' (Mahmood, 2001). This notion of agency does not only recognise decisions or actions from a position of power or resistance of power in the public realm, but it shows that agency can also be found in the private sphere of family, friendship, sex and love. My suggestion is to use this broader notion of conflict in order to make women's self-reliance in conflict visible instead of assuming that they are victims in need of protection.

My analysis has shown how literary works can play a role in moving away from a discourse of stereotypes that overlooks the agency of the masses. The novels by Djébar and Adichie provide new perspectives to look at wars. They help us imagine and sympathise with different experiences and show us that agency can be expressed in unexpected ways. In this, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Children of the New World* complete the story of the Algerian War of Independence and the Biafran War. They offer a story in which a one-sided image of conflicts and the people experiencing it becomes impossible.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- "Career Prospects: Conflict Studies and Human Rights." Utrecht University, last modified 2015-07-24, accessed 04/05, 2017, <https://www.uu.nl/masters/en/conflict-studies-and-human-rights/career-prospects>.
- "Conflict Studies." Utrecht University, last modified 2017-05-02, accessed 04/05, 2017, <https://students.uu.nl/en/hum/conflict-studies>.
- Adichie, Chimamanda N. 2009. "The Danger of a Single Story." *TED Ideas Worth Spreading*.
- Adichie, Chimamanda N. 2006. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. 2009 edition. London: Fourth Estate.
- Asad, Talal. 2000. "Agency and Pain: An Exploration." *Culture and Religion* 1 (1): 29-60.
- Bilge, Sirma. 2010. "Beyond Subordination Vs. Resistance: An Intersectional Approach to the Agency of Veiled Muslim Women." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31 (1): 9-28.
- Choi, Sung-Eun. 2016. *Decolonization and the French of Algeria: Bringing the Settler Colony Home*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Davies, Bronwyn. 1991. "The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructuralist Analysis." *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* (30): 42-53.
- Djebar, Assia. 2005. *Children of the New World* [Enfants du nouveau monde]. Translated by Marjolijn de Jager. New York: The Feminist Press.
- Donaday, Anne. 2008. "African American and Francophone Postcolonial Memory: Octavia Butler's Kindred and Assia Djebar's La Femme Sans Sépulture." *Research in African Literatures* 39 (3): 65-81.
- Gould, Michael. 2012. *Struggle for Modern Nigeria, the : The Biafran War 1967-1970*. London: I.B.Tauris.
- Hall, Stuart. 2013. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Second edition. California: SAGE publications.

- Hesse Biber, Sharlene N. 2013. *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*. Second edition. California: SAGE publications.
- Hill, Mike. "Literary Analysis: Using Elements of Literature." Roane State Community College OWL., accessed 04/05, 2017, <https://www.roanestate.edu/owl/elementslit.html>.
- Jackson, Richard and Helen Dexter. 2014. "The Social Construction of Organised Political Violence: An Analytical Framework." *Civil Wars* 16 (1): 1-23.
- Kalyvas, Stathis N. 2006. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lake, David A. and Donald Rothchild. 1996. "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict." *International Security* 21 (2): 41-75.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2001. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." *Cultural Anthropology* 16 (2): 202-236.
- Mason, David T. 2004. *Caught in the Crossfire: Revolution, Repression, and the Rational Peasant*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Moore, Will H. 1995. "Rational Rebels: Overcoming the Free-Rider Problem." *Political Research Quarterly* 48 (2): 417-454.
- Mortimer, Robert. 2015. "Seeds of Change: Assia Djebar's *Les Enfants Du Nouveau monde/Children of the New World: A Novel of the Algerian War*." *الخطاب* 1 (16): 147-156.
- Nagel, Joane. 1998. "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (2): 242-269.
- Nepstad, Sharon and Clifford Bob. 2006. "When do Leaders Matter? Hypotheses on Leadership Dynamics in Social Movements." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 11 (1): 1-22.

- Norridge, Zoe. 2012. "Sex as Synecdoche: Intimate Languages of Violence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Aminatta Forna's *the Memory of Love*." *Research in African Literatures* 43 (2): 18-39.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 1992. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quinan, Christine. 2011. "Veiling Unveiled: Female Embodiment and Action in Assia Djebar's *Les Enfants Du Nouveau Monde* and *Les Alouettes Naïves*." *Women's Studies* 40 (6): 723-747.
- Rosenblatt, Louise M. 1978. *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Shange, Belinda K. 2014. "Performing Black Masculinities: Johannesburg's Performance Poets and their Counter Narratives of Resistance to Normative Ideas of Black Malehood in Mainstream Cinema." PhD diss.
- Shringarpure, Bhakti. 2015. "Wartime Transgressions: Postcolonial Feminists Reimagine the Self and Nation." *The Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 3 (1): 22-39.
- Stanovsky, Derek. 2007. "Postcolonial Masculinities." *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*: 493-496.
- Stremlau, John. 1977. *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tickner, J. Ann. 1992. *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- Wagner, Heather. 2012. *The Algerian War*. New York: Infobase Publishing.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. *Gender and Nation*. London: SAGE publications.