

The Unquiet Earth: War, Developmental Violence, and Contested Peace in the Contemporary African Novel

**Onyeashie, James E.*

Abstract

*This article employs qualitative literary analysis to argue that contemporary African novels by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Half of a Yellow Sun*), Teju Cole (*Every Day is for the Thief*), and Omar El Akkad (*What Strange Paradise*) fundamentally reconfigure the understanding of war, peace, and development. Moving beyond narratives of conflict as aberration, the analysis demonstrates how these texts theorize the necropolitical logics governing postcolonial existence, revealing war and so-called peace as entangled conditions on a single continuum of systemic violence. Framed by Mbembe's necropolitics, Nixon's slow violence, and critiques of developmentalism, the study contends that these novels expose liberal peace-building and security governance as often underpinned by structural and epistemic violence, where hegemonic development models can become instruments of dehumanization. Ultimately, the article contributes to peace and security scholarship by positioning this literary corpus as an embodied archive and theoretical intervention, one that insists true human flourishing requires a radical reimagining of both development and peace beyond their liberal conceptions.*

Keywords: contemporary African novel, structural violence, necropolitics, postcolonial development, peace-building, security governance, trauma, refugee crisis

* Dept. of English, Augustine University, Ilara-Epe, Lagos. james.onyeashie@augustineuniversity.edu.ng.

Introduction

The earth, in the imagination of contemporary Africa, is seldom quiet. It reverberates with the echoes of past conflicts, groans under the weight of contested presents, and trembles with the uncertain vibrations of futures under construction. To speak of war and peace on the continent through the simplifying prism of Western political discourse as a binary switch flipped between states of chaos and order is to fundamentally misunderstand the lived reality etched into its landscapes and cityscapes. The contemporary African novel, in its profound and polyvocal richness, offers a far more truthful and troubling cartography for peace and security studies. It maps not a pendulum swing between antithetical states, but a continuum of systemic violence, a pervasive condition where the overt, spectacular brutality of armed conflict bleeds seamlessly into the insidious, normalized violences of political arrangements, economic systems, and social relations in times of so-called peace. This literary project, undertaken by a generation of writers both within the continent and in its diaspora, forms the core of this study.

This article argues that these novels perform a crucial dual labour of witness and theory for understanding post-conflict reconstruction, security governance, and developmental policy. They are, first, meticulous archivists of embodied experience, preserving the sensory, psychological, and social truth of life within systems that harm. They capture not just the sound of gunfire, but the crushing silence of bureaucratic indifference; not just the spectacle of the bomb, but the slow-burning anguish of economic strangulation; not just the trauma of displacement, but the pervasive anxiety of existing in a society where the social contract is perpetually under erasure. Second, they are sophisticated theorists of power and survival, diagnosing the interconnected logics that bind the battlefield to the boardroom, the militia checkpoint to the police roadblock, the refugee camp to the gated community. In their narrative architectures, they

reveal that what is often heralded as “peace” and “development” can itself be a modality of violence; a disruptive, dislocating, and often predatory process that creates its own casualties and exiles, thereby contesting mainstream paradigms in peace and security studies.

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative literary analysis situated within the interdisciplinary field of peace and security studies. The research design is structured as a comparative close reading of three seminal contemporary novels: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Teju Cole’s *Every Day is for the Thief* (2014), and Omar El Akkad’s *What Strange Paradise* (2021). These texts were selected based on their canonical status, critical acclaim, and their explicit engagement with the core themes of war, systemic violence, displacement, and the ambiguities of peace and development across distinct but interrelated African and diasporic contexts.

The analytical approach is explicitly framed by three key theoretical paradigms from critical peace and security scholarship: Johan Galtung’s concept of structural violence, which exposes harm embedded in social and political systems; Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics, which analyses the sovereign power to dictate who may live and who must die; and Rob Nixon’s slow violence, which accounts for attritional, delayed destruction dispersed across time and space. This tripartite framework provides the analytical lens through which the literary texts are examined. The close readings trace how each novel narrativizes and theorizes the continuum from direct conflict to the violences of peace, thereby making abstract concepts phenomenologically tangible. The methodological synthesis of literary analysis with critical peace and security theory aims to demonstrate literature’s unique capacity to provide an embodied, affective epistemology

crucial for understanding the complex realities of postcolonial conflict, (in)security, and development.

Theoretical Framework: Situating the African Novel in Global Violence Discourses

To navigate the complex literary landscapes of contemporary African fiction, one must first construct a theoretical compass capable of orienting the reader toward the nuanced, often obscured, realities these novels depict. The central contention of this study is that these works chart a continuum of systemic violence; a seamless, often imperceptible, flow between the spectacular brutality of war and the normalized, structural harms of peacetime. This framework challenges the binary logic of “conflict” versus “peace” that dominates international discourse, proposing instead a more fluid and insidious model of power and suffering. To fully apprehend this continuum, we engage a triad of interconnected theoretical paradigms: Johan Galtung’s structural violence, Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics, and Rob Nixon’s slow violence. Together, they provide the analytical architecture for understanding how the contemporary African novel archives, diagnoses, and theorizes the conditions of postcolonial existence.

Johan Galtung and the Architecture of Invisible Harm: Structural Violence

Our foundation lies in the seminal work of peace researcher Johan Galtung, who, in his 1969 essay “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” dismantled the simplistic equation of violence with direct, personal physical assault. He proposed a crucial tripartite typology: direct violence (visible, event-based harm committed by an identifiable actor), structural violence (harm embedded within social, political, and economic structures), and cultural violence (the symbolic realm of attitudes, ideologies, and discourses that legitimize both direct and structural violence).

Structural violence is the cornerstone concept for our analysis.

Galtung defines it as violence “built into the structure [and] showing up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (Page 21). This form of violence is impersonal, pervasive, and often without a single, malicious author. It operates through the very design of institutions, policies, and economic systems that systematically prevent individuals or groups from meeting their basic needs and realizing their potential. Its casualties are not felled by bullets but by hunger, preventable disease, unsafe housing, and economic despair. The mortality statistics from poverty, Galtung argues, dwarf those from direct conflict, yet they rarely command the same political urgency or narrative attention because they lack a clear antagonist and a dramatic event.

In the context of the postcolony, structural violence is the inheritance and continuation of colonial logic. Colonialism was not merely a project of direct military domination but a comprehensive system of economic extraction, social re-engineering, and political subjugation designed to benefit the metropole at the expense of the colony. The postcolonial state, often inheriting these same bureaucratic and economic structures without their democratic or welfare-oriented counterweights, can perpetuate this violence. Corrupt governance, neoliberal economic policies imposed by international financial institutions, land dispossession in the name of development, and entrenched ethnic or class hierarchies all constitute structural violence. It creates what Paul Farmer terms “pathologies of power,” where the distribution of sickness and health, life and death, follows the fault lines of social inequality (Farmer 2003, 40).

The literary significance of this concept is profound. The African novel becomes a vital instrument for making this invisible violence visible and felt. Where a political scientist might chart Gini coefficients or mortality rates, the novelist translates these abstractions into the stunted life of a child in a slum, the quiet desperation of a father unable to afford medicine, or the corrosive shame of educated unemployment. Novels give structural violence

a phenomenological reality; a taste, a smell, a texture. They expose how “peace” can be a violent condition when it is merely the absence of war amidst a suffocating presence of systemic deprivation. By narrating the life constrained, the opportunity denied, and the potential extinguished by unequal structures, these works perform a radical act of testimony against a violence that thrives on its own normalization.

Achille Mbembe and the Logic of Disposability:

Necropolitics If Galtung provides the architectural blueprint for systemic harm, Achille Mbembe, in his seminal work *On the Postcolony* and the essay “Necropolitics,” provides the chilling political logic that animates it within the African context and beyond. Mbembe builds upon but moves decisively beyond Michel Foucault’s concept of biopower: the modern state’s power to “foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault 1978, 62). For Mbembe, the late modern and postcolonial world is increasingly governed by necropolitics: “the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (Mbembe 2003, 11).

Necropolitics represents the ultimate expression of sovereignty. It is not merely about the right to kill (the old sovereign privilege) but about the subjugation of life to the power of death through the creation of what Mbembe calls “death-worlds.” These are “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” (Mbembe 2003, 40). In these zones—which can be plantations, colonies, occupied territories, or even certain urban slums and mining enclaves—the political order is organized around the production of corpses, or at least of beings stripped of political agency and reduced to bare life, vulnerable to destruction.

The nexus between necropolitics and the postcolony is central. Mbembe argues that the colony was the original laboratory of necropower, where racial categorization created a fundamental division between “humans” and “natives,” the latter being subject

to arbitrary violence, dispossession, and death. The postcolony, he suggests, has not fully escaped this logic. Sovereignty is often performed through spectacular and arbitrary displays of power over the bodies of citizens, through civil wars that fragment the national body, and through the creation of internal “enemies” or disposable populations. The militia leader, the warlord, and even the corrupt state official exercise a necropolitical authority, deciding who has access to protection, resources, and life itself.

This framework illuminates the continuum of violence with devastating clarity. In open warfare, necropolitics is explicit: the enemy is marked for destruction. However, in times of “peace,” this logic simply mutates. It operates through state negligence that allows epidemics to ravage underserved communities (a passive decision about who may live). It operates through extractive capitalism that poisons the land and water of marginalized groups for profit (an economic decision about who must die slowly). It operates through militarized policing of poor neighbourhoods or protestors (the constant threat of lethal force to maintain a political order). The African novel is a masterful expositor of this logic. It depicts characters navigating these death-worlds; whether the literal killing fields of civil war, the economically barren landscapes of post-industrial decay, or the bureaucratically lethal corridors of asylum systems. These narratives reveal how the sovereign power to “make die” is not an aberration but a fundamental, organizing principle of social and political life for those deemed expendable.

Rob Nixon and the Violence of Time: Slow Violence

While Galtung reveals the structural architecture and Mbembe the sovereign logic, Rob Nixon, in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, provides the essential temporal dimension needed to understand the full spectrum of the continuum. Nixon defines slow violence as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that

is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2011, 2).

This concept is a critical intervention. Traditional narratives of violence are event-centered: they focus on the explosive, the immediate, the photogenic: the bomb blast, the massacre, the dramatic overthrow. Slow violence, by contrast, is incremental, accretive, and climatic. It is the violence of climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, radioactive waste, and the long-term health impacts of pollution. It is also the violence of political dispossession, economic displacement, and the intergenerational trauma passed down from wars and social ruptures. Its effects are deferred, often striking hardest at future generations or distant communities, making attribution difficult and political mobilization challenging.

Nixon’s core argument is representational: slow violence suffers from a “representational bias.” It lacks the sensational, telegenic qualities that attract media attention and public outrage. It is, in his words, “starved of dramatic spectacle” (Nixon 2011, 3). Therefore, the crucial political and cultural work is to devise “creative ways to dramatize” these slow-moving crises, to make them visible, tangible, and urgent.

The contemporary African novel is arguably one of the most powerful instruments for this dramatization. Its capacity for deep temporal exploration, for tracing cause and effect across generations, and for embedding social and ecological processes within intimate human stories makes it uniquely suited to narrate slow violence. A novel can show how a dam built for “development” (a celebrated event) gradually displaces a community, erodes a culture, and destroys a livelihood system over decades (the slow violence). It can trace the psychic scars of a past conflict as they warp the relationships and choices of the children and grandchildren of survivors. It can detail the daily, attritional struggle against a toxic environment that saps strength and hope. By giving narrative form to these gradual processes, the novel performs a radical act of witness. It counters the “temporal myopia” of contemporary

politics and media, insisting that we see the long arc of harm. It makes the invisible erosion of lives and landscapes the central drama, arguing that this, too, is a story of conflict; a war waged not with armies but with policies, chemicals, and neglect.

Synthesizing the Framework: The Continuum in Theory and Text

The power of this tripartite framework; structural, necropolitical, slow lies in its synthesis. It allows us to analyze a literary text not by isolating different “types” of violence, but by seeing their intricate interplay. Consider a fictional depiction of a mining town in a “peaceful” African country. Structural violence is evident in the exploitative labor contracts, the vast inequality between corporate managers and local workers, and the state’s alignment with capital over citizen welfare. Necropolitics manifests in the company’s and state’s calculated decision to expose miners to unsafe conditions and the community to toxic tailings, effectively determining their life expectancy and health outcomes. Slow violence is the gradual poisoning of the water table, the rising incidence of silicosis and cancers over years, and the cultural disintegration of the community as its traditional economy and social bonds are destroyed.

The contemporary African novelist traces this continuum. They show how the logic of war (the elimination of an enemy, the control of resources) seamlessly becomes the logic of “development” (the extraction of value, the creation of sacrifice zones). They reveal how the direct violence of a past conflict mutates into the structural violence of a corrupted, inequitable peace, which in turn generates the slow violence of trauma, displacement, and environmental ruin. And crucially, they explore how communities and individuals survive within, resist, and imagine alternatives to this continuum.

These novels think with and through the concepts of Galtung, Mbembe, and Nixon, materializing them in narrative flesh and blood. They answer Nixon’s call for stories that dramatize slow

violence. They give concrete, affective form to Mbembe's abstract death-worlds. They make the impersonal machinery of Galtung's structural violence a deeply personal experience. In doing so, they provide an indispensable epistemology—a way of knowing the postcolonial world that is rooted in embodied experience, historical depth, and ethical urgency, revealing the profound unquiet of an earth shaped by the relentless continuum of systemic violence.

Close Readings: Charting the Continuum in the Contemporary African Novel

The theoretical framework of structural, necropolitical, and slow violence provides the lens; the contemporary African novel provides the living, breathing world through which that lens focuses. The following close readings undertake a journey across the geography of the continuum, from the heart of declared war to the invisible battlefields of “peace” and the globalized borders that manage its fallout. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief*, and Omar El Akkad's *What Strange Paradise*, we encounter not isolated tragedies but interconnected chapters in a sustained narrative of systemic harm, where the line between war and peace dissolves into a pervasive condition of unquiet.

The Intimate Unravelling: War as Structural and Slow Violence in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's monumental *Half of a Yellow Sun* is often categorized as a war novel, a historical fiction of the Nigeria-Biafra conflict (1967-1970). To limit it to this genre, however, is to miss its profound theorization of violence. Adichie's project is less about mapping military campaigns than about meticulously documenting how the logic of war infiltrates and dismantles the very architecture of human life: the self, the family, the social bond thereby revealing war as the terrifying apex of a continuum that includes structural and slow violence.

The novel brilliantly establishes its pre-war world in Nsukka as one already underpinned by structural violence. The ethnic tensions between Igbo and Hausa are not merely personal prejudices but are woven into the fabric of the nascent Nigerian state, a colonial construct straining under the weight of its artificial borders and unequal distribution of power and resources. The casual bigotry Odenigbo endures at the hands of a Hausa businessman, and the violent pogroms against Igbo in the North, are eruptions of a systemic fault line. This is Galtung's cultural and structural violence made manifest: ideologies of ethnic difference legitimize direct harm, all within a political structure incapable of guaranteeing equal security or life chances to all its citizens. The war, when it comes, is not an aberration but the explosive, direct culmination of this simmering structural condition.

Adichie's most significant contribution is her unflinching portrayal of the war's necropolitical core. The sovereign power of the Nigerian state is exercised most decisively not just on the battlefield, but through the blockade. This strategic decision transforms hunger from a tragic side-effect into the primary weapon. Food becomes a political instrument, and access to it a matter of life or death dictated by distant authorities. This is Mbembe's necropolitics in its starkest form: the power to "dictate who may live and who must die" is enacted through the deliberate deprivation of sustenance (Mbembe 2003, 11). The novel forces the reader to witness this logic as it operates on individual bodies. The harrowing descriptions of kwashiorkor; the swollen bellies, the discoloured hair, the utter physical wasting of children are not just scenes of suffering; they are portraits of sovereign power made flesh. The child, Amala, whom Olanna finds dead, is a casualty of a political calculation, her body a site where state policy is brutally literalized.

Furthermore, Adichie masterfully charts the war as a catalyst for pervasive slow violence. The trauma is immediate, but its effects are dispersive and long-term. The violence is slow in the

erosion of identity: the Cambridge-educated Odenigbo is reduced to a hollowed-out figure, his intellectualism rendered irrelevant; the radical academic becomes a broken man. The violence is slow in the disintegration of ethics: Ugwu's transformation from inquisitive houseboy to a soldier who commits rape illustrates how moral frameworks are attritionally worn down by fear and dehumanization. Most poignantly, the slow violence persists long after the guns fall silent. The novel's final, devastating revelation that it was Ugwu, not Richard, who wrote the book-within-the-book is a narrative embodiment of this enduring damage. The war's true end is not the ceasefire but the ongoing, silent struggle to assemble a coherent self and narrative from the fragments. The "post-war" is not peace, but a new terrain haunted by ghosts, defined by loss, and scarred by a slow-burning psychological devastation that Adichie archives with heart-breaking precision. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the continuum is laid bare: structural inequity erupts into direct, necropolitical conflict, which in turn seeds a future poisoned by the slow violence of unresolved trauma.

The Theatre of "Peace": Pervasive Predation as Necropolitical Norm in *Every Day is for the Thief*. If Adichie explores the continuum radiating from a declared war, Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* offers a chilling portrait of a society where the continuum is the daily reality of "peace." Cole's Lagos is officially a city of ceasefire, development, and bustling enterprise. Yet, through the observational, slightly alienated gaze of his narrator-returner, Cole constructs Lagos as a theatre of peace that operates with the logic of a diffused, low-intensity war. Here, the violences are structural, necropolitical, and slow, but they are so normalized they constitute the very atmosphere of life.

The novel is a catalogue of structural violence made mundane. The constant, petty extortion by police at checkpoints is not the act of rogue individuals but a systemic feature of law enforcement, a tax on mobility and dignity. The cybercafé, buzzing with "yahoo-yahoo" scammers, represents the digital internalization of a global

economic order that offers few legitimate paths to prosperity, turning predation into a rational career choice. The catastrophic fire at the National Archives, where the nation's memory is left to burn through state neglect, is a potent symbol of a structure that fails in its most basic custodial functions. This is Galtung's violence built into the structure: a system where trust is irrational, where public institutions do not serve, and where survival necessitates a constant, entrepreneurial negotiation of threat.

Cole elevates this diagnosis to the level of necropolitics by revealing the sovereign logic underpinning this chaos. The state in *Every Day is for the Thief* is not absent; it is present in its punitive, extractive capacity while absent in its protective, nurturing role. The police checkpoint is a microcosm of this sovereignty: the uniformed officer exercises the power to detain, to harass, to extract a toll; the power to disrupt a life based on no law but his own whim. This is Mbembe's necropolitical power in civilian garb, the constant, low-level assertion of the state's right to intervene in and diminish the lives of its citizens. The title itself is a philosophical treatise: in an environment where the social contract has evaporated, every day is an opportunity for someone to prey upon you, and thus, for you to become a thief of opportunity, safety, or dignity simply to survive. Life is reconfigured as a series of small, defensive, or aggressive manoeuvres in an endless campaign.

Most strikingly, Cole captures the slow violence of this condition. There is no single, catastrophic event that destroys Lagos; rather, it is the attritional grind of existential anxiety. The violence is in the noise that frays nerves, in the traffic that wastes lifetimes, in the constant vigilance against scam or theft that exhausts the spirit. It is the slow erosion of hope, the acceptance of dysfunction as water is accepted as wet. The narrator observes a city where development; the new banks, the glossy billboards exist not as an antidote to this violence but as a glittering fortress within it, often exacerbating dislocation and inequality. Cole's prose, clinically

observant and lyrically precise, performs the work Nixon calls for: it dramatizes the slow violence of a normative disorder. It makes the reader feel the psychic weight of a world where peace is not safety but a managed, pervasive insecurity. In Lagos, the continuum is not a journey from war to peace, but a static condition where the instruments of harm have simply been swapped; the mortar for the mobile phone, the soldier for the policeman, the trench for the traffic jam while the essential logic of predatory survival endures.

Globalizing the Necropolitical Border: From War Zone to “Paradise” in What Strange Paradise

Omar El Akkad’s *What Strange Paradise* executes a bold narrative and geopolitical expansion of the continuum. By intercutting the story of a child refugee’s flight from war (“Then”) with his struggle for survival on the shores of a Greek island (“Now”), El Akkad demonstrates how the violences of the postcolony are not contained but globalized, following human flows to the very gates of the Global North. The novel argues that the border is not a line separating war from peace, but a filtering mechanism within a single, global system of necropolitical management. While El Akkad is an Egyptian-Canadian author writing about a refugee crisis often centred in the Middle East, his novel is firmly situated within a postcolonial literary and security discourse. It extends the analysis of the African novel’s concerns: extractive sovereignty, displacement, and the violences of border regimes into a global frame, reflecting how the human fallout from postcolonial instability is managed by neo-imperial security architectures, a core concern for African peace and security studies.

The “Then” chapters, detailing young Amir’s (Vanna’s) journey from a stylized, war-torn homeland across the Mediterranean, cover familiar ground of direct violence. Yet, even here, El Akkad infuses the narrative with a sense of structural and slow violence. The war itself is the product of failed states and geopolitical proxy conflicts (structural), and the journey is fuelled by the slow, hope-

eroding violence of displacement and loss. The real theoretical pivot occurs in the “Now” chapters on the island. Here, the direct violence of war is replaced by the bureaucratic, maritime, and political violence of the European border regime.

This is where El Akkad’s necropolitical vision becomes most potent. The Mediterranean Sea is transformed into a necropolitical space. The EU’s policies of border externalization, non-intervention, and outsourcing to coast guards like Colonel Kethros, constitute a sovereign decision about life and death. By making rescue more difficult, by criminalizing NGO aid, and by prioritizing deterrence over saving lives, European sovereignty is exercised as the power to let drown. The hundreds who perish when Amir’s ship sinks are not accidental casualties; they are the calculated, accepted outcome of a political logic; a form of mass, delegated necropolitics. Kethros, following orders to “not get involved,” is the literal agent of this policy, his inaction a more lethal weapon than any gun.

On land, the violence becomes structural and slow. It is embedded in the labyrinthine, forbidding asylum process designed to deter and reject. It is in the criminalization of the refugee, turning the survivor into a suspect. It is in the tourist economy of the island that looks away from the bodies on the beach, a form of cultural violence that legitimizes exclusion. The island itself is split: a “paradise” of leisure for tourists, and a lethal landscape of hunt and hide for Amir. This dichotomy lays bare the hypocrisy of a “peaceful” Global North whose stability is premised on the active management of suffering elsewhere.

El Akkad also captures a devastating slow violence—the deferred destruction of hope and the intergenerational legacy of trauma. Amir’s ordeal is not over when he reaches land; it merely changes form. The psychological violence of being hunted, of being utterly alone in a hostile environment, is an attritional assault on a child’s mind. Furthermore, the novel suggests the slow violence inflicted on the conscience of the West, embodied in the character of Kate, the army wife. Her fraught, half-guilty attempt to help

represents a moral system corroding under the weight of complicity in a brutal system.

What Strange Paradise masterfully closes the loop of the continuum. It shows how the direct and structural violence that produce refugees in the postcolony are met not with sanctuary, but with a refined, bureaucratic necropolitics at the border. The journey from war zone to “paradise” is not an escape from violence, but a transition between different nodes on the same continuum. The quiet, deadly order of the European border is revealed as the dialectical twin to the chaotic violence of the collapsed state; two sides of a global coin that decides, ultimately, who is human enough to be afforded peace.

Synthesis: The Novel as Cartographer and Theorist

Together, these three novels form a powerful triptych mapping the unquiet earth. Adichie gives us the genealogy of the continuum, tracing how structural fault lines erupt into necropolitical war and metastasize as slow violence in the aftermath. Cole provides the sociology of the continuum, showing how its logic becomes the normalized grammar of everyday life in a “peaceful” metropolis. El Akkad delivers the geopolitics of the continuum, exposing its global circuitry and the necropolitical barriers that maintain global inequality.

Beyond cartography, these authors are theorists. They each conceptualize a contested peace. For Adichie, it is the fragile act of testifying, of writing the story against erasure, as Ugwu does. For Cole, it is found in moments of stolen beauty and intellectual reflection amidst the chaos, a personal interiority held against the abrasive world. For El Akkad, it is the perilous, empathetic connection that sparks between Amir and the teenage girl, Kethros, a connection that defiantly asserts a shared humanity against the systems that would deny it. These are not visions of grand, political peace treaties, but of micro-ethical practices;

small, defiant assertions of life, memory, and connection forged in the interstices of the very systems that seek to extinguish them.

Conclusion: Toward a Relational Peace in Peace and Security Scholarship

The contemporary African novel, as analysed through the works of Adichie, Cole, and El Akkad, refuses the fiction of clean breaks between war and peace, thereby offering a crucial corrective to conventional peace and security studies. Instead, it listens to the “unquiet earth,” documenting the tremors of past conflicts and the erosive pressure of systemic inequities that undermine post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable development. These writers guide us through the continuum of violence, revealing the shared necropolitical logic of dehumanization that can underpin both battlefield and border, and both overt conflict and hegemonic development policies.

Their work is ethically and epistemologically imperative for the field. By archiving the intimate textures of suffering, they demand an active, empathetic witness that statistics and policy reports often elide. By theorizing peace not as a top-down institutional arrangement but as fragile, relational acts—a written testimony, a moment of aesthetic respite, a shared gesture of recognition—they shift the locus of agency and analysis. They compel a fundamental reconsideration of security and development: Is a “secure” and “developed” society one with the highest GDP or the strongest borders, or one with the lowest threshold of indifference to the suffering of its own and others’ citizens?

The ultimate contribution of this literary corpus to peace and security scholarship is its insistence on a humane calculus. In a world of policy abstractions such as “collateral damage,” “growth rate,” “migrant flow”; these novels restore the specific weight of a single life, a single memory, a single act of kindness. They argue, powerfully, that any future worth building; any meaningful peace or just security must be rooted in this recalibrated, deeply

human scale. To read them is to undergo an essential education in the lived realities of conflict and (in)security, and to be tasked with imagining and forging a more genuine, more compassionate, framework for peace.

REFERENCES

- Adichie, C. N. (2006). *Half of a yellow sun*. Knopf.
- Cole, T. (2014). *Every day is for the thief*. Random House.
- El Akkad, O. (2021). *What strange paradise*. Knopf.
- Farmer, P. (2003). *Pathologies of power: Health, human rights, and the new war on the poor*. University of California Press.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, Volume 1: An introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1976).
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>
- Mbembe, A. (2003). Necropolitics. *Public Culture*, 15(1), 11–40. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11>.
- Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.