

Original Paper

Language, Gender and Power in Chinua Achebe's—There Was a Country and Chimamanda Adiche's—Half of a Yellow Sun

LAWAL M. Olusola^{1*}

¹ Department of English & International Studies, College of Humanities & Culture (Ikire Campus), Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria

* LAWAL M. Olusola, Department of English & International Studies, College of Humanities & Culture (Ikire Campus), Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria

Received: February 14, 2019 Accepted: March 4, 2019 Online Published: April 17, 2019

doi:10.22158/grhe.v2n2p82

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/grhe.v2n2p82>

Abstract

The interconnectivity of language in the analysis of ideological schemas of gender and power is remarkable. In every piece of texts, language is employed as an expression of ideology. Hence, there is no linguistic expression that is ideologically empty. Language is inspirable from the gender and power preoccupations of Chinua Achebe's There Was a Country and Chimamanda Adiche's Half of a Yellow Sun. In this paper, it is made succinct that both Achebe and Adichie deploy their English linguistic prowess with their traditional Igbo language colorations as an expression of power and gender discourses. Indeed, while it is deduced that Achebe, through the use of rhetorical and proverbial expressions, pursued a somewhat patriarchal gender and power ideological inclination in his memoir; Adichie, in her use of sublime language, exhibited her feminine gender belief in a rather subtle manner. Evidently, the two authors' use of the English language with a heavy Igbo language influence is an index to the fact that language, apart from being a powerful means of expression of a writer's ideological idiosyncrasy, is a source of power on its own; an instrument which both Achebe and Adichie deployed to show their different gender inclinations and power discourses in the selected texts.

Keywords

Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Adichie, language, gender, power

1. Introduction

Language is pivotal to every human activity; and as gender relation is power relation (Oloruntoba, 2009), language anchors both gender and power. Language is used to state the various forms of ideological expressions. Language is connected to our thoughts for it is the mirror through which we

look at the world. Thus our world is understood through the mode of language. When it comes to the discourse of language use in relation to gender and power, human beings become enigmas. Hence, language is manipulated to suite different ideological blocks. The understanding of the use of language to express, for example, an ideological discourse like gender gives human being an expression of power.

Language is a social phenomenon. It permeates every aspect of human activities. Thus it is an important instrument of power and gender relations. According to Ashcroft et al. (1995), language is the fundamental site of struggle for post colonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in language. One of the most subtle demonstrations of power of language is the means by which it provides, though the function of naming, a technique for knowing a colonized place or people. To name the world, note Ashcroft et al., is to understand it, know it and to have control over it. What this implies is that every human engagement, including gender and power relations, involves language. This is understandable because identities are constructed through language. This suggests that language is not as neutral as one may want to assume.

Writing from a deconstructionist perspective, Tyson (2006) asserts that if language is the ground of being, then the world is infinite *text*, that is, an infinite chain of signifiers always in play. And because human beings are constituted by language, they too are texts. Hence, language, from deconstructionist perspective, has implication for *subjectivity*, for what it means to be human being. Beyond the world and humans as a “galaxy of texts” with unending meanings, language is equally an integral part of discourses of gender and power. Thus, the whole idea of *maleness* or *femaleness*, power or powerlessness is framed by language.

In the context of this paper, gender is conceived as a socio-cultural construct that divides people into various categories such as male and female with each having certain characteristics, behaviour or stereotypes. As used in this paper, power is not an element exclusive to a class or institutions of government. According to Foucault (1980), power is not something that can be owned, but rather something that acts in certain way; it is more of a strategy than a possession. It is something which circulates, or something which only functions in form of a chain. It is employed and exercised through a net like organization; individuals are vehicles of power, not its point of application.

Literature cannot be divorced from the language through which it reflects human society and its messages. Because literature, according to Ngugi (1972), does not develop in vacuum, it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. This implies that literature is intertwined with all facets of gender and power relations. Against this background, this paper examines Achebe’s *There Was a Country* and Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* as they relate to the whole issues of language, gender and power. What are the relationships among language, gender and power in the texts of the two authors? In their use of language and representation of gender and power, whose value are the two authors reinforcing or undermining? Do the writers employ language to subvert the patriarchal hegemony or to reinforce it?

What are their attitudes to gender and power? Through an intra-disciplinary theoretical approach, these are some of the questions addressed in this paper.

2. Method

The study shall use the purposive sample analysis in appreciating and examining the two texts. The analysis of the texts is anchored to van Dijk's (1998) Socio-cognitive Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's (1985) Socio-semiotic Model of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). This is as a result of the fact that Dijk's CDA critiques the inequalities in man's endeavors, ranging from gender, socio-cultural issues, economics and politics among others, and so also that Systemic Functional Linguistics has been mostly favored as a model for linguistic analysis by most researchers in CDA, and that it incorporates all the units of a language. It also gives explanations to each part of sentence and discourse as a whole. The two texts are critically and contextually examined to reveal their relevance to the discourse issues of the socio-political and economy of the Nigerian society and also to exhibit their linguistic, gender and power continuities.

2.1 Analytical Framework

The study adopts and draws projection and insight from van Dijk's critical discourse analysis in connection with Fairclough's description, interpretation and explanation. It is significant to mention that Critical Discourse Analysis was employed to interpret and explain the themes and messages of the authors in the works put under analysis in this study. It is equally important to state that the study is not patterned strictly on the three stages of evaluation, description and interpretation but, however, anchored on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics of 1985. Systemic Functional Linguistics is employed along with CDA in this work because of its flexibility in accounting for all levels of grammar starting from the morpheme, word, group, clause, sentence and the whole gamut of discourse, it also constitutes a favorite for many researchers in CDA. Van Dijk's CDA is found veritable and worthwhile for adoption in this study because it critiques the inequalities in human endeavors ranging from gender to power and other socio-economic and political issues.

2.2 Statement of the Problem

Every writer is an ideologue. There is the need, therefore, for specific linguistic choice to express their ideology/ideologies. The language choice cum gender and power configurations of the writers are conditioned by their ideologies. A lot of earlier works have focused on the literary and linguistic features of the text under study. These works have, however, not studied the motivations that inform the literary and linguistic premises and ideology/ideologies that lie(s) behind them. The main issue in this paper is to establish the link between language, gender and power discourses employed in the texts under study and the messages and ideologies canvassed in them.

There is the need to investigate the motivations for these literary and linguistic features of gender and power for earliest studies have focused on the literary and linguistic features of the texts under study. There is the need to investigate whether or not the features are ideologically based. Ideology is

explicitly or implicitly expressed in language choice for there is no language that is ideologically empty (Birch, 1995). Language users demonstrate gender and power relations in particular contexts in their language choices. The relevant question here is how this done specifically in Achebe's *There Was a Country* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Again the work intends to investigate the area of influences and parallels in the Achebe's and Adichie's works to establish if there are thematic cum gender and power ideological continuities and discontinuities between the authors' works.

2.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to describe the interplay of language, gender and power in the texts in order to explain the gender ideological preoccupations and power discourses of the works. Thus, the study intends to investigate the nexus of language, gender and power in *There Was a Country* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In specific terms, the study intends to:

- 1) Identify and discuss the messages in the texts;
- 2) Explain the gender ideologies and power discourses behind the messages;
- 3) Describe the linguistic devices used in projecting the messages as well as the gender ideologies and power discourses; and
- 4) Establish the extent to which the devices are effective in projecting the messages of gender and power ideologies.

2.4 Research Questions

The study is premised on the following research questions:

- 1) What are the major thematic preoccupations of Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Adichie in the texts?
- 2) What gender and power ideologies inform the thematic preoccupations of the two texts?
- 3) What linguistic, gender and power discourses are deployed to project the messages of the texts and the ideologies behind them?
- 4) How effective are the linguistic devices used in the works to project the gender and power messages/ideologies.

2.5 Significance of the Study

This work is significant in that it reveals the gender and power ideological discourses that show the cultural and sociological features and elements of the use of language in the two works. This shows the linguistic relation of gender and power ideologies in the texts. Therefore, both *There Was a Country* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* of Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Adichie are purposively chosen for our study. More specifically, the study investigates the realities that are operational in the language, gender and power in the texts. Again, the work describes the use of language in the texts, and the gender and power issues exhibited and expressed by the language are explicated. The work also explores the major thematic preoccupations in the texts and relates them to the gender and power ideologies that inform the linguistic devices that are deployed to project the ideologies and messages behind them. In real sense, the texts show a reflection of the society we have in Nigeria together with the elements or

features that we experience in the country.

Also, the work provides us more insight to the significance of gender and power discourses in the texts of Achebe and Adichie with the intent of improving reader's appreciation of the works.

2.6 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on Achebe's *There Was a Country* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The study subjects the texts to content analysis at lexico-semantic and syntactic levels in order to reveal how language relates to the expression of gender and power ideologies in the texts.

2.7 Conceptual Clarification

In broad terms, gender according to Adegbite (2009) refers to the sex-role identity employed by humans to enact the differences and distinctions between males and females. *Encarta Encyclopedia* (2005) states that despite the fact that the word "gender" and "sex" are often used interchangeably, gender refers to the behaviour associated with members of a particular sex, whereas sex relates specifically to the biological and physical characteristics that make a person male or female at birth. According to Kendall and Tannen (2001), gender discourse does not only provide a descriptive account or documentation of male and female discourse, it also exhibits and reveals how language performs its roles as a representational or symbolic resources to create and administer personal socio-cultural identities and meanings.

Gender, in Tsaaio's (2009, p. 25) submission, is a socio-cultural construction and ideological determination, a way of representing and defining "others" contingent on sexual differences. Gender, according to him, "is, therefore at the core of power relations and social representations of society such that it becomes imperative in literary discourse". This makes gender different from sex. In relation to this, Goodman et al. (1996, p. vii) maintain that "Gender refers to ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex differences" while sex "is a biological category: female and male". Based on the above submissions and several others, the opinions of scholars converge on the realm that while sex is mainly a biological configuration, gender is a social construction of people.

Power can be described as an authority that is based in agreement by majority of the members of a society or group. Power entails the exercise of one's authority in a given circumstance. Werber (2007) defines power in the words of Michael Foucault (1926-1984) who perceives power as a complex strategic situation in "a given society". Power, more generally could be portrayed as the unilateral ability to bring about significant change, usually in the lives of people through the actions of oneself or of others. Power exists in a society as exercised by an individual or a group that is authorized by the members of a given community. These are several sources of power.

In addition, Galbrath (2007) summarises types of power as being "*condign*" that is, power based on force, "*compensatory*" that means power through the use of various resources, or "*conditioned*" which is power as a result of persuasion. He also gives the sources of power as "*personality*" which is the power from individuals, "*property*" this means power from people's material resources and "*organizational*", which is power from organization. These are some of the sources of power that

abound in different societies. Hence, power can be perceived from various perspectives from the exertion of physical use of force, electricity, power as energy, etcetera. However, power in this context refers to the power that exists between the various participants roles in a discourse. Power in this paper is perceived as the subtle control of participants in a discourse with the use of language. Power here refers to the ability of a user of language to control a discourse with appropriate linguistic choices. Power then becomes a weapon of dominance, authority, superiority, influences and governance of the people in the struggle that exists in a society.

3. A Short Literature Review

The novels of Achebe and Adichie exhibit robust engagements with the issues of language, gender and power. These are depicted through various aesthetic elements such as plot-structure, diction, characterization, setting, themes and others. Nonetheless, their preoccupations with the issues of language, gender and power have elicited a myriad of responses from scholars. Thus, this section reviews some of the extant literatures on Achebe's *There Was a Country* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, especially on the discourse of language, gender and power.

Interrogating the Nigerian-Biafran War and the elites' notion of nation and nationalism in Achebe's *There Was a Country*, Ekhaton (2014) contends that "Nigeria's story and Achebe's personal story were told to inspire in future Nigerians the spirit of nationalism, value for where Nigerians are coming from". He notes that "the veritable themes in the memoir are politics of nationhood, ethnic nationalism and national integration". These according to Ekhaton, are "the sum of the causes of Nigeria—Biafra War". Writing further on the depiction of power struggle and its implications in the memoir. Ekhaton remarks that:

Achebe creates imaginary scene for traumatic horrors of war. This approach enables the reader to appreciate the themes of the book which appeal to the reader's sense for caution so that such grievous terrorism will be avoided.

Barnard and Kinggeorge (2014) investigate the ways in which the history and memory of Nigeria—Biafra Civil War and its lessons, as depicted in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *There Was a Country*, can engender collective purgation and promote national unity. The critics assert that *Half of a Yellow Sun* "is not just about loss and destruction, it is also a book of self-determination, survival and hope-qualities which Ugwu [...] endued". They note that Adichie "foreshadows the hope of a new enlightened Nigerian through Ugwu's initial encounter with modernity when he first arrives at Odenigbo's quarters to find spacious rooms, wide enough for him to walk around the house up and down, touching books, curtains, furniture and plates".

The observation of Barnard and Kinggeorge refers to the transformative power of Western modernity on Ugwu. In spite of transformative power of Western modernity, especially on Ugwu; the novel shows that Western modernity also possesses some destructive elements. The war situation depicted in the novel serves to justify this point. The critics further contend that "the historical fact of ethnicity and

race as bane of Nigeria's unity is projected in the novel through incidents that resonate with the failure of the leadership to identify and harness the positive aspects of Nigeria for national unity".

On the representation of the war in the novel, Barnard and Kinggeorge assert that "the war creates an opportunity for unlikely friendship to be forged. Kainene and Olanna rise above their difference and communicate freely". This assertion shows the paradoxical power of war. War as depicted in the novel, not only destroys people, but it also unites them. In the analysis of *There Was a Country*, Barnard and Kinggeorge observe that Achebe "has succeeded in preventing our collective memory and history from sinking into atrophy and amnesia, thereby facilitating the process of exorcism". This is one dimension of power of literary art. It boosts national memory and enhances a nation's history.

In her reading of *Half of a Yellow Sun* Makokha (2014) contends that the novel depicts the myriad of challenges being faced by the African woman in her struggle to carve a niche for herself in the post colonial African society. She argues that the African woman, as portrayed in the novel, suffers double colonization, the first time the British, and the second time by the Nigerian man in postcolonial Nigeria. While contending that the patriarchy configuration of the post colonial Nigerian society and, by inference, the African continent marginalizes and oppresses educated women, like Olanna, Makokha calls for the urgent need for African men to solve "the problem of patriarchy and domination of women by treating women as their counterpart, and not as second class citizens, both in domestic and formal set-up". Despite the fact that Makokha alludes to the conflicts between Mama and Olanna in her analysis, her submission that the already mentally colonized women should decolonize their mindsets tends to suggest that the colonization of women is exclusively perpetrated by men. The validity of Makokha's analysis is, thus, hampered by its failure to recognize the intra-gendered colonialism that engenders the suppression of women in the novel. The character of "other woman" like Amala shows that the "African woman" is plural. The manipulation and suppression of Amala by Mama in order to advance her interest of having a grandson signifies that women are also involved in colonizing their fellow women.

Azuike's (2009) exploration of *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* focuses on women's struggle to overcome marginalization and oppression in sexist and patriarchal society. She contends that "the novels are populated by psychopaths, rapists, religious fanatics and ruthless rulers; all of whom terrorise women". Azuike, thus submits that Adichie uses the novels "as instruments of self-discovery and healing for the abused women in Nigeria who may have undergone traumatic experiences". Although Azuike makes a passing reference to Jaja's ordeal in the hands of Papa, her radical feminist interpretation of *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* seems to suggest that women are the only victims of tyranny and other forms of political violence prevalent in contemporary Nigeria. Azuike's radical feminist perspective tends to oversimplify the various dimensions and complexities of power and their abuses depicted in the novels. Apart from the fact that Azuike's reading falls short of realistic representation of Adichie's gender consciousness, her critical judgments engendered by radical feminist orthodoxies, undermine the novels' complex thematic focus. As the novels show, both the

female and the male are victims of abuses of power, oppression and human rights violation. For instance, in *Purple Hibiscus*, Jaja (a male child) is a victim of Papa Eugene's brutality. Ade Coker, an ace (male) journalist and Editor of the *Standard* newspaper, is assassinated through a parcel bomb by the military junta. Similarly, Papa-Nnukwu, an old man, is humiliated and ostracized by his son Papa Eugene. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Mama oppresses Amala. She also insults and humiliates Olanna. Mrs Ozobia conspires with her husband, Chief Ozobia, in order to use their daughter, Olanna, as a sex bait to secure a contract from the Minister of Finance, Chief Okonji. Ugwu a male teenager, is also forced into fighting in the war he knows little or nothing about. All these instances and others show that both the male folk and the female folk are perpetrators and victims of political and domestic violence. Thus, power and its abuses in the novels are not limited to the male as Azuike's analysis seems to suggest.

3.1 Contextualisation of *There Was a Country* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*

3.1.1 There Was a Country

Divided into four parts with a postscript, *There Was a Country* a personal history of Biafra narrates Achebe's personal experience—his memoir of the Nigerian—Biafran War. As shown in the text, the author's upbringing coincides with the birth of the country in 1960. Recalling the era of colonialism which affords him and other members of his generation the golden opportunity to acquire Western education with little or no financial cost, the author chronicles the evolution of the struggle of Nigeria's independence by Nigerian nationalists and the various inter-ethnic intrigues that influence the struggle. In a detailed account, the text recalls the colonial factors, and other inter-personal, inter-ethnic and inter-regional acrimonies that engender political violence, including the *coup de'tat* and the counter coup of January 29, 1966, which engender the civil war. The fallout of those coups and the attendant power struggle among members of political elite, principal among whom were Ojukwu and Gowon, coupled with the contending forces failure to abide by the "Aburi Accord" degenerate into a civil war between the Nigerian state and the Igbo people.

However, Ojukwu's declaration of Republic of Biafra, as a sovereign state, on May 30, 1967 is captured as the last straw that breaks the camel's back as the Federal Government's "police action" to quash the secessionist agenda is met with stiff resistance from the Biafran forces. Consequently, this results in full-blown civil war. The war which is known as the Nigeria Biafran War was fought between 1967 and 1970. Hence *There Was a Country*, Achebe's personal history of Biafra, offers a detailed account of the war.

3.1.2 Half of a Yellow Sun

Like *There Was a Country*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* deals with the Nigerian—Biafran war from a "factional" perspective. Set in the early 1960s and late 1960s in Nigeria, the novel recounts the various dimensions of intrigues and bloody violence such as the coup and counter coup of January 15 and July 29, 1966 which lead to the civil war. In the first part of the novel which covers the early 1960s, the major characters—Ugwu, Olanna, Kainene, Odenigbo and Richard—are introduced to the reader. In

this part, the interpersonal and inter-ethnic rivalries leading to the civil war are also presented. The events in the 1960s, as presented in the novel, record the various dimensions of brutality that characterize the war. Starvation, homelessness, economic dislocation and mass death are among the consequences of the war on the people, especially the Igbo. Beyond the war, however, the novel also centers on various form of amorous and platonic love. These are captured through the characters of Odenigbo, Ugwu, Olanna, Mama, Susan, Richard and Kainene.

3.2 Major Thematic Preoccupations in *There Was a Country* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*

For practical considerations and because of the identical realities and preoccupations of themes, setting, time and locale of the two texts—*There Was a Country* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*—the discussion of their major themes and messages shall be intertwined in this paper.

Power struggle: Power struggle is one of the themes of the texts. As shown in the two texts, the Nigerian political elite who inherit the rein of power from colonial masters are engaged in inter-personal war of supremacy. For instance, Achebe shows how the Nigerian nationalists—Nnamdi Azikwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Aminu Kano and others—through their various political parties and newspapers contribute to the nationalist struggle with a view to liberating their country from colonial masters as well as appropriating power to themselves and their various tribes. The text-Achebe’s memoir—also depicts the intrigues and hostility that define party politics in the early years of Nigerian independence. The reader is told that “elections were rigged, the national census staged-managed; and the judges and magistrates manipulated by politicians in power” (p. 51). Similarly, Adichie’s novel also alludes to the political intrigues and power struggle that characterize the post-independence era in Nigeria. For example, the reader is informed by Odenigbo about the outbreak of violent protests in Lagos and Ibadan which is generated by cooked election results and electoral malpractice.

Inter-ethnic conflicts: Intertwined with the theme of power struggle is the issue of inter-ethnic conflicts. Power struggle among members of political class is exacerbated by inter-ethnic hostilities. Led by Kaduna Nzeogwu, the January 15, 1966 coup which claimed the lives of prominent Nigerian politicians such as Ahmadu Bello, Samuel Akintola, Okotie Ebo and others was perceived by some Northerners as “Igbo coup”. The coup is not only followed by a counter-coup by soldiers of the Northern extraction, a number of attacks are also carried out against the Igbo. As narrated by Achebe, “it is a desperate time. Soldiers [...] used by elements in power to commit a number of crimes against the Igbo, Nigerian citizens” (p. 67). In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie alludes to a similar event when the BBC reports that “[...] they are killing Igbo officers in Kaduna”. The killing of Olanna’s auntie and uncle by some violent youths in the North also shows the inter-ethnic conflicts that characterize the power struggle in post-independence Nigeria.

Secession and War: Secession and war constitute salient preoccupations of the two texts. The reader is presented with the struggle of the Igbo political elite to break away from the Nigerian State owing perhaps, to their sense of insecurity and perceived marginalization from power. The Biafran

secessionist agenda is met with “police action” by the Gowon led Federal Government of Nigeria. This eventually results in bloody civil war. Although Achebe and Adichie, as depicted in the texts, share the notion that the Igbo people are victims of the aggression of the Nigerian state owing to the monumental tragedies they suffer in the war, the secession and the war are integral parts of power struggle used by various members of political elite to pursue their private political agenda.

Political corruption: The thematic import of political corruption, which engenders resentment, coup and counter-coup, is equally foregrounded in the texts. While Achebe appears to blame the occupiers of power, especially the Northerners, for the pervasive corruption and abuses of power that engulf the country in the early phase of Nigerian independence, Adichie shows that political corruption and abuses of power in that period transcend ethnic boundary. This is reflected in the characters of Chief Ozobia and Okonji, both of whom are Igbo. Chief Okonji is a Finance Minister who uses his position as a public servant to advance his personal interest and that of his cronies. His intention to offer Olanna a position in the Ministry of Finance authenticates this point. Olanna’s assertion that her father, Chief Ozobia, and “his politician friends steal money with contracts, but nobody makes them kneel to beg for forgiveness. And they build houses with their stolen money and rent them out to people” (p. 221) shows that political corruption and abuses of public offices are not limited to politicians of the Northern region.

Literary arts as tools of emancipation: The tropes of literary arts as tools of socio-political and cultural emancipation are also evident. Achebe contends that African literature and African writers, from the colonial era, have been actively parts of socio-political, cultural and ideological struggles to liberate the African continent from colonial domination. He submits that the objective of an indigenous African literary renaissance that emerges during colonial period in Africa is “to challenge stereotypes, myths and images of ourselves and our continent, and to recast them through stories—prose, poetry, essays, and books for children” (p. 53). In an attempt to achieve this objective, Achebe notes, many African writers engage in “politics of representation” by “writing back” to the Western colonialists order to subvert their uncentric notion of African people as uncivilized. Similarly, he indicates that writers are enlisted in the Nigerian—Biafran war. This is captured in the text through the characters of Soyinka, Okigbo and Achebe himself. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Okeoma’s involvement in the war and Richard’s book: *The World Was Silent When We Die*, show how literary arts and writers are implicated in the contest for political power. This further signifies that literary arts and writers are not neutral in the discourse of power.

Influence of Western powers: Another theme that is evident in the works is the overbearing influence of Western powers on modern African states. The independence of many African countries notwithstanding, they are still being controlled by the World powers. *There Was a Country*, for instance, claims that the war is not fought and lost without the influence of the United Nations. Achebe alleges that the silence of the United Nations on the human tragedies suffered by the Igbo is a kind of complicity with the atrocity of the Gowon-led Federal Government. Achebe equally argues that when

Ojukwu reaches “desperately to the United Nations” for mediation, he met with “a defeating silence” while “u Thant turned to Nigerians for direction” (p. 212). Also, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the first military coup is labeled an “Igbo coup” (p. 125) by the BBC. Similarly, during the counter coup of July 1966, the same media reports that the Igbo are being killed by the Northern officers abound. The instances show the influence of Western powers on African countries.

Destructive nature of war: The works also thematise the destructive nature of war. In both texts, war is depicted as a human engagement which inflicts incalculable suffering on human beings. “By the beginning of the dry season of 1968”, for example, “Biafran civilians and soldiers alike were starving” (p. 210). Achebe recounts. Human “bodies lay rotting under the hot sun by the roadside, and flapping wings of scavengers could be seen circling, waiting patiently nearby” (p. 210). A similar gory picture is painted by Adichie through the character of Ugwu. When Ugwu gets to the hospital, after he is helped escape by deserting soldiers, he sees “many bodies littered around him on mats, on mattresses, on the bare floor” (p. 293). Apart from starvation, eminent and ordinary citizens, including children and women are also killed in the war. For example, the war claimed the life of a prolific Nigerian poet-Christopher Okigbo (Okeoma in *Half of a Yellow Sun*) are also instances of the destructive nature of war.

Gender conflicts: Intra-gendered and inter-gendered conflicts are also themes that permeate the texts. As depicted in *There Was a Country*, the political crises, including the secession, coups, “the police action” and war, are a kind of intra-gendered conflicts among the male folk. Because virtually all the principal characters in the conflicts are male, the civil war is an enactment of patriarchal power tussle. It shows the patriarchal character of the Nigerian State. This instance is equally seen in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. However, intra-gendered conflicts are not limited to the male folk. The wrangling between Mama and Olanna on the one hand, and the malice between Olanna and Kainene on the other reveal the extant intra-gendered conflicts among the female folk. Linked to this is the inter-gendered discord between Mama and her son, Odenigbo. Mama succeeds in manipulating Odenigbo to sleep with Amala against his wish. Richard is also manipulated by Susan. Similarly, Chief Ozobia not only cheats on his wife; he also uses his daughter Olanna, as a sex bait in order to secure contracts from the Minister of Finance, Chief Okonji.

Love affair: The theme of love, both amorous and platonic, is depicted in various ways in the texts. Although, *There Was a Country* mainly focuses on the war, a deeper reading of the text reveals that it also deals with love. Unrestrained love for power is illustrated in the text through the failure of Ojukwu and Gowon to reach an accommodation on the various national issues that eventually lead to the war. As Achebe puts it, “both are blinded by ego, [...] obsessed with interpersonal competition and petty rivalries” (p. 123). Buttressing this point further, Achebe aptly observes that “there was an obsessive tendency by both belligerents—Ojukwu and Gowon—to seek position of strength and avoid looking weak throughout the conflicts” (p. 125). This irrational, patriarchal love (or it is lust?) for power by the two soldiers results in a civil war and irredeemable tragedies for the country.

Beyond patriarchal love for absolute power, Adichie demonstrates the ways love serves as means of confronting violence, especially in a period of war. This is illustrated through the love affair between Odenigbo and Olanna. The love affair between Kainene and Richard further signifies how love serves as means of liberating an individual from emotional estrangement. Richard, who has been lonely for many years, becomes liberated from his emotional alienation when he finds true love in Kainene.

Cultural solidarity: Achebe illustrates and demonstrates a fervent socio-cultural affinity of the Igbo people in *There Was a Country*; for instance, a substantial number of the Igbo people solidarise with Ojukwu both socially and culturally in his secessionist bid and in the three-year spanned war. This theme of support and solidarity is demonstrated by Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun* through the language barrier that is broken by a white man-Richard-speaking the Igbo language almost with an unclogged-wheel frequency. Indeed, Richard eats the Igbo meals, marries an Igbo woman-Kainene-and socialises with the Igbo people and imbibes their culture in every ramification. The cultural solidarity deployed by Adichie here is enough to qualify Richard as an Igbo-white entity.

4. Syntactic Clues to Gender and Power Relations in the Texts

4.1 Materials Processes

The materials process, under the transitivity system, is the branch of the syntactic clue used for a brief analysis in this study. Fowler and Kress (1979); Simpson (2004) maintain that materials processes are highlighted by the agent-action-affected semantic structure. In the materials processes an entity (Actor) is construed which acts on another entity (Goal, Patient, Beneficiary or Maleficiary). This anchors or depends on the type of action, varied degrees and kinds of power that are signified as would be shown in the analysis of the texts under study.

Indeed, materials processes are “doing” processes. The notion that some entity “does” something is expressed by materials processes which evidently may be done to some other entity. In the processes, two participants are involved in the role; they are: actor and goal. In the analysis below, the use of material processes both by Achebe and Adichie in the texts selected for this study have some gender ideological orientations and power relation identities and implications as evidenced in the following excerpts, first, from Achebe’s *There Was a Country*.

Excerpt 1

Marauding northern youths armed with machetes, knives and other instruments of death attacked unsuspecting civilians, mostly Igbos (pp. 80-81).

In the excerpt above, the powerful, who are also the Actor is the “Marauding northern youths armed with machetes, knives and other instruments of death” who are poised to vent their spleen on the powerless; the word “attacked” happens to be the materials process which shows the virulent action of the agent on the malevolent and defenceless goal, the “unsuspecting civilians, mostly Igbos”. The Igbos as demonstrated here by Achebe are being oppressed by the powerfully armed northern youths who discriminate against their poor country men. The author uses another materials process as we have in

the following excerpt.

Excerpt 2

The Nigerian air force shot down a Swedish Red Cross plane carrying humanitarian supplies and medicines to the sick and dying in Biafra, killing all aboard ... (p. 101).

In the excerpt above, “The Nigerian air force” is the powerful and at the same time the Actor, while “shot down” is one of the materials processes in the excerpt; “a Swedish Red Cross plane ...” is a defenseless goal in the excerpt, again, the materials process, “killing” exhibits the power relations of the Actor, “Nigerian air force” over the malevolent rather than the benevolent goal “all aboard”. Achebe paints the picture here that the Igbo citizens were seriously demoralized by the Nigerian army and were also grossly dehumanized by the Nigerian military might.

In Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a lot of feminine gender power relations are foregrounded. In other words, Adichie subtly makes more prominent, in the materials transitivity system, her gender preoccupation than the masculine one. This is made evident in the following excerpts below from the text.

Excerpt 3

Her lips were still against his and her words suddenly took on a different meaning and she moved back and pulled her dress over her head in one fluid gesture. She unbuckled his trousers. She did not let him take them off. She turned back and leaned on the wall and guided him into her, excited by his surprise, by his firm hands on her hips (p. 344).

Naturally and expectedly, the man takes the leading and active role in love making. However, Adichie, in her intricacy and subtlety, through the materials transitivity pattern, makes Olanna, the woman take the active role over Odenigbo, the man. In another words, Olanna the female, is the Actor throughout the act of love making here while Odenigbo, the male, is the passionate but subdued benevolent goal. In the expression, “Her lips were still against his ...”, we realize that “Her lips” is the active/agent, while “were still against” is the materials process, “his” takes the role of the Goal. The woman did not let the man take off her dress for her but “she moved back and pulled her dress over her head”. She is the Actor, “moved back” and “pulled” are the materials processes, while “her dress” is the Goal.

Again, the woman did not let the man unbutton his trousers by himself, but “She unbuckled his trousers”, “She” is the Actor, while “unbuckled” is the materials process, “his trousers” becomes the Goal. Lastly here, the woman also takes the leading role again as “She did not let him take them off” then “she turned her back and leaned on the wall and guided him into her, ...”. “She” is the Actor here and the materials processes are “turned”, “leaned” and “guided” while the Goals are “the wall” and “him”. Incidentally and interestingly as well, the woman takes the more active role in love making here as she guided the man into her in lieu of letting the man take the most active and manly role in love making of guiding himself into the woman; but Adichie takes the role the other way around.

Another transitivity pattern that demonstrates the materials process in the same text by Adichie which is an exhibition of power relation is expressed below:

Excerpt 4

“What is there to buy in Biafra? They have blockaded us *kpam-kpam*” (p. 357).

There is nothing to buy in Biafra for, during the war, the Nigerian contingents of the army who are the powerful Actor “They” “have blockaded” (materials process) “us” becomes the Goal. The Nigerian contingents blockaded the Biafran people from getting food and medical supplies within and outside the country so that the Biafrans can be suppressed and be easily defeated in the war.

Again, there is another gender relation materials process in the same text by Adichie where the female takes the active role of cuddling the man like a baby while she sobbed.

Excerpt 5

“She held him close to her and sobbed” (p. 391).

“She”, Olanna, is the active Actor, “held” is the materials process, while “him”, Odenigbo, becomes the Goal.

The materials process in the following excerpt in the same text has a close likeness to the penultimate instance both in gender and power relation preoccupations.

Excerpt 6

“Olanna cradled him closer” (p. 402).

“Olanna”, the woman, takes the Actor’s role; “cradled” becomes the materials process, while “him”, Odenigbo, the man, is the submissive goal. In Adichie’s text, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the author subtly presented women as the Actors in the materials processes while the men are cast in the positions of the goals.

5. Conclusion

Achebe’s memoir, *There Was a Country*, and Adichie’s “faction”, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, have both explored the issues of the Nigerian Civil War stressing mostly the pogrom and the excruciating suffering and subjugation of the Igbos during the conflict. The two texts share almost the same notion both in context and theme; again the linguistic configurations of the authors share the same easy, free-flow and reader friendly premises. There is, however, a sort of discontinuity in the gender and power relation preoccupations of the authors, for while Achebe pursues a masculine gender power predilection through the use of Igbo proverbs and clichés in the text, Adichie subtly and intricately represents women as the Actors in the materials processes as the men take the submissive position of the goal. This represents Adichie’s feminine gender affinity.

References

- Adegbite, W. (2009). Language, Gender and Politics: A General Politics, A General Perspective. In Odebunmi et al. (Eds.), *Language, Gender and Politics: A Festschrift for Yisa Kehinde Yusuf*.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (Eds.). (1995). *The Post-colonial studies reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Azuike, M. A. (2009). "Women's struggle and independence in Adichie's. Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun". *African Research Review*, 3(4), 79-91. <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v3i4.47548>
- Barnard, C. D., & Kinggeorge, O. P. (2014). History, memory and politics of National Unity in Adichie's. Half of a Yellow Sun and Achebe's There Was a Country. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 81-89.
- Chimamanda, N. A. (2014). *Half of a Yellow Sun*. India, Manipal Technologies Ltd.
- Chinua, A. (2012). *There Was a Country*. Great Britain, Clays Ltd.
- Ekhaton, O. G. (2014). "There Was a Country"—The Reminiscence of Nigeria-Biafra Civil War and Elites' Perception of Nation and Nationalism. *Historical Research Letter*, 12, 13-25.
- Encarta Encyclopedia. (2005). *Gender*. Microsoft Standard.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writing 1972-1977*. London: Harvester Press.
- Fowler, R. K. G. (1979). Critical Linguistics. In R. Fowler et al. (Eds.), *Language and Gender* (pp. 185-213). London, Rontledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429436215-10>
- Galbraith, J. K. (2007). *An Anatomy of Power* (electronic version). Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia. Retrieved June 21, 2015, from <http://www.goggle.wikipedia>
- Goodman, L. et al. (Eds.). (1996). *Literature and Gender*. London, Routledge.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Kendall, S., & Tannen, D. (2001). Discourse and Gender. In D. Shiriffin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Maiden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell.
- Makokha, G. A. (2014). Portrayal of African Woman in Half of a Yellow Sun. *Journal Research on Peace Gender and Development (JRP GD)*, 4(6), 111-120. <https://doi.org/10.14303/jrpgd.2014.041>
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. (1972). *Homecoming*. London, Heinemann.
- Oloruntoba-Oju, T. (2009). Language and Gender Performatives in the Nigerian Context. Citation and De-citation in Yoruba and "Nollywood" Films in Language, Gender and Politics. In O. Akin et al. (Eds.), *A Festschrift for Yisa Kehinde Yusuf*. Concept Publications Press, Lagos, Nigeria.
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A Resource book for students*. London and New York Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203496589>
- Tsaaior, J. T. (2009). Language, Gender and Politics. In Odebunmi et al. (Eds.), *A Festschrift for Yisa Kehinde Yusuf*. Lagos, Nigeria, Concept Publications Press.
- Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical Theory Today*. London, Routledge.

- Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. Deborah, S. Deborah, & H. Heidi (Eds.), *Handbook of Critical Discourse Analysis*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118584194.ch22>
- Werber, M. (2007). *Power (Sociology) Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia* (electronic).