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Shadows of war: A study on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Half of a Yellow Sun"

Abstract: This paper offers a compassionate and compelling look at the nearly immeasurable immediacy of wars effect on human and environment. It also constructs in the reader a collective consciousness of the war. By telling the painful miseries of war Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie illuminates a determining moment in the modern African history. She has transferred the experiences of the cruelty of war to her reader with the unfathomable narration. Her narration makes an impact on the reader and provides awareness that the war has brought horrible changes in the entire eco-system and the society. Through the voices of her characters she expresses how the Nigerian civil war has devastated human territories and settlement. This paper suggests that by understanding the brutality of the war the world should take a serious step to stop war in future.

Key words: devastation, economic instability, genocide, refugee camp, starvation, war.

The Nigerian civil war has had a profound effect on economy as well as on the environment and humanity of the nation. This paper scrutinizes the roots of the devastation of the eco-system with the aim of presenting Biafra war as an example for the long untold miseries of the country. Some of the consequences of the 1967 to 1970 Civil War in Nigeria are that, it has drained the human, natural, material and financial resources of the nation.

Between 1967 and 1970 Nigeria was the thread of the cruel and bloody civil war. The conflict originated from internal crisis such as tribalism and political failures of the civil government after the independence, as well as from the external influences by the ex-colonial powers. The people of Nigeria are still living in the effects of the civil war even after it ended officially. Unofficially the war rages on, and has metamorphosed into different war genres such as religious, ethnic, regional, tribal, cultural, linguistic and many more. The relatively higher incidence of war in Africa is not due to the ethno-linguistic fragmentation of its countries, but rather to poverty, economic dependence on natural resources, the hegemonic representation of religious prejudices and political institutions.

There are number of fictional and non fictional writings that talk about the trauma induced by the war in the psyche of the people. War narratives are a way to relive the country's history of violence and many writers and critics have penned down the horrors of Nigerian civil war in their fictional and non-fictional works. In the contemporary time Adichie one of the leading writers of Nigeria has powerfully addresses the emotional and personal consequences of the Nigerian Civil War, along with the historical atrocities that accompanies it in her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The story of the novel swings back and forth between the early 1960s Nigeria and the southern region affected by the breakout of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War in the late 1960s. The novel explores the reality of the explosive atmosphere of the war and its effect

on individuals and the nation as a whole. Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a grace evocation of the forgotten time and place during Biafra war. It explains accurately the historical and political accounts of the Biafra war. Adichie has graphically inserted some of the scenes in her book that makes the reader close the book and take a deep breath before continuing. She captures Biafra's impassioned struggle to establish itself as an independent republic in South Eastern Nigeria. Biafra has become the synonym for starvation, hunger, misery.

Biafra war which lasted for two and half years witnessed the genocide of millions of Igbos. Through the intertwining experiences of the five important characters Adichie gives a detailed account of the vindictiveness of the war. Adichie foreground the suffering of the characters in their day to day existence. The horror of the war is brought out through the experience of Olanna. The very first instance of Igbo massacre witnessed by Olanna is when she happens to be in Kano there she has witnessed many dead bodies lying on the road like "dolls made of cloth" (148). To her the street looks strange and unfamiliar she noticed aunt Ifeka's kiosk there she has seen "uncle Mbaezi lay facedown in a ungainly twist ... Aunt Ifeka lay on the veranda. The cuts on her naked body were smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips" (147). Her throat parched to see utter destruction. While travelling in the train she has seen a lady approaching her cuddling a calabash when asked she showed her daughter's head in it. "come she said 'come and have a look'. She opened the calabash Take a look said again. Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl's head with the ashy-grey skin and plaited hair and rolled back eyes and open mouth" (149). The mother also explained Olanna that she had taken a long time to plait her hair the photographic view of this incident shows, how the war has separated relationships and instilled a psychological imbalance. The war has played an injustice over the human life. Genocide has become the common activity of the war. The civil war has a long history of genocidal action against the native people Africa.

The war also has given the experiences of psychological disorder to the native people. After coming back from Kano Olanna's days started with dark swoops. Her legs failed the doctor who examined Olanna told her father that it's due to the psychological chaos. In the following nights she has had restless sleep. "That night, she had the first Dark Swoop: A thick blanket descended from above and pressed itself over her face, firmly, while she struggled to breathe" (158). This part of Adichie's narration proves that how far the war has brought confusion and disorder in the individual psyche.

The people who belong to a war tensed society cannot even enjoy the happiest moment of their life. On the occasion of Olanna's wedding with Odenigbo they have seen the rain of bombs. Like a flood the bomb has destroyed everything and everybody. The planes gliding low beneath the blue sky spurted hundreds of bullets as if it is laying large eggs. By seeing this Ugwu has felt "they (bombs) would continue to fall until everything was destroyed and everyone died" (203). Wars most harrowing experiences are seen through his eyes. The blood and gore spilled during Civil war does not leave a single character in the story untouched.

Nigerian Civil war has brought untold miseries and irrecoverable damages to humanity and environment. Weapons of mass destruction bombard human settlements and killed millions of people; properties are looted, women are molested and raped ruthlessly, many children have become orphans and their future look bleak and hopeless, more than two million people have become refugees. Many of the water resources have been destroyed, trees have been cut down. The environment as well as the human has become the casualty of war. Adichie intertwines such situation in her narrative.

Violence seems to become the inheritance of the nation. They started behaving violently towards women and children. They are most sufferers of this civil war Ugwu's neighbor and his sister are the victims of war rape the former has an affair with the soldier and has become pregnant and the latter is forcibly raped by five Nigerian soldiers. This shows the secondary

status of women in the post-colonial Nigeria, where even military attire does not protect women from being raped and molested. It is the scathing reminder of the promises of the freedom of women. When coming to children most of the children are denied education and nutritious food. Many children have died due to kwashiorkor a disease caused because of malnutrition.

When talking about refugee camp fear of economic instability and inadequacy of protection forced many of the people to vacate their native land and settle in rehabilitation camp. For most of the countries accepting the refugee has become divisive political issue. They failed to offer refuge to these migrants because they have feared that their resources will become insufficient for their people. Being in refugee camp is a risky task because in most of the places it is unhygienic and there will be shortage of food. Adichie gives a cinematographic picture of the condition of the people who is residing in camp. heart breaking description of the life of the camp through the character Olanna. While being in the relief center she feels uncomfortable to stand in queue and beg for food. She also has felt sheer despondency and powerless when the soldiers try to attack her. It's a known fact that human rights are supposed to be respected and protected, regardless of circumstances, but the war here means an automatic cancellation of such rights.

Reading of Adichie's novel helps the reader understand the catastrophe's war. Her narration makes an impact on the readers and provides awareness that the war has brought horrible changes in the whole eco-system. Due to air raids and bombing of civilian locations vast, greenish, and beautiful forests have suddenly changed into a cloud of smoke. The trees have been split into pieces. In the novel, the reader witness Richard showing Kainene a tree that has been split perhaps by air raids "look at the tree", he told her pointing . It has been cleanly split in two, from the branches down to the stem." (312). In another occasion Richard sees, "His favorite orange tree was gone. Many of the trees had been cut, and the orchard now had stretches of cultivated grass" (426). "The plants and trees were scorched, blown bare by

the dusty winds. The earth was swallow”(411). Thus Adichie clearly describes how the environment has become a sympathetic victim of war. Consequently it brings adverse effect on the people of Nigeria.

Adichie’s ‘The World was Silent When We Died’, a book within a book describes slaughter, starvation and suffering of the Igbo people during the Civil war. The fifth part of this book is dedicated to starvation. The word ‘starvation’ appears eight times at the beginning of each sentence, piercing the conscience of the reader with known images of starving African children. Several million people have died due to malnutrition. Food is in short supply in the region during war. Considering the unavailability of relief materials the Igbo resorted to various act of survival. For example, Mamma Adanna kills her dog Bingo to provide some protein supplement for her younger daughter Adanna, and in the rehabilitation camp the boys have “roasted and shared the lizard” (398). This proves that starvation is a predicament that befalls people during war. People eat anything they can lay hands in order to survive the war. Towards the end of the novel Olanna says “the war has ended but hunger has not” (433).

Adichie by illustrating the past history of her nation makes an impact on her people to live a war free life. She clearly gives the picture that a healthy atmosphere is unavoidable for mankind to lead a comfortable and happy life. If it is threatened the man will face innumerable sufferings and problems. She presents this novel as a warning to the present Nigerians to look beyond their differences before they descend into final destruction.

Work Cited

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