

IMAGES OF GENOCIDE IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

By

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Abstract

Though there is no settled definition of what literature is, probably because of other disciplines' interest in it, apart from literary criticism; yet, the uniqueness of its language is a given. Literary language, whose indispensability to literature, may be compared to lightning that must herald thunder. This is because it is through the deciphering of the language of a literary work that the reader or critic can unmask the message of the creative writer. The thrust of this critical essay, therefore, is to examine Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's language use in *Half of a Yellow Sun* that unfolds her vision of a genocidal war in the fictive world of her novel. As Adichie abandons the mythicizing of femininity, she delves into the horrors of the three-year Nigerian Civil War between the Biafran rebels and the federal government. In both the war and the pogrom, which precedes the war, she recaptures the unusual haunting and traumatic experiences of their victims and survivors. This is made possible through her employment of various figures of speech that foreground the imagery of ethnic-cleansing. She also leaves no stone unturned in her linguistic repertoire to highlight the savagery, the degradation, the violence, the atrocity, the betrayal, the brutality, the helplessness, the impotence, the starvation, the disease and death, as well as the love and lasting friendship, of the characters that inhabit the prewar, wartime and postwar settings of the war fiction.

Introduction

Oppression takes many forms. It can occur when one race or group of people exploit and suppress another race or ethnic groups; it can affect whole families and classes of people who are economically oppressed by the system. It can be within the family, taking the form of gender violence as well as child abuse and neglect (Katherine von Wormer, 2004).

Language is the basic material of literature in the broadest and narrowest senses of the category and, therefore, should display particular characteristics which define its literariness when we are dealing with literary discourse (Webster, 1996: 31).

The novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, was published in September, 2006 and won the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2007. It is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's second novel, published after her debut with *Purple Hibiscus*. In the first novel, Adichie explores the themes of brutality, domestic violence and child abuse, which arise when the head of a family, the father, is overbearing and religiously dogmatic. She also swipes at the military dictatorship with its murderous hold on the masses of Nigeria. However, in the work under discussion, Adichie recaptures vividly the Nigerian Civil War, which raged in Nigeria for almost three years. In recognition of her effort, Abiola Irele said that "This is very promising for the con-

tinued vitality of Nigerian literature” (2010:17). And to Ernest Emenyonu in his appraisal of the new African women’s creative writing, including Chimamanda Adichie’s, “There have been remarkable innovative stylistic experimentations as well as thematic expansions into uncharted waters, alien domains and incursions into hitherto taboo subjects” (2004:xi). In her war fiction, she recounts the suffering, the psychological trauma of the victims and survivors of the war and pogrom. The hardship, the moral decadence, the wastage of lives and property are not left out, so that after reading it, a discerning reader is left with haunting memories of the historical war. He may likely compare the ethnic-cleansing of the Igbo in the fictional setting of *Half of a Yellow Sun* with the scale and dimension of the Jewish pogrom in the Second World War and the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Adichie indicts the world for condoning the genocide in her chilling and haunting mantra, *The World Was Silent When We Died*. The role of the British, whose complicity in policies ignites the war, is visible and in the opinion of A.O. Ikelegbe, “It is argued that indirect rule allowed the Governor-generals of Nigeria to rigorously pursue policies which are primarily favorable to the British interests without any input from Nigerians” (1996:67).

Within the pogrom in the north and the war in Biafra, Adichie weaves in the tales of love and hatred, lasting friendship and betrayal, humaneness and atrocities. However, these themes would not have been lucidly recreated if not by the power of imaginative language. Literary language is the pillar of literature, for there is no way a reader can understand “the peculiar nature of a literary work without constant reference to language use” (Yankson iii). At best, it will be like historical works, religious tracts or political pamphlets. A good creative artist, therefore, must employ literary language to imprint indelible pictures of his vision of life in the mind of his reader. And a good part of that language use must be “figurative because it is based on images and pictures of human experiences” (Okoye 145). On the indispensability of language, Karl Marx and Frederick Engel believe that “language is the immediate actuality of thought” (1978:252), and Ezra Pound declares that a great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost degree (quoted in Ezugu 2011). And to C.J. Ihiegbulam, “Primarily, the figures of speech are referred to as ornament of language but are also integral to the function of language and are in fact indispensable not only to poetry but to all modes of literary discourse” (2006:157). B.M. Mbah and E.E. Mbah argue that “... literature is mostly concerned with the aesthetic use of language” (2007:340), but social and ethical functions of literature cannot also be overlooked. It is Peter Lamarque who says, “A competent reader might hope to learn from the literary work not by formulating a derived moral principle but by acquiring a new vision or perspective on the world” (quoted in Ani 2011: 48). In his explanation of Lamarque’s opinion on the ethical value of literature, Emmanuel Ani states, “...literature in particular, can be used to show a new perspective to certain old moral norms. Secondly, verbal art is used to preserve certain moral teachings against adulterations, because once they have been written, they cannot be changed” (2011: 49). This view is also buttressed by A. N. Akwanya when he asserts that “Literary texts are the most complex creations of language” (*Semantics and Discourse: Theories of Meaning and Textual Analysis* 2007). It is also believed that “...it is inconceivable to talk about literature without words because words are quintessential to its being” (Norbert Eze 2011: 13). The language we are dealing with is the language that brings about the literariness of a

literary work, a language which Roman Jakobson said is the kind that represents an “organized violence committed on ordinary speech” (quoted in Eagleton 2). A language which in its essentiality to literature, Terry Eagleton compares it thus, “Most of the time we breathe in air without being conscious of it: like language, it is the very medium in which we move” (2009: 4). Therefore, it is with language that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is able to show the reader that, “Like history, literature helps us to imagine those events we were not opportned to witness – slavery, earliest days of colonialism, traditionalism, etc” (Ezugu 179). But in this case, what the reader witnesses imaginatively is the holocaust of a civil war in the world of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It is a war novel for which she has been described as detached, objective, and “... free from sentimental depiction of events” (Nnolim in Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 2010: 14) as she presents the situations in prewar, wartime and postwar world of the novel through the foregrounding of the imagery of genocide.

Language Use in the Novel

In the four-hundred-and- thirty-five-paged novel that comprises thirty-six chapters in four parts, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie resurrects the eerie and haunting memories of the Nigerian Civil War, the lasting love and the heroic deeds of her characters as the raging flood of the war and the pogrom swirls around them. It is the vividness of her description that compels Chinua Achebe to state in his eulogy:

We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient story-tellers. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie knows what is at stake, and what to do about it. She is fearless, or she would not have taken on the intimidating horror of Nigeria's civil war. Adichie came almost fully made (quoted in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, 2006).

In the description of the prewar situation at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, the novelist uses simile in the description of the serene and enchanting environment of the university, which is one of the places the novel has its setting. Naïve Ugwu, one of the characters from whose point of view the story is told, is enthralled by the university environment and thinks, “He would never be able to describe to his sister Anulika how the bungalows sat side by side like polite well-dressed men, how the hedges separating them were trimmed so flat on top that they looked like tables wrapped with leaves” (Adichie, 2006). The simile of “the bushes were shaped like slender hills” and “they looked like tables wrapped with leaves” (4) with the image of orderliness reinforces the description of the picturesque setting of the university.

Young Ugwu is not only excited about the beauty and elegance of the university environment, but he is also excited with his master's material possession. The narrator says, “He [Ugwu] was staring at the car in the garage, a strip of metal ran around its blue body like a necklace” (4). Apart from this simile of alluring beauty in the description of Odenigbo's car, he is impressed with the fridge in his house, which he metaphorically calls a “cold barn” (6). Personification is used to show the harmonious ambience in Ugwu's new home which is in agreement with nature as “sunlight streamed in through the windows, and from time to time a gentle breeze lifted the curtains. The room was silent except for the rustle of Master's

page-turning” (5). As he inspects the other gadgets in the house, his sense of contentment is personified, “Ugwu turned off the tap, turned it on again, then off. On and off and on and off until he was laughing at the magic of the running water and the chicken and bread that lay balmy in his stomach” (6). The emphases are mine.

The rustic life of the people in this nature-endowed environment is not left out in the description. Ugwu’s aunty’s spitting is given human attributes in “she stopped to spit; the saliva left her mouth with a sucking sound and landed on the grass” (3). Her inelegant walk, which depicts her peasantry, is onomatopoeically rendered thus, “His aunty walked faster, her slippers making slap-slap sounds that echoed in the silent street” (3). There is the alliteration of the voiceless sibilant consonantal sound /s/ in “slippers” “slap”, “sounds”, “silent” and “street” and this is calculated to give melodious harmony to the university setting.

It is through language, too, that Adichie paints memorable pictures of the physique and humaneness of the characters, which inhabit this beautiful setting of her novel. The war in its brutality will later devastate both the environment and the characters. For example, Ugwu indirectly compares his master’s robust and healthy physique with “Ezeagu, the man who held the wrestling record in Ugwu’s village” (6). To naive Ugwu, Odenigbo and Ezeagu are alike in the sense that they are robust, brisk and energetic. Olanna, Odenigbo’s girlfriend, is another character whom the novelist uses a lot of figurative language to describe. The narrator says:

Her oval face was smooth like an egg, the lush colour of rain-drenched earth, and her eyes were large and slanted and she looked like she was supposed to be walking and talking like everyone else; she should be in a glass case like the one in master’s study where people could admire her curvy, fleshy body, where she should be preserved untainted (23).

The simile in the comparison of the smoothness of her face with an egg gives the mental pictures of beauty, perfection, fragility, preciousness and edibility to Olanna. These mental images are further reinforced in this metaphorical description, “She was walking across the yard toward him. She had only a wrapper tied around her chest and as she walked, he imagined that she was a yellow cashew, shapely and ripe” (24). In fact, Ugwu is so captivated by Olanna’s beauty that he has sexual fantasies about her; however, it is not only Ugwu who admires Olanna and wants to possess her. Okeoma and Dr. Patel admire her; Miss Adebayo covets her, and Kainene resents her. Okeoma describes her as a “water-mermaid”, and envious Miss Adebayo said that she is “illogically pretty” (49). But the degree of Olanna’s beauty is seen in her name, “Olanna”, which in Igbo language means “father’s gold”. Ironically, Olanna refuses being sexual bait for her father to be given juicy contracts by government officials. She vehemently rebuffs Chief Okonji’s sexual overtures. Besides, Ugwu is very much in love with Olanna’s perfect English with unadulterated British accent. The fluidity and perfection of her English is seen in this analogy, “Here was a superior tongue, a luminous language, the kind of English he heard on Master’s radio, rolling out with clipped precision. It reminded him of slicing a yam with a newly sharpened knife, the easy perfection in every slice” (22). This analogy is reinforced with a simile of her ghostly and unearthly appearance, which goes with the metaphor of a mermaid. As the narrator puts it, “The embroidery on her close-fitting dress gleamed and she looked, for a

moment, like a shapely spirit who had emerged from the sea" (9). Ugwu, in his infantile love for her, also ravishes her with the images of rarity and durability, which have the stylistic effect of perfection in the prewar world of the novel. He imagines:

There was something polished about her voice, about her; she was like a stone that lay right below a gushing spring, rubbed smooth by years and years of sparkling water, and looking at her was similar to finding that stone, knowing that there were so few like it. He watched her walk back indoors (24-25).

Olanna's beauty and good nature attract to her conflicting feelings of admiration, and resentment in the other characters that people the world of the novel. Ugwu, Odenigbo, Okeoma, Mohammed, Dr. Patel adore her, and Miss Adebayo and Kainene resent her. According to Kainene, "I and my sister are meat" (59). This metaphorical statement means that the two daughters of Chief Ozobia and the wife are paraded around for suitable suitors. Olanna does not need a bequest of a house in Port Harcourt to attract a suitor, unlike her twin-sister, who is not endowed with such beauty. Olanna's cousin, Arize, is so fond of her that she wishes that her unborn baby will resemble her. Transliteration is used in the presentation of Arize's wishful statement, "But she must have your brain and know book" (129). The use of transliteration ought to serve as a "mere fact of a common speech...as a peculiar potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language" (Sapier quoted in Farinde, 2007:157). It also reflects Arize's level of education, which is not much.

Though Arize who is very close to Olanna disapproves of the relationship between Olanna and Odenigbo because of his ugliness, she accommodates it, because of Olanna's strong feelings and defence of him. This attitude is encapsulated in a proverb, "That is what the relatives of the ugly monkey, enwe, told him to make him feel better, that good looks come in different ways" (42). This proverb reflects a world of social solidarity and accommodation shared by the characters and articulates the Igbo world-view. It is argued that:

In every gathering in Africa, the key word for persuasive decision hangs on the ability to relate the issues clearly. It is a well known fact that African languages make use of proverbs as the best and most effective instrument of communication, since the writer and the society interact together all the time....Proverbs comprise images which are common to the users and listeners, which in turn enforce clarity on the issues related in the utterance (Usoro, 2007:241-242).

As the events narrated in part one, which happened in the early sixties, come to an end, there is a subtle change in the language use. The figures of speech which generally evoke images of perfection, beauty and serenity are subtly replaced with aggressive and brutal ones. The symbolism of the gift of tortoise from Colonel Madu to Kainene, which dies when it is removed from its natural habitat, and the intensity and furiousness of the rain, which "grew loud, like pebbles being flung against the glass" (113) are not lost on a discerning reader. These two portend and foreshadow the brutality and bloodletting, which follow in part two of the novel, during the pogrom and the war.

The Igbo pogrom in the north and the subsequent civil war are narrated in part two of the novel. From the very first page of this part, the author foreshadows this unimaginable slaughter and the indelible psychological trauma of its victims and survivors. According to the narrator, Ugwu lay on a mat in his mother's hut, staring at a "dead spider squashed on the wall; its body fluids had stained the mud a deeper red" (119). The symbolism of the crushed spider foreshadows the impending massacre of the Igbo in an ethno-religious-motivated cleansing, where the leadership of the north incites the mob to see the pogrom as a jihad, where nobody – friend or foe, adult or toddler, baby or foetus – will be spared. As Mbiti observes, "Followers of a given religion are often ready to fight and defend it or something related to it. They are sometimes unreasonably fierce and fanatical if their religion is threatened by force or disrespected. They treasure their religion ..." (1969: 48).

Also one of the key players in the civil war, Colonel Patrick Anwunah, in his memoir on the Nigerian Civil War, supports this view, when he states, "...Northern Nigerians, on the other hand, were on a religious war of annihilation against the easterners although it was not expressly called a jihad but a civil war for political reasons. On the other hand, the Biafrans were fighting a war of survival" (2007: 267).

Interestingly, as the stains of the spider leave a deep and permanent red mark on the wall of the hut, so also will the effects of the massacre and civil war leave permanent physical and psychical injuries on their victims and survivors. This is reinforced by the massacre Richard witnesses at the Kano airport and the air raid in wartime Biafra. The narrator recounts Richard's experience of the pogrom thus, "The bartender was writhing on the floor and the gurgle that came from his mouth was guttural. The soldiers ran out to the tarmac and into the airplane and pulled out Igbo people who had already boarded and lined them up and shot them and left them lying there, their bright clothes splashes of color on the dusty black stretch" (Half of a Yellow Sun 153).

Adichie does not spare the reader the remote and immediate causes of the war with her literary language, which in the opinion of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, "Great novelistic images continue to grow and develop even after the moment of their creation; they are capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth" (quoted in Eagleton 2009: 102). Ugwu resents the politicians whose corruption and irresponsibility plunge the nation into anarchy. This is because the intervention of the military on July 15, 1966 was made possible for the "Politicians had made it quite clear that their looting of public resources could not be challenged within the framework of electoral politics" (Williams quoted in Chuma Adilieje, 2010: 17). Ugwu, therefore, sees politicians as "not like normal people ... whenever he drained a pot of boiled beans, he thought of the slimy sink as politicians" (12). This unusual comparison, that is, the use of extended metaphor or conceit, in describing politicians with "slimy sink" suggests that they are not only unreliable but also unwanted people, who must be eliminated. Hence, Ugwu is not sympathetic to Chief Okonji's murder during the first coup. But this is understandable because, "Corruption in public life is the most common political theme in West African literature in English.... One of the consequences of corruption in public life and the immorality and materialism of politicians is the peoples' disillusionment" (Killam, 2000: 225).

Really, the immediate cause of the massacre of the Igbo in the north is the killing of the leader of the north, the Sarduana of Sokoto, and Alhaji Tafawa Balewa in the first coup, which the British Broadcasting Corporation incitingly calls an "Igbo coup" (Half of a Yellow Sun 2006). The omniscient narrator says, "They say the Sarduana sounded like that [a goat] when he was begging them not to kill him. When the soldiers fired a mortar into his house, he crouched behind the wives and bleated, mmeem-mmeem-mmeem, please don't kill me, mmeem-mmeem-mmeem" (130). The mockery of the Igbo living in the north about the slaughter of the leader of the region is rendered in exaggerated language saturated with the simile of contempt and brutality, which angered the northerners and spurred them into violence. This position is reinforced by the metaphorical description of the Sarduana as "...a goat begging not to be killed: mmeem-mmeem-mmeem". Colonel Madu's assurance to Kainene and Richard that there will not be another coup is ironical and untenable. The killing of the Sarduana and the mockery that goes with it spur the northerners into spontaneous reprisal attacks on the Igbo – both soldiers and civilians – living with them. The counter-coup masterminded by northern officers and soldiers targets their colleagues in the Nigerian army serving in the north. Colonel Udodi's brutal murder is symbolic and foreshadows the degradation and suffering, which will be meted on his fellow tribesmen. According to Kainene, "Northern soldiers put him in a cell in the barracks and fed him his own shit... then they beat him senseless and tied him to an iron cross and threw him back in his cell. He died tied to an iron cross. He died on a cross" (138). Colonel Udodi's manner of death may also be a Biblical allusion to Jesus Christ who was crucified for his faith. This allusion naturally bestows on the pogrom and subsequent civil war a religious- motivated actions as posited in Patrick Anwanah's account of the civil war thirty-seven years after it ended.

Adichie uses a simile to present the systematic execution of the Igbo in the north, which gives the undertone and image of genocide or ethnic-cleansing, when Obiozo tells Odenigbo, "They are killing us like ants. Did you hear what I said? Ants I saw a whole family, a father and mother and three children, lying on the road to the motor park. Just lying there" (14). This indirect comparison of the killing of the Igbo with the "killing of ants" gives the mental impressions of the triviality of life and the countless number of Igbo people wasted in the northern pogrom alone. This simile is reinforced by another simile as Obiozo insists, "Those mad men were chasing us like runaway goats, but once we entered the gates of the barracks we were safe" (145). The indirect comparison of the Igbo as "runaway goats" shows the helplessness and defencelessness of the victims and survivors, who are hunted down for slaughter. The metaphor in the calling of the rioters "mad men" portrays the ferocity, frenzy, relentlessness and the vandalism that go with the pogrom.

The story of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is not only about war and love; it is also about betrayals. Uncle Mbaezi, Olanna's maternal uncle, and his family are betrayed by Abdulmalik, his Hausa friend and neighbour. This underscores the fragile relationship existing between the ethnic groups, for the illiterate northern masses have been brainwashed and mobilized to see the pogrom as a religious war, which they must see as a religious obligation. Abdulmalik, one of the rioters, says with satisfaction, "We finished the whole family. It was Allah's will! One of the men called out in Hausa, the man was familiar. It was Abdulmalik.

He nudged a body on the ground with his foot and Olanna noticed, then, how many bodies were lying there, like dolls made of cloth" (148).

The evocative language of contempt in Abdulmalik nudging the bodies with his foot is reinforced by the simile of the bodies being compared with "dolls made of cloth". These enhance the triviality of life and the brutality of the murder. The extent of the ethnic-cleansing is comparable to the genocide in Serbia in the early nineties that Colonel Anwunah argues, "Nigerians who were not targeted for this pogrom may not appreciate its impact since it did not affect them. For Biafrans, however, they were massively ambushed and killed at every nook and cranny by their northern neighbors, who also burnt and destroyed their homes and property" (2007: 161).

Adichie uses different figures of speech in the recreation of the horrendous civil war. There is the use of semantic parallelism, which "... holds where two sections of a text have parallel meanings, where 'parallel meaning' covers a range of possibilities, with the two most common kinds being similarity of meaning and opposition of meaning" (Fabb, 1997:139). For Geoffrey Leech quoted in Kofi Yankson, "Parallellism sets up a relationship of equivalence between linguistic items and strongly urges a connection between them" (1987:17). It is further explained as "The use of parallel construction or parallel structures which has the effects of acting as an organizing force to attract the reader's attention, or simply provide a musical rhythm" (Swovelin 82). Therefore, semantic parallelism is seen in the novel under discussion in, "We drove in a frenzied silence, past policemen in blood spattered uniforms, past vultures perched by the roadside, past boys carrying looted radios, until he packed at the train station and shoved her onto a crowded train" (148). The parallelism in the above quotation is in the equivalent structures: "past policemen in blood-spattered uniforms", "past vultures perched by the roadside" and "past boys carrying looted radios". The use of this semantic parallelism has the effect of semantic compounding, where "policemen" and "boys" have the semantic feature/+human/, and "policemen" with the added feature of / + orderliness / appearing in the same context as "vulture" with the feature of /+animalism/ and /+predation/. With the contextual conditioning of these items, they acquire additional meanings. In the world of the novel, therefore, there is disorderliness, animalism and predation in the massacre of the Igbo in the north in the fictive world of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

There is also the foregrounding of imagery in the quotation too, particularly, in the three items already stated. For Kofi Yankson, there is "foregrounding of imagery when there is a prominence of imagery which draws attention to itself" (1983:3). The stylistic significance of this foregrounding of imagery in the novel is to draw the reader's attention to the wanton wastage of lives and property during the pogrom. There is no succour for the fleeing refugees from the massacre as seen in the parallel structures, "...it was agony to blink, agony to keep them closed, agony to leave them open" (149). This parallelism has the effect of the novelist foregrounding the imagery of great suffering in her reader's mind. Olanna, for example, is in the north during the massacre and she sees her uncle's family wiped out and their property destroyed. As if this is not enough trauma, one of the passengers in the crowded train opens up a calabash and shows her fellow passengers its content.

According to the narrator, "Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl's head with the ashy-gray skin and the braided hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth. She stared at it for a while before she looked away. Somebody screamed" (149). The gory image in this description is to show that no Igbo person in the world of Adichie's novel, whether a child or an adult, is spared in the massacre. Indeed, the annihilation is calculated to be total, like the weeding of grass in the field. There is a permanent psychological damage, a neurosis, for the witnesses of the pogrom. Olanna, for instance, has nightmares, suffers dark swoops, urinates on herself, cannot sleep and cannot eat well, is frigid when making love, is afraid of noise-making during the war, and is haunted by the thought that Baby will be killed in an air raid during the war. This shattering experience has been foreshadowed in the symbolism of the squashed spider, whose "body fluids had stained the mud a deeper red" (11) in part one of the novel.

Furthermore, the secession of Biafra and declaration of independence are encapsulated in slain Nnaemeka's father's proverb, "Let the eagle perch and let the dove perch and if either decrees that the other will not perch, it will not be well for him" (164). The acts of secession and declaration of independence, which are acts of self-determination, bring reprisal reactions from the federal government. The region is completely blockaded from the rest of the country and the outside world by land and sea. In the world of the novel, the final solution to the Igbo problem – genocide – must be completed by warfare, and this is seen in the symbolic representation of this warfare, which the author presents in a simile of, "Dust swirled all around us like a see-through brown blanket" (179). The once beautiful and friendly Nsukka setting takes on an ominous and hostile demeanor as the new nation faces a brutal war of survival. As the war rages on in the Biafran territory, the northern soldiers are metaphorically referred to as "vandals". This reinforces the earlier description of the northern rioters as "mad men". This is because of the unprecedented savagery, brutality and plundering associated with their actions. There are the rampant violations of the laws of humanitarian warfare, which a jurist states, "War or armed conflict should not provide excuses for inflicting unnecessary hardship and wanton destruction of the victims' lives, properties and cities" (Unegbu, 2000:2). The ecliptic situation in Biafra is unimaginable and Adichie uses indirect comparison, which reeks with the image of predation to present it thus:

They ran – Master, Olanna, holding Baby, Ugwu, some guests – to the cassava patch beside the house and lay on their bellies. Ugwu looked up and saw the planes, gliding low beneath the blue sky like two birds of prey. They spurted hundreds of scattered bullets before dark balls rolled out from underneath, as if the planes were laying large eggs. The first explosion was so loud that Ugwu's ear popped and his body shivered alongside the vibrating ground (202).

This air raid which occurs on Odenigbo and Olanna's wedding day shows the wanton destruction of lives and property as non-military targets – houses, hospitals, airports, refugee camps, relief centres, markets, schools – are hit by the federal army. The personification and simile in "the planes gliding low beneath the blue sky like two birds of prey" paints the mental pictures of stalking and predation.

There is the connivance of the international community with starvation as an instrument of warfare as seen in the total blockade of Biafra and the denial of arms sales to the new nation. In the words of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the head of state of the short-lived Biafra, in his "Foreword" to Patrick Anwanah's book, "...he has chronicled accurately the pains and agonies of our inadequacy of weapons, ammunition, clothing, rations and vehicles. In the paraphernalia of warfare in Biafra, everything was inadequate" (2007: x).

Despite the connivance of foreign governments in the war, despite the negative and biased reports of foreign media, which Achebe believes is the "only means of getting an important story told, or of drawing the world's attention to disasters" (2000: 22), Biafrans gallantly defended the new state as the "masses are a stronger medium than all the media" (Baudrillard, 1973: 44). Biafrans believe in their cause: the pogrom in the north is a reality to them. If they do not fight back, their ethnic group will be exterminated, for genocide is not a novel socio-political phenomenon in the world. This has happened in the past and will happen again and again in the future where people perceive others as inferior or are brainwashed with awful ideologies. As B.G. Trigger puts it, it is widely agreed that "Native savages should be wiped off the face of the earth" (1985: 15). J. Horwood buttresses this fact, "They [the Beothuck population of Newfoundland] were a gentle and peaceful people, who at first welcomed the white settlers as friends. Nevertheless, within a few years they were hunted and shot as remorselessly as the wolves and caribous which warmed the interior barrens" (1959: 27).

In the Biafran war of survival, old men, child-soldiers and mentally retarded are conscripted as the long lines of volunteers dry up. High Tech, for example, is a thirteen-year old child-soldier who indulges in alcohol and hard drugs with the other soldiers. They confiscate the property of civilians and beat men old enough to be their fathers. This possibility exists because of the redefinition of "heroism" in a time of war. Ugwu as a soldier earns the admiration of the snobbish Harrison who calls him "one of our boys". Heroes, therefore, are those who take up arms to defend Biafran territorial integrity. Adichie employs the metaphor of impotence, feminization and uselessness in Mama Oji's description of the husband as a "castrated sheep" (328), because he deserted the army.

Besides, the novelist presents the hardship, the starvation, the death, and the decadence in war-torn Biafra in a vivid language. There is a calculated attempt, on the part of the federal military government, to wipe off Biafrans either through pounding them by shelling, air raids and starvation, or a combination of the methods. In order to cripple the newly seceded territory, it swiftly changes the country's currency. As a result of these policies, there is severe starvation in Biafra that most adults and children roast crickets and lizards to eat. One of the foreign journalists, who visited Biafra during the war, says condescendingly, "Niggers are never choosy about what they eat" (370). His opinion is understandable as he is not involved in the war and, therefore, cannot appreciate the burden of those involved. Adichie paints the picture of once fat and vivacious Mrs. Muokelu as an epitome of the devastation and savagery of the war. The narrator says, "Mrs. Muokelu was gaunt, her body was built for thickness and now, with so much weight loss, she drooped" (379). Also Olanna, whom Adichie uses language with images of beauty, youthfulness, perfection and durability

before the war, is horribly affected by it. She has not only gone down in size, but her menstrual flow is sparse and darkish brown. The robust, energetic and articulate Odenigbo is now a shadow and the "flat glassiness in his eyes, the slump of his shoulders, worried her [Olanna]" (331). The war's toll on the children is very frightening. Olanna is worried that "Baby has grown wiser but she hasn't grown taller since the war started" (405). Also in Richard's reflection "...how tiny, how light, she [Baby] was for a six-year old" (406). The wartime situation in Biafra compels Adichie to employ irony inundated with mental pictures of starvation, disease, death and decadence in this horrendous description of miasma, a disease as a result of malnutrition in children:

A mother was sitting on the floor with her two children lying next to her. Olanna could not tell how old they were. They were naked; the taut globes that were their bellies would not fit in a shirt anyway. Their buttocks and shirts were collapsed into folds of rumped skin. On their head, spurts of reddish hair. Olanna's eyes met their mother's steady stare and Olanna looked away quickly. She slapped a fly away from her face and thought how healthy all the flies looked, how alive, how vibrant (348).

Such antonymous expressions of healthy flies feeding on sick and malnourished children portray the degeneration and dehumanization that have come over the characters on account of the war. The level of starvation is very high in Biafra because people can no longer farm as a result of the air raids, or because they are refugees in other towns and villages, or the refusal of the federal government to allow relief materials into Biafra, or because of the corruption of relief workers, or because of the shrinking of Biafran territory. Therefore, people, particularly children, are living-dead whom flies feed on. The view is also reiterated in this opinion of the war, "The thick odours of unwashed bodies, and rotting flesh from the shallow graves behind the buildings grew stronger. Flies flew over the sores of children's bodies. Bedbugs and kwalikwata crawled; women would untie their wrapper to reveal an ugly rash" (Emeagwali, 2012). Recently, it has been reiterated that starvation is used as an instrument of warfare against Biafran military and civilian population with genocidal intention:

Throughout the conflict the Biafrans consistently charged that the Nigerians had designed to exterminate the Igbo people from the face of the earth. This calculation, the Biafrans insisted, was predicated on holy jihad proclaimed by mainly Islamic extremists in the Nigerian army and supported by the policies of economic blockade that prevented shipments of humanitarian aid, food and supplies to the needy in Biafra (Achebe, 2012: 229).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's critical lenses also beam on the Biafran flag. She satirizes the yellowness of the sun in the flag, which symbolizes a glorious future for independent Biafra. According to Robert Harris, "Satire is a literary manner, which blends a critical attitude with humour and wit to the end that humanity may be improved" (2012). And Rudolf O. Okonkwo says, "Satire thrives on the use of ridicule, irony and sarcasm to portray folly and destroy them with mockery" (2012). Therefore, Adichie uses the satire to show the naivety of

the utopian dream of Biafrans in confronting the federal army with very little military armaments and untrained army.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, therefore, the halfness of the sun is an ironic title and shows the imbalance in the utopian dream of Biafrans. It dawns on the intelligent and educated characters like Olanna that there is a glaring disparity between the officers in the top civil service and other civilians. There is, therefore, the betrayal of the ideals for secession and declaration of independence. The glorious sun does not beam its light on all Biafrans but a privileged few. The lifestyle of Special Julius and Professor Ezeka are contrastingly different from others. While the others starve, dress in rags, are diseased, and are homeless, they live in stupendous affluence. Adichie exposes the nepotism, corruption and favoritism which are the causes of the war as replicating themselves in the new state. Professor Ezeka, for example, still drinks imported brandy while Odenigbo drinks cheap locally made liquor; Ezeka's wife offers such delicacies as cakes to Olanna, who stays for days without decent meals; Ezeka's family gets travel documents to go overseas while Odenigbo and his family are stuck in bullet-riddled Biafra; Ezeka's family lives in a cozy house while Odenigbo's family is caged in a poorly ventilated, poorly sanitized one room; Ezeka's family has a sturdy bunker constructed with concrete while Odenigbo's family shelters in a bunker covered with leaves. There is no doubt that this ignominious "disparity between the elites and the masses as well as the depth of government corruption" (Fielding, 2007) exists, because as the colonial administrators left the colonies, "ninety-five percent of the population of underdeveloped countries, independence brings no immediate change" (Fanon, 1963:75), and the military leadership was not also a better alternative. In the opinion of Chuma Adilieje, "The ideals which the military express while heralding a coup d'état at the dawn of a new era of military governance are usually abandoned soon after, as the society is returned to business as usual" (2010: 27). This is the position both in Nigeria and Biafra in the fictive setting of the historical war novel.

Moreover, Adichie uses the evocative power of descriptive language to paint an unedifying picture of the lowering of the moral tone of the people during the Nigerian Civil War in the novel. It is a trite statement that from time immemorial, women have been regarded as trophies of wars. Even in peaceful pre-war setting in the novel, women are seen as sex-objects, either for men's sexual satiety or for procreation. Prior to the war, Olanna's relationship with Odenigbo is temporarily shattered because of the latter's sexual fling with Amala, which results in her pregnancy. Adichie uses a proverb to present the ugly consequences of the carnal union. According to Olanna, "My grandfather used to say that other people just farted but his own fart always released a shit" (233). The proverb conveys the enormity of the problem facing her. Odenigbo has used the girl only once under the mother's intoxicating drinks; however, his mother has her own motive: to use Amala to procreate a son who will continue the genealogy of her family. When the product of the union is a girl, mother and son are not interested in nurturing her, for different reasons. For Mama, her disinterest is as a result of the sex of the child, and for Odenigbo, he does not want anything or anybody to break his relationship with Olanna. Amala is not also interested in her daughter, because she feels she has failed Mama in giving birth to a girl instead of a boy. The child, therefore, bears the name "Baby", a name that does not denote any identity. Adichie

uses Amala's case to show the existence of women's degradation in African societies, where there is a preference for the male-child. Amala is a voiceless village girl who has been used and dumped. Also Kainene, Olanna's twin sister, resents her name because of its implication. She is treated as a boy in the family because her parents do not have a son to inherit their vast business empire, as it is said that Chief Ozobia "owns half of Lagos". From early in life, her father introduces her into his business, and she is a successful and shrewd contractor, who uses her brain, body and wealth to get contracts from political and military rulers, who run the country at various points in time. The role her father modeled her for affects her relationship with the others, particularly the men, that throughout the events in the novel, she is taciturn, tenacious and aggressive like a man. There is a reversal of roles in her relationship with her white lover, Richard. But this is understandable when one considers the suggestion about the effects of socialization on human behaviour, "The men ignored her morphological sex ... and accepted her as a man on the basis of her gender behaviours ... this changed-gender demonstrates the extreme malleability of people with respect to gender roles In other areas, becoming an amazon was seen to be the choice of the female herself" (Williams, 1986: 235-236).

Furthermore, the illiterate women's helpless situation in the world of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* may also be seen from the imagery of predation and defenselessness in "A kite swooped down and carried one of them off, a brown-and-white chick. It was so fast, the descent of the kite and the gliding away with the chick grasped in hooked claws, that Olanna thought she might have imagined it" (224). This imagery of a kite preying on a chick in the pre-war setting at Nsukka is capable of double interpretations. It may have foreshadowed the usage of the voiceless Amala by the powerful duo of mother and son. If this is so, then it is reinforced later in the simile, "She [Amala] was huddled in the mud like a pathetic animal, chewing slowly, tears streaming down her face" (240). This evokes the images of pity and helplessness. The same figure of speech is seen in "... she opened her mouth and extended her pepper-burnt tongue to pant like a dog" (240). The used girl subjects herself to so much suffering in order to abort the pregnancy. On the other hand, the second interpretation of the imagery may foreshadow the holocaust which will be unleashed on Biafrans during the war. If this is the case, it evokes death and destruction, which is supported by the "planes, gliding low beneath the blue sky like two birds of prey" (202) in an air raid in wartime setting of the novel.

It has been mentioned earlier that in wars, women are regarded as trophies. And Adichie uses simile that evokes images of impotence and castration to underscore piqued Alice's perception of her soldier-lover's attitude, which contrasts with the people's view of soldiers as heroes. She confides in Olanna, "He would jump on top of me, moan oh-oh-oh like a goat, and that was it" (336). In this depiction, there is some selfishness in the man's sexual intercourse with Alice as he does not bother whether she has orgasm or not, and this is also reflected in Ebelechi's sexual relationship with another military officer. However, the greatest sexual assault on women is rape. High Tech and his group of child-soldiers, including Ugwu, raped a barmaid. Ugwu's sister, Anulika, is raped by five soldiers from the federal army. Father Marcel is responsible for Urenwa's pregnancy in the refugee camp run by Kainene. The sexual decadence is not confined to soldiers and civilians; men at the helm

of affairs also use women as booties of war. The head of the Biafran state is not exempted from this inglorious attitude, for the narrator says:

The only saboteurs we have are the ones Ojukwu invented so he can lock up his opponents and the men whose wives he wants. Did I ever tell you about the Onitsha man who bought up all the cement we had in the factory, shortly after the refugees starting (sic) coming back? Ojukwu is having an affair with the man's wife and has just had the man arrested for nothing (313).

This may be a biblical allusion to David and Uriah to show the moral decadence of the leaders, who execute the war. This is a prevalent situation in Africa because, "Since when could a male, let alone a ruler, be denied the right to feel his way around women's thighs, whether other men's wives or schoolgirls" (Ngugi, 2007: 6)? The psychological trauma of the raped victim is exceedingly high. In Segametsi Modikel's opinion, "I have seen some rapists go to prison for ten to fifteen years, but surely that does not remove the stigma and emotional stress that one goes through after being raped. I felt dirty inside and I still do" (2012). In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, even after the rape, Ugwu still pictures the "calm hate" in the barmaid's eyes. He also experiences the indelible imprints of rape on a raped victim in Anulika. He observes after the war:

But it was Anulika who looked most changed. Her face was covered in blackheads and pimples and she did not look at him in the eyes as she said, in tears, "You did not die, you did not die". He was startled that the sister he had remembered as beautiful was not at all. She was an ugly stranger who squinted with one eye (420).

In the world of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the genocide on the Igbo does not end with their massacre in the north; the actual war fought inside Biafra, but continues unabated with genocidal policies after Biafra surrenders, in post-war Nigeria. Survivors of the war are given only fifty Nigerian pounds in exchange for all their Biafran pounds. Their properties and bank accounts in Rivers and Lagos states are confiscated, either by the governments or individuals. Nigerian military officers of Igbo origin, who served in the Biafran army, are detained at Alagbon Close and later dismissed from the army. So much limitations and indignities are heaped on the vanquished by the victors of the war. Igbo civilians are compelled to urinate on the pictures of their war hero, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. Odenigbo and Olanna are forced to carry planks for having Biafran number plates on their vehicle immediately after the war. A man is beaten like a child and his glasses snatched away from him for wearing them. But the foregrounding of imagery of devastation in postwar Biafra, in both the villages and in the towns, is seen in Abba, "Bushes had sprung up everywhere; small huts were completely swallowed in browned grass" (415). In the university town of Nsukka, "The buildings were blackened, roofs blown off, walls half standing. Here and there were black carcasses of burnt cars. An eerie quiet reigned. Curved profiles of flying vultures filled the horizon" (415-416). And in the once beautiful and serene pre-war setting of the university, the vestiges of the war are seen in the imagery of abandonment in the description "... looking at the whistling pine and ixora and lilies, all shapeless and tangled. Odim Street itself was shapeless and tangled with both sides knotted in thick bush" (418).

Odenigbo's once beautiful house in the university has a new occupant for, "Milky cobwebs hung in the living room. He looked up and saw a large black spider moving slowly in its web, as if uncaring of their presence and still secure that this was its home" (418). Odenigbo's house is searched, his food eaten and his documents burnt by the victorious federal army. The vandalistic nature of the Nigerian army is seen in the burning of the books in the university library. This is a symbolic act of death to knowledge, and a professor of chemistry is dragged out from his house in the campus and never seen again.

However, it is not as if the war is all about destruction, decadence and wastage. There are also positive sides to the war, though the negative ones outweigh them. Adichie, amidst the massacre and destruction, presents the enduring and beautiful side of love and lasting friendship. Olanna and Odenigbo stick to each other, despite Odenigbo's sexual fling with Amala, which produces Baby. Also despite Olanna's inability to give him a child before and during the war, Odenigbo is very much in love with her. In the north, if not for Mohammed's friendship, Olanna would have been dead. He makes desperate and frantic effort to get her to a place of relative safety. Again during the war, he writes letters to her and sends her necessities, which show his undying love for her, despite the fact that the two ethnic groups are engaged in a genocidal war.

No Igbo who are in the north during the pogrom or in Biafra during the actual war or in both will say he has suffered nothing. Though the war has ended, hunger has not and this is part of the inequalities, which caused the war. And Kainene and Inatimi's missing a few days to the end of the war is symbolic. It is symbolic of the everlasting freshness of the physical, emotional and psychological injuries on the Igbo. As foreign journalists estimate over a million died in the war, Colonel Madu says it is underestimated. The Nigerian Civil War has the dimension of genocide like that of the Jews, the Hutu in Rwandan and the ethnic Albanians in Serbia. The conscience of mankind will continue to be haunted by Adichie's emphatic refrain, *The World Was Silent When We Died*. This blood-chilling mantra suggests the connivance of the world in the ethnic-cleansing of the Igbo during the civil war in the historical novel. They failed to discharge their duties and obligations under several declarations and conventions of the United Nations. The words of Edward Said, the late Palestinian critic and poet, will continue to resonate the responsibility of the international community in armed conflicts because, "Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and canons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (1994: 7).

Conclusion

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's language use in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, like the beautiful and colorful petals of rose flowers, is what draws the reader's attention to her message in the novel: the message of genocide. The story of wanton destruction and wastage of lives and property in the Nigerian Civil War, the story of undying fire of love and lasting friendship, the story of great betrayals and sellouts, and the story of the physical, psychological and emotional wounds of war victims, survivors and their families, would not have been possible, if not through the use of embellished language. It is through the aggregation of images flowing from the various figures of speech she employs that she clarifies her central theme –

the Igbo genocide – in her historical novel. Her language is like lightning that signals thunder, or like a shell that protects the coconut, or like the banana skin that covers the banana. And as one cannot have thunder without lightning, nor can one get to the coconut without breaking its shell, nor can one eat the banana without peeling off its skin, one cannot equally decipher the message of genocide in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* without a thorough understanding of her literary language that encapsulate it.

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