

**KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

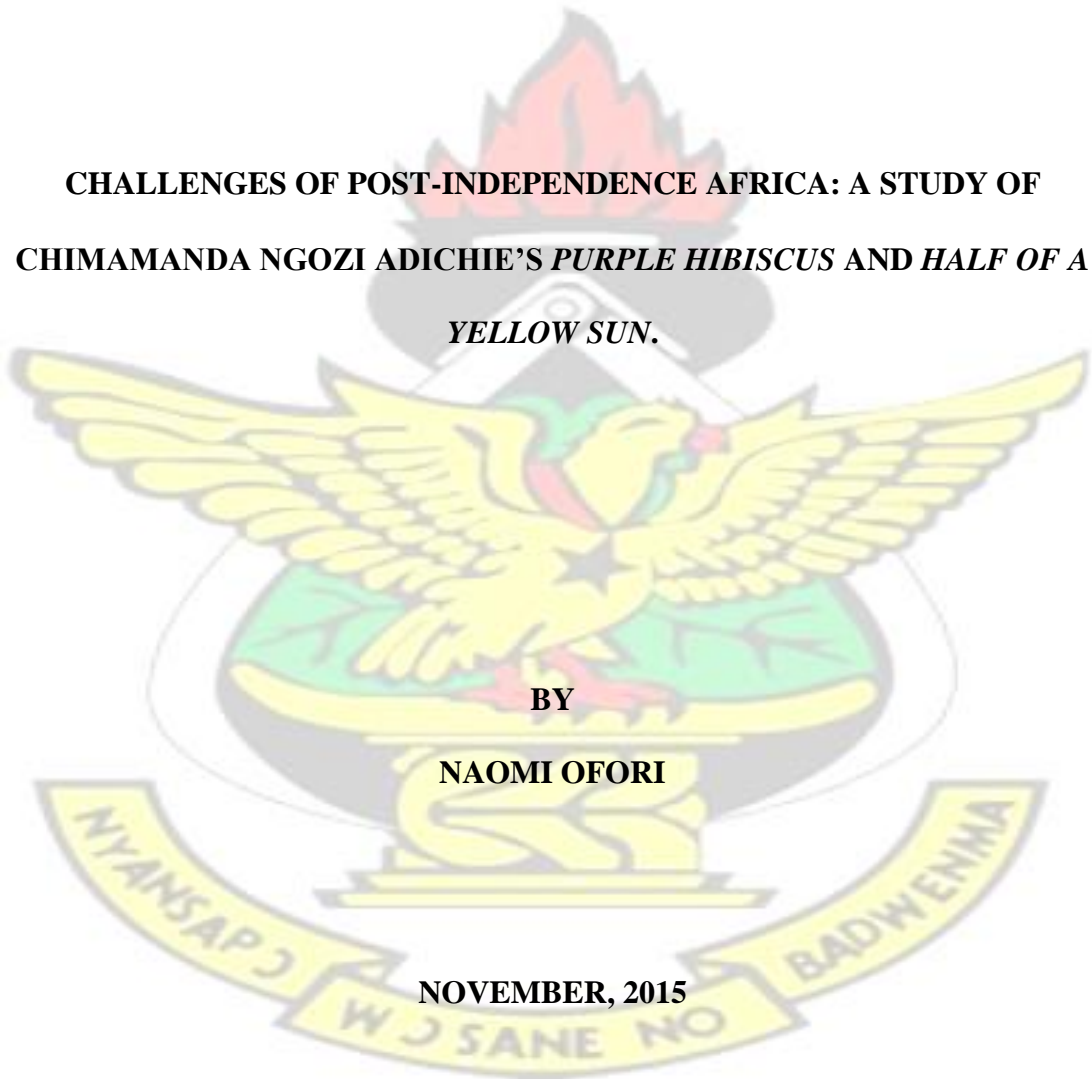
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**CHALLENGES OF POST-INDEPENDENCE AFRICA: A STUDY OF  
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS* AND *HALF OF A  
YELLOW SUN*.**

**BY**

**NAOMI OFORI**

**NOVEMBER, 2015**



# KNUST



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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, KWAME  
NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD  
OF THE DEGREE OF**

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**NOVEMBER, 2015**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the M. Phil and that to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material accepted for the award of a degree by any university except where due acknowledgement has been made.

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## ABSTRACT

Many literary artists have written about Africa's troubled past and present. This research analyses the causes, the course and effects of the many political upheavals in Nigeria. The project studies mainly the many coups and counter coups and the devastating civil war fought in Nigeria in the late sixties as presented by Chimamanda Adichie in her novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The study also examines Adichie's presentation of the nature and effects of military rule in *Purple Hibiscus*. Using the post-colonial and the new historicist theories, the study shows that the main cause of the Nigerian and therefore African upheavals is the deliberate divisive tactic of the colonialists to play one ethnic group against the other. The other reason the study discusses is poor leadership.

The research concludes by making some recommendations to Nigeria and Africa to prevent wars, coup d'états and military regimes. The study suggests that leadership must be improved to give all ethnic groups equal chances to access the economic potential of the country.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to God for giving me the strength and grace to complete this work successfully.

I would also like to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. John Aning for accepting to supervise this work. I am very grateful to him for his patience and direction and also for making me know that he believes I will get it right because “we are in trouble together.”

My heartfelt appreciation also goes to all my lecturers who took me through various courses in the M. Phil programme, especially Dr. (Mrs.) Dadson who always told me, “You can write better than this.” I hope this work meets her expectations. My special thanks go to my parents and my entire family for the immeasurable support they have given me throughout this course. I also thank all loved ones who in diverse ways have been instrumental to the success of this work especially my very good friend, Mrs. Tenkoranmah Oblithey Commey, who has proven to be very dependable.

## **DEDICATION**

To Mr. Augustine Ofori, my husband, the man whose love and encouragement urged me on,

I dedicate this work.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

During the colonial period, the African continent suffered a great deal of subjugation and humiliation at the hands of the colonial masters. In the quest for independence, several African writers spoke strongly against colonial rule and the associated maltreatment of Africans. The fierce struggle for independence that swept through the African continent was as a result of this cruel treatment meted out to Africans by the various colonial masters. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Agostinho Neto of Angola, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, among others who led the independence struggles in Africa, were united by one common fact, that the Blackman is capable of managing his own affairs. All these leaders were of the view that if an African was in charge of the governance of his country, he would be in a better position to improve the living standards of his people and bring development to his country. The unrelenting quest of most Africans for self-governance finally began to yield results. Eventually, the wind of independence swept through Africa with Ghana leading the way as early as 1957, and South Africa becoming truly independent as late as 1994.

With self-governance finally attained, many Africans earnestly looked forward to high standards of living, improvement in infrastructure of their countries, good governance, democracy which ensures the respect of the fundamental human rights of citizens, among others. Unfortunately, the hopes of many Africans have been dashed as successive governments have failed to better their living conditions and have rather ended up perpetrating worse discrimination and exploitation, abuse and killings than

even the colonial masters. Most countries in Africa after several decades of independence still belong to the ‘third world’ or ‘developing countries’ group.

Commenting on the appalling state of Africa’s development Abutudu posits that:

Africa is a continent in crisis. Manifested economically, socially and politically, this crisis is multidimensional and has deepseated historical roots. If current events have a bearing on the future, and indeed, necessarily condition and shape it, there may be little cause for cheers about the prospect for the future in the next few decades or so. (19)

This statement presents a terrible picture of Africa. Many critics believe that the state of affairs on the continent is attributable to “all the past African dictators and governments that have committed atrocities against their own people – and waged seemingly endless wars and exhibited poor judgment in leading their countries.”

(Johnson 65).

The non-performance of the elected governments precipitates several problems, one of which is military takeovers. For some military men, the failure of the constitutionally elected government is enough reason for them to stage a coup. To these military men, a coup is a means of ‘cleaning-up’ the system of the corruption of the civilian governments and to make life easier for the ordinary citizen. Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings, who was the leader of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council which seized power in Ghana on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1979, is quoted to have said, “I do not know Economics, neither do I know Law, but I know how it feels to go on an empty stomach.” (Free Press 1)

However, these military regimes end up perpetrating the very offences they speak against, with human rights abuses soaring high.

Another problem that poor leadership creates is armed conflicts. There have been several cases of civil wars in some African countries. Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Uganda and Nigeria are among the African countries that have experienced civil wars. These armed conflicts that occur affect the peace and progress of the respective countries.

Many insightful critics have theorized about Africa's post-independence failures. As early as 1962, two esteemed writers, Frantz Fanon and Rene Dumont, warned the freedom fighters of Africa about the new form of colonialism that may go on after attainment of independence. In *The Wretched of the Earth* and *False Start in Africa*, Fanon and Dumont expressed the fear that:

the anti – colonialist revolution would be undermined by a national bourgeoisies which would assume the mantle of the colonisers...corrupt governing classes exploiting the poverty-stricken masses; political instability and pronunciamientos of military juntas and the dominant influence of foreign capital. (Wauthier 289-290)

People like Fanon and Dumont foresaw that post-independence Africa will be confronted with leaders whose corrupt practices will result in a politically unstable continent with a series of coups. They also foresaw that these corrupt leaders' continuous reliance on the colonial masters for financial support will subject the

continent to external manipulation. This situation will undermine the independence and development of the continent. Claud Ake also has this to say:

Three decades of preoccupation with development in Africa have yielded meagre returns. African economies have been stagnating or regressing. For most Africans, real incomes are lower than they were two decades ago, health prospects are poorer, malnourishment is widespread and infrastructure is breaking down, as are some social institutions... However, the assumption so readily made that there has been a failure of development is misleading. The problem is not so much that development has failed as that it was never really on the agenda in the first place. By all indications, political conditions in Africa are the greatest impediments to development. (1)

For Ake, African leaders who are supposed to steer the development of the continent seem not to have development as part of their goals. Chido Makunike, a Zimbabwean critic also blames African leaders for the underdevelopment of Africa. He says of African leaders, "...threatening, beating, jailing and impoverishing people they may be proven masters at, but deliberately planned nation-building does not appear to be their strong point." (3) Chinua Achebe also emphasizes the role of leadership in the challenges confronting particularly Nigeria. He says

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise up to the responsibility, to the challenge of



personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership. (1)

After some decades, he still feels disappointed at the state of affairs in Nigeria when at a homecoming in 2009 after ten years absence from Nigeria, he says:

I had expected that by now we should be a medium sized nation. I have been unhappy about the condition in which we are for a long time. I grew up with the nationalist movement and I know how eager we were, how passionate we felt, how great it was to be in this movement that would liberate us after centuries of denigration and deprivation; and to grow up with those hopes and find at the end of the day that you can't really put your finger on anything and say, this is the result of freedom."

(Luther 42)

It can be seen that people like Ake, Achebe, Makunike, among others put the cause of the present underdeveloped state of Africa at the doorstep of leadership. However, there are others like Ayi Kwei Armah who think that apart from the failure of leadership, bad systems and structures inherited from our colonial masters also account for the failure of the continent. He sees the inherited systems as being at the "root of our current structural and identity problems." He says that it is "too sad that the structures so hastily embraced were not just non-African, but actually anti-African models." (Armah 238) All the above quotations point to the fact that the African continent has not got much to show for the many decades of independence. This situation according to some critics is due to bad leadership while others think it emanates from bad systems and structures inherited at independence.

African writers in their writings focus on the various challenges that confront present day Africa. The challenges of armed conflicts and brutal military takeovers and regimes have attracted a lot of literary attention. Several African writers have written works on these two major problems. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a young African writer who has combined beautifully the causes of coups, civil wars and their devastating effects on Nigeria in her novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Many Nigerian writers have written on the Nigerian Civil War and military rule in Nigeria. The focus of this research is to examine in terms of literary techniques how differently Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* presents the factors that caused the civil war and coup d'états in Nigeria as well as their negative effects.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

As part of the objectives of this study, the research seeks to establish through a literary examination of *Half of a Yellow Sun* that colonialism played a significant contributory role to the Nigerian civil war and that the civil war had devastating effects.

The study also seeks to establish through a literary assessment of *Purple Hibiscus* that there are various forms of dictatorships in the society and these dictatorships are unhelpful for the development of the individual and the nation.



## JUSTIFICATION

Various literary works have examined the Nigerian Civil War and military rule in Nigeria from diverse perspectives. For Adichie, the issues that led to the war are still unresolved. The novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* offer, especially the youth, an opportunity to examine Nigeria's history with respect to the civil war and the military takeovers in order that they will be able to effect the much needed change in Nigeria.

It is therefore hoped that this study would aid the literary appreciation and understanding of the causes and effects of the Nigerian civil war. It is further hoped that the study would reveal the various forms of dictatorship that exists in society and its effects on people.

The case of Nigeria in the two novels has implications for Ghana because there have been several examples of ethnic rivalries in the country which in recent times have resulted in serious conflicts in certain parts of the country. Also Ghana has experienced quite a number of military takeovers for which poor leadership was cited. Adichie's novels are, thus, a great source of reflection for Ghana.

## METHODOLOGY

The research is a library study using *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* as primary sources. The study will use secondary materials that focus on what literary critics have written about Nigerian and African disillusionment. Also, materials from both the print and electronic media that relate to Africa's post-independence challenges

will also be used when necessary. Postcolonial literary theory and New Historicism are the theories that will be used in the practical reading of the two texts.

## **STRUCTURE OF STUDY**

The work will be divided into four main chapters. In the Introduction, I will look at the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, justification of the study, methodology, review of related literature and the theoretical framework.

Chapter One deals with the writer's presentation of the causes of the Nigerian civil war and the devastating effects of the war in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Chapter Two is a discussion of military rule and the impact of tyranny on individuals and on the development of the nation in *Purple Hibiscus*.

The conclusion highlights the fact that Adichie's peculiar style is very effective in the discussion of the subjects of the Nigerian Civil War and military rule in Nigeria. Some recommendations are also given on how to prevent armed conflicts and military regimes in Africa.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The numerous armed conflicts as well as the dictatorships on the African continent have attracted a lot of attention. The Nigerian Civil War, for example, has been the focus of many literary works for some time now. Each writer looks at the war from his or her own perspective.

One of the angles from which literary works discuss the Nigerian Civil War is by looking at the factors that resulted in that unfortunate situation. Abioseh Porter in his reading of Buchi Emechata's *Destination Biafra* agrees with the novelist's presentation of the contributory factors to the war when he posits that the British ensured a Nigerian leadership under "the feudalistic, politically naïve and less radical Hausas." He adds that "it was assumed by the British authorities that if they could get the more ambitious and more radical Igbos and Yorubas out of real political control (at least at the Federal level) British economic interests would be safeguarded." (Porter 315) Grace Okereke also lauds Emechata for highlighting the causative factors of the war. She says, "Emechata systematically weaves in the sub themes that build up to the major theme of war-the corrupt Nigerian politics and colonialism." (146) What Porter and Okereke say shows that British influence and corrupt politics are presented as some of the reasons that occasioned the Nigerian Civil War.

Another aspect of the war that has preoccupied the attention of writers is the predicament faced by women during the civil war. One critic, commenting on the eponymous story of Achebe's collection, *Girls at War and Other Stories* says that *Girls at War* displays "one of [Achebe's] major themes; the moral predicament of the Nigerian womenfolk in the war situation." (Amuta 89) Ben Okri's *Dangerous Love* and Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* also delineate the vulnerability of women during the Biafran War. Armstrong commenting on the two novels reveals that the death of Ifeiyiwa and the rape of Ndudi by the soldiers are tragedies that the protagonists of the two respective novels are unable to represent adequately. The difficulty in articulation, according to him, is significant of the horrors faced by women in the war. (182)

Apart from the vulnerability of women depicted in war novels, some literary works specifically assess the effects of the Nigerian Civil War on the family unit. Ofoegbu's *Blow the Fire* for instance projects the disruption of the family unit and the struggles that women go through to cater for the many people brought into the family as a result of the war. Ugochukwu observes that the novel "provides a unique insight into the plight of displaced populations, especially on the family unit: the couple and children-their own and the many they fostered and cared for throughout the conflict." (p.238)

Another aspect of the war that has taken the fore-front in novels is the exploitation of the masses by the ruling class in the course of the war. Okpewho's *The Last Duty* for instance explores the greed and opportunism of the Biafran leadership. According to Amuzu, *The Last Duty* is

an account of the way in which an individual(Toje) seizes upon the opportunities the war has created for evil, and by using his social position, influence and money, turns the virtues of innocent individuals into evil tools with which he subverts the moral foundations of his society and threatens its very survival as a human community. (193)

From what Amuzu says, the lower class in society becomes the ultimate victims of the war. Iyayi's *Heroes* also criticizes the exploitation by the ruling class as it presents the war as that of the elite-army generals, politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen among others for national resources. This is found in the statement of the protagonist of the novel, Osime Iyere who says, "This is an investment in blood and destruction by those at the helm of affairs with the expectation of profit." (*Heroes* p.64) This statement of the protagonist vindicates the stance of the critic,



Adebayo who says that *Heroes* is an attempt to criticize “the ruling class of its insatiable monetary appetite and lusts for power.” (36) Iniobong Uko adds her voice to the criticism of the Biafran leadership. In her reading of some selected short stories on the war, she bemoans the ‘insanity’ that characterized the war. For her, the Biafran leadership deserves rebuke for fighting a war it was ill-prepared for. (49) She asserts that

Apparently, young boys were forced to serve in the Biafran army. They had no training, or uniforms and adequate food and arms. Malnourished and poorly armed, often abandoned by their senior officers and commanders, the soldiers become frustrated, disillusioned and desperate. (55)

Uko’s assertion here questions the essence of abusing children in the name of war. Apart from criticizing the Biafran leadership, some war novels also question the needless killings of innocent people. Chidi Amuta commenting on Chukwuemeka Ike’s *Sunset at Dawn* criticizes the Biafran leadership as well as the federal soldiers for the needless killing of innocent people. He says that Ike

writes out of a familiarity with the mechanisms of Biafra society....Just as (he) castigates the heartless strafing of defenceless civilian populations, he highlights the senseless naivety of a people who sought to confront the vilest monstrosities of modern warfare with bare hands and machetes. (Amuta 95)

One can therefore conclude that there was failure of leadership on the part of the two parties that engaged in the conflict.

Ultimately, every novel on the Nigerian Civil War does not fail to depict it as an unfortunate occurrence that destroyed the lives of individuals, families, communities and the nation. For instance, Ogunpitan commenting on Ken Saro Wiwa's *Sozaboy* has this to say:

There is no doubt that the novel embodies the profound essence of the Nigerian Civil War. It reveals the tragedy to us in a refreshing way, first as a personal tragedy of an innocent victim, and second, as a national tragedy involving everyone in the society. The futility of the war is revealed in a very personal way. The author concentrates on the down-trodden, the class of people on which the war and any war for that matter has its most devastating effects... The narrative captures the shock, confusion and dehumanization that the war produces in the young, the helpless and defenceless populations. (22)

From all indications, numerous literary works from different angles have examined the Nigerian Civil War. The issues raised in these novels include the causal factors of the war, the exploitation and lack of truthfulness of the Biafran leadership, the killing of innocent people, the suffering of women and the family unit, the use of child soldiers, among others. Many of the war novels were written a few years after the war ended. Adichie chooses to write several decades later about the war in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, not because there has not been enough literary discussion on the topic, but rather because she feels a re-examination of the subject is very relevant to present day Nigeria. By this novel, she seeks to get Nigerians in particular and Africans in general to examine their past and its implications for the present and future. Adichie herself



attests to this fact when in an interview with BBC's Molar Wood in July 2007 she says:

Biafra is a subject that we are not honest about, don't talk about. We should be asking WHY the war remains a sore subject...What I hope this book will do in Nigeria is get us to examine our history and ask questions. I hope that my generation of Nigerians in particular will talk about this period.

Though she brings her peculiar style and perspective to bear on the subject, her novel on the whole, like those of some earlier writers, "seems to suggest that war time experiences have a profound and transformational effect." (Nwajaku 48)

In bringing up the issue of the Nigerian Civil War, Adichie brings her peculiar style and perspective to bear on the subject. According to many critics, she excels more than the earlier writers on the civil war. Her excellence is greatly due to the fact that she approaches the subject with a conscious fidelity to her artistic mission. This is what most writers on the civil war failed to do. Chinua Achebe for instance, is criticized for his show of attachment in his creative writings on the civil war. Ogungbesan states that although Achebe has "minutely recapitulated the ugly facts of life in Biafra during and immediately after the war," he however "shows a closeness of observation and intense emotional involvement in the situation." (51)

It is not only Achebe who is trapped in this emotional involvement. Flora Nwapa is also one writer who failed to overcome her attachment. Commenting on her novel, *Never Again*, one critic posits that:

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What is lacking in the novel is the fine toothbrush and smooth comb of a skilled artist who can distance herself objectively from her subject matter. There is absence of cohesion in the internal relationships that hold the various parts of the story together. The author's voice is emotionally uncontrolled and jarring in its pedestrian excursions into trivia.....The author is unable to lift it .....to the realm of solemn imaginative narrative..... (Emeyonu 96)

Emeyonu, concluding his critique of some selected Nigerian war novels has this to say:

Without exception, they have all written about the Biafran war not entirely as impartial observers or objective artists. They have instead, written passionately as authors who were committed to a political cause at a point in time with their people...where the commitment in political terms overwhelms the artistic vision....the writer comes out with less than his artistic best....The Nigerian writers on the war must allow a reasonable period to lapse before they can objectively write about the war, no longer as active combatants in the conflict, but as writers who bring their imaginative vision to bear on the important events in the history of their people. Such works are more

likely to be more aesthetically pleasing.... The great Nigerian war novel is yet to be written. (104)

With the arrival of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the great Nigerian war novel has been written. The novel has received a lot of acclaim for the writer's ability to bring her imaginative focus to bear on this important event in Nigeria's history. Some critics believe that, "Adichie's success in part, likely stems from her distance from the event in time, having been born seven years after the end of the war." (Umelo 4)

Adichie, being born after the war, allows her the distance that Emeyonu advocates. She takes on the Nigerian civil war with a reduced political and emotional attachment. In the words of Bryce, "Adichie is the first to approach it entirely as historical fiction" and in doing so she "treats the civil war head on" (58) Another critic commenting on the success of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, compared to earlier Nigerian war novels says, "the absence of a judgemental stance or apportioning blames is part of the greatness of this novel." (Nnolim 149) Umelo also has this to say about the novel:

When one considers the preponderance of works on the subject of Nigerian Civil War, it is surprising to see a novel that probes this over trodden path with deft freshness, and that is a compelling read.... She is able to handle the historical truths of the brutalities and effects of the war without squeamishness or overt melodrama. (4)

Again, Adichie in her novel is able to touch on a wide range of issues and the various Biafran experiences. Issues that some earlier writers were silent on, she vocalizes.

This is the point Ugochukwu makes when he says about the novel that:

The style goes to great lengths to show how the conflict exacerbates feelings, thus contributing to voice what the other writers had kept under their breath. (241)

Evidently, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is an incredible Nigerian war novel that deals sufficiently with the issue. More importantly, it continues the discussion of the Nigerian Civil War. This continuous discussion is important because as Iroh puts it, “to stop writing about Biafra would be to stop writing about the history of the nation. You can never write enough about the tragic thing called war.” (Ugochukwu 252) The importance of the ongoing discourse on the war, according to some critics, lies in its therapeutic function. To these critics, it is “only if traumas are remembered can they lose, gradually but never entirely, their traumatic effects.” (Berger 415)

Adichie’s peculiar style is very effective in the delineation of the civil war experience.

On the nature of military rule in Nigeria, a number of literary works have been written. The writers generally look at the military’s reason for intervening in politics, its susceptibility to corruption, its brutalities and excesses and the nature of life under a military regime.

Most of the time, corruption is given as one of the reasons for which military men oust democratically elected governments are ousted by military men. Some novels on military rule, however, present military regimes as equally, if not more corrupt than civilian governments. MSC Okolo, for instance, says that Achebe’s “*Anthills* shows that the military is equally, if not more susceptible to the corrupt influence of politics and the intoxicating effects of power.” (42)



Generally, the main issues that take the centre stage in the discussion of military rule are the life of terror and deprivation that majority of people are faced with during military regimes. Undoubtedly, the experience that the general populace goes through has an enduring effect on them. Adekoya agrees with this fact when in his reading of Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* he asserts that the play is "a caustic satire on despotism and abuse of power and a lasting testament of the horror of the wound inflicted on Africa by foreign and local power psychopaths." (29) Although presently the four despots presented in the play are no longer in office, the ravages of their misrule are still felt in their respective countries. Also with the recent coups that have taken place on the continent, the play becomes of immediate socio-political relevance to Africa.

Indeed, military regimes plunge nations into a life of terror and deprivation. One critic lauds Tolofari for his presentation of this fact in his novel *The Black Minister*. He says that the novel "reflects the trajectory of Nigeria's postcolonial history as the country hops from one military rule to another...Specifically, the novel is the author's critical response to Babangida's eight years in office." (Gbemisola 34) Also, Akingbe commenting on Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* appreciates the terror and low standard of living that citizens are faced with during military rule as he says:

The portraiture of the military in *Waiting for an Angel* is foregrounded in a semiotic of deprivation and destruction. This can be seen in the deprivation of the downtrodden masses on Poverty Street, the urban debris of Lagos with its squalid slums, its suppurating sewers, its huge craters on the road and the mountain of filth and dirt of Egunje Road. Rot and dilapidation demarcate the landscapes of Nigeria during Abacha's reign of terror. (28)

Generally, the military regimes of Babangida and Abacha seem to attract a lot of criticism in literary works. Habila in his afterword to the novel says about this period:

It was a terrible time to be alive.  
Most intellectuals had only three  
options: exile, complicity or dissent.  
Needless to say, there was more of  
the first two than the last....nobody  
has a right to impose himself over  
others in this way. It is morally  
wrong. (*Waiting for an Angel* p.228)

A lot of literary works have examined the nature of life in Nigeria under military rule. When Adichie writes about it at the turn of the century, she does so because the subject of military rule is still relevant to Nigeria and indeed the rest of the continent. Her narrative style however brings some freshness to the discussion of the subject.

Dawes says about her narrative technique that she “tells her story with something akin to the psychological disinterest of a deeply traumatized person who has cultivated the skill to seem calm as a way of holding back the emotional collapse that appears on the verge of consuming her.”(84) Probably Adichie uses this technique as a way of projecting the extent of trauma that the brutalities and excesses of dictatorships create.

A lot of critics have lauded Adichie’s style in the presentation of the issue of dictatorship. Oha has this to say about the novel:

In *Purple Hibiscus*, there is a critical presentation of the oddities in Nigeria as well as Africa in general, as the continent trudges in the biting tyrannical trauma of the military and anarchical leaderships.  
(199)



Among other devices, Adichie's narrative technique distinguishes her novel from others that have handled this same issue. One critic has this to say about the novel, "...one of *Purple Hibiscus*' most compelling features lies in its nuanced treatment of the notions of freedom and tyranny." (Tunca 134) The writer's style is able to emphasise the various forms of tyranny that exists in the society since it deals with both dictatorship and oppression on the domestic as well as the national scene. Jane Bryce confirms this when she says that: *Purple Hibiscus* takes the form of a Bildungsroman set in a society in which attitudes have hardened, where violence that was external has become entrenched in the family. (58)

Adichie's way of highlighting national issues as well as domestic ones underscores the need to address the malice of abuse. It also underscores the need for the literary artist to bring variation in the discussion of the topic. One critic makes this same point when he says: .....Having told this tale in various forms, the need to get truly out of the 'scenes' and tell a true tale of the true situation prompted the emergence of Kambili. She is a new voice crying out to be heard because of the torture and anguish in the impediment of governance and civilization around her. (Oha 200)

What therefore distinguishes Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* from other novels on the issue of tyrannical leadership and bad governance is the novelist's ability to merge the domestic with the national and also the first person narrative technique used. The distinctive success of *Purple Hibiscus* is summarized thus:

Adichie achieves a striking success in creating a sensitive character in Kambili; she neatly tucks away sensationalism that the other 'new

writers' would have flooded their works with; she depersonalizes herself from the work thus lifting her work from the slump of personal social commentary as most of our novels are. (Oha 235)

In conclusion, it can be said that the two texts selected for this study deal with issues that have been discussed by earlier writers. What makes the two texts worthy of critical literary attention lies in the fact that, on the civil war for instance, almost all the literary works were written within the first two decades after the end of the war by writers who in one way or the other experienced the war firsthand. It is interesting to analyse how Adichie approaches the war entirely as historical fiction. There is the need for a critical assessment on the extent that the novelist succeeds in the recreation and interpretation of the causes and effects of the civil war. Also, on the subject of the nature and effects of military rule, the success of Adichie's approach of examining the issue without direct focus on the national scene also deserves critical attention.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

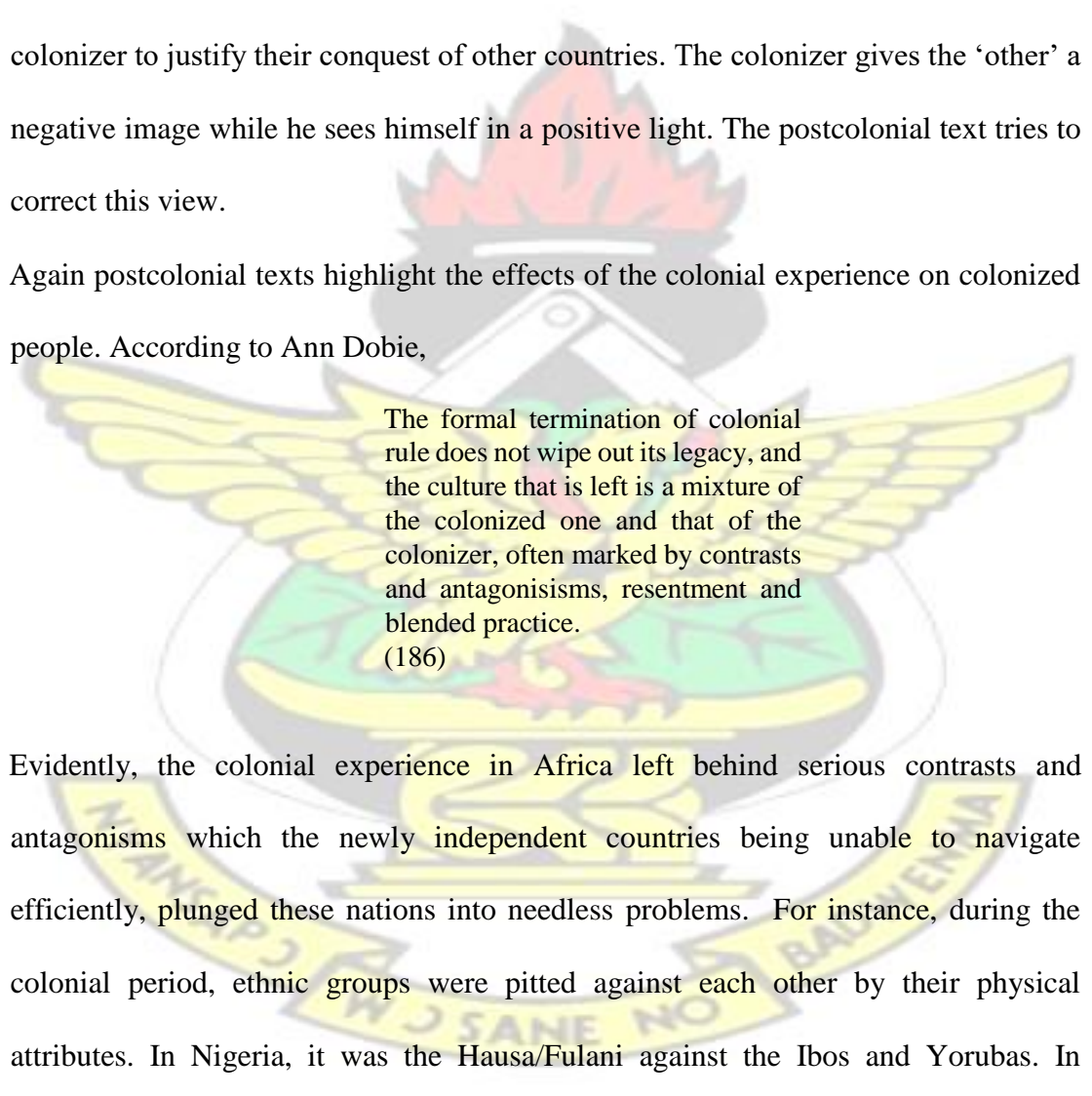
The novels under consideration would be analysed using the Postcolonial Literary Theory and New Historicism.

Postcolonial theory offers a unique way of looking at texts written in countries that were under colonial domination. Postcolonial texts are literary works that depict what exists and happens during and after colonial rule. During colonialism, colonized countries suffer untold hardships at the hands of the colonizer. By the end of colonial rule, colonized people are robbed of their valuable resources. They are also faced with an identity crisis due to the mixture of their indigenous culture with that of the colonizer. Apart from these, the colonized are faced with the major challenge of picking up the bits and pieces of the pre-colonial past and forging ahead. It is these and

many more experiences that are depicted in postcolonial literary texts and which postcolonial literary criticism enables readers to appreciate.

Among the major concerns of postcolonial writers is their quest to portray indigenous African culture and debunk misconceptions about their culture. For instance, Edward Said, a major contributor to this theory in his text *Orientalism* draws attention to the stereotyping of people in colonized countries by Britain and other countries who belong to the 'first world.' This stereotyping according to Said, makes it easy for the colonizer to justify their conquest of other countries. The colonizer gives the 'other' a negative image while he sees himself in a positive light. The postcolonial text tries to correct this view.

Again postcolonial texts highlight the effects of the colonial experience on colonized people. According to Ann Dobie,



The formal termination of colonial rule does not wipe out its legacy, and the culture that is left is a mixture of the colonized one and that of the colonizer, often marked by contrasts and antagonisms, resentment and blended practice.  
(186)

Evidently, the colonial experience in Africa left behind serious contrasts and antagonisms which the newly independent countries being unable to navigate efficiently, plunged these nations into needless problems. For instance, during the colonial period, ethnic groups were pitted against each other by their physical attributes. In Nigeria, it was the Hausa/Fulani against the Ibos and Yorubas. In Rwanda, the Tutsis were pitted against the Hutus while the Arabs in Sudan were preferred over the blacks. Since postcolonial texts focus on the description and interrogation of the post-independent problems in Africa, the study will highlight how

the novelist concerns herself with the colonial influences that resulted in the Nigerian Civil War and also her description and interrogation of the subject of dictatorship and its effects on people.

New historicism is another theory that will be used to analyze the texts. New historicists break down the traditional opposition between literature and history. They suggest that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of the history of the author. Thus, the new historicist looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times. This study therefore would emphasise how the writer's times is affected and reflected in the two novels selected for the study.





## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PRESENTATION OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR IN *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN*

Sometimes history plays a significant role in the creation of literary works. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is an example of a literary work that combines history with imaginative writing. The novel fits into new historicist school of thought that broke down the traditional boundary between literature and history. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a historical novel in which Adichie presents the civil war that took place in Nigeria between July 1967 and January 1970 by combining the historical facts with imaginative writing. As is typical of historical novels, the setting of *Half of a Yellow Sun* is real; it is drawn from history and contains both real and fictional characters. The setting of the novel in the sixties corresponds with the time the civil war took place in Nigeria. Also locations like Nsukka, Lagos and Kano found in the novel played significant roles in the events leading to the war. However, in the novel these places are significant because of the characters and events that take place there.

With regard to characters, while the principal characters are fictional, there are other characters like Majaor Nzeogwu, Prime Minister Balewa, Ojukwu, Gowon who are actual 'historical' persons. Also, the character Okoema is modeled after the poet Christopher Okigbo. All these characters lend a sense of historical realism to the novel. Also the writer's use of *The Book* within the novel provides the historical antecedents of the Nigerian Civil War.

The novel has an interesting plot. It captures the lives of two Igbo adult fraternal twins, Kainene and Olanna Ozobia and their partners Richard and Odenigbo. Olanna returns from London and moves to Nsukka to join her Igbo fiancé, Odenigbo, a lecturer who already lives with a houseboy, Ugwu. Kainene settles in Port Harcourt to take care of her father's businesses there. Her fiancé, Richard joins Odenigbo and Olanna at the University of Nsukka. The January coup occurs, shortly followed by the second coup. Olanna is in Kano at this time and witnesses the massacre of Igbos that followed the second coup. She escapes and returns to Nsukka. The Eastern Region of Nigeria secedes as a result of the massacre of Igbos in the north. War is declared by the Federal government of Nigeria to bring the secessionist eastern part back to join Nigeria. Nsukka falls so Odenigbo and his family move to Abba and then to Umuahia. Umuahia finally falls and Odenigbo and his family move to join Kainene and Richard who had relocated to Orlu after the fall of Port Harcourt. As a result of severe famine, Kainene decides to go and trade behind enemy lines and does not return. The war finally ends so Odenigbo and his family move back to Nsukka.

All efforts in search of Kainene yield no result and this utterly devastates Olanna.

This chapter examines how the writer through the use of various literary techniques is able to present the causes, the course and the devastating effects the Nigerian Civil War in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The writer uses a variety of devices which include setting, characterization, the plot structure of the novel, among others.

The causes of the Nigerian Civil War as presented by Chimamanda in her novel are varied and include the colonial angle, the ethnic problem and the horrendous massacre of the Igbos in Northern Nigeria which resulted in the secession of the eastern region



of Nigeria. The secession leads to war as a 'police action' is resorted to as a means of bringing secessionist Biafra back to join Nigeria.

The novelist presents how colonialism remotely contributed to the war through the main narrative as well as a parallel narrative called 'The Book'. According to the writer, the political system put in place in Nigeria by the British contributed to the events leading to the war. In the main narrative, the colonial factor is revealed through dialogues between some characters and particularly, through the couple Odenigbo and Olanna's intellectual salon. Colonel Madu gives an account of how the British ensured that non-qualified northerners were put in leadership positions in the military ahead of qualified southerners. Madu explains to Kainene:

The problem was the ethnic balance policy. I was part of the commission that told our GOC that we should scrap it, that it was polarizing the army, that they should stop promoting northerners who were not qualified. But our GOC said no, our *British* GOC. (p.141)

Richard, Kainene's fiancé, writes about the massacres and also states Britain's role in the antagonism between the tribes of the north and south. He says:

...If this [the massacres] is hatred, then it is very young. It has been caused, simply, by the informal divide – and rule policy of the British colonial exercise. These policies manipulated the differences between the tribes and ensured that unity would not exist, thereby making the easy governance of such a large country practicable. (pp.166-167)

Madu and Richard's statements quoted above demonstrate how the British colonial exercise created ethnic rivalry among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The British set the stage for entrenched ethnic rivalries which in the end lead to the war. Basil Davidson, the historian, explaining the chaotic Nigerian political situation leading to the war says, "...the means and methods left behind by the colonial government had encouraged regional rivalries, and personal ambitions to the point where everything was in confusion." (201) evidently, the British colonial powers set the stage for a polarized country and made regional antagonism inevitable. Again in the main narrative, the colonial angle is revealed through the evening conversations of the couple Odenigbo and Olanna and their friends who are all lecturers at the university in Nsukka. In response to the allegation that the BBC is calling the first coup as an Igbo coup, Professor Ezeka responds, "It was mostly Northerners who were in government." Odenigbo adds, "The BBC should be asking their people who put the Northerners in government to dominate everybody." (p.125) Odenigbo's statement intimates how the British colonial exercise put governance in the hands of the Northerners. These revelations in the main narrative are re-enforced by the parallel narrative device, 'The Book.' Through this book within the novel, the writer emphasizes the fact that the systems and structures put in place in Nigeria by the British colonial government encouraged ethnic rivalries. The book explains:

The British preferred the North. The heat there was pleasantly dry; the Hausa – Fulani were narrow featured and therefore superior to the negroid Southerner, Muslim and therefore as civilised as one could get for natives, feudal and therefore perfect for indirect rule.  
(p.115)

This quotation gives three reasons why the British colonial power preferred the North of Nigeria to the South. These are the weather, the physical appearance of the Northerners and their political and religious orientation. The climate of the North was favourable to the British. It was dry unlike the South which was humid and mosquito-infested. The Northerners had narrow features – fair complexion, pointed noses, thin lips so were preferred to the negroid Southerners. The feudal system of the North whereby specific people wielded so much power favoured the indirect rule system of the British, unlike the Southerners, especially the Igbo who were independent minded in their republican communities. The Islamic religion in the north was kept intact while in the South, “Missionaries were allowed in to tame the pagans, and the Christianity and education they brought flourished.” (p.115) At independence, the British eager to keep together both the north and south, put in place a system that favoured the populous north. The writer explains:

To propitiate the North, they [the British] fixed the pre – independence elections in favour of the north and wrote a new constitution which gave the North control of the central government.

The south, too eager for independence, accepted this constitution...Nothing was done about the clamour of the minority groups, and the regions were already competing so fiercely...At independence in 1960, Nigeria was a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp. (p.155)

In the creation of Nigeria, the British colonialists deliberately placed the Muslim north ahead of the Christian south which was more endowed in terms of education. This arrangement was to be the cause of many problems to come. As Moyibi puts it, “Like

all African countries, Nigeria was an artificial structure initiated by the British which had neglected to consider religious, linguistic and ethnic differences.” (19)

Clearly, the people of northern and southern Nigeria in spite of their differences

“were bunched together by the British who named [them] Nigeria.”(Moyibi19)

Obiechina captures Britain’s role in the ethnic tensions in Nigeria as he says:

When the British colonizing power decided to yoke together several ethnic nationalities with very little in common – culturally, socially and religiously – to create the country they named ‘Nigeria’ they had set up a structure that at the best of times would require the genius of political craftsmanship to weld into nation. (Obiechina 530)

The writer clearly demonstrates that Britain’s creation of Nigeria was flawed in the first place and at the best of times a genius of political craftsmanship was needed to hold the country together. The novel thus qualifies as a postcolonial novel in the way it is able to present effectively how the legacy of the colonial exercise led to the civil war in Nigeria.

In addition to the British contributing to the events leading to the war, Adichie presents how Britain actually helped Nigeria to fight against secessionist Igbos. In the course of the war, Britain supported Nigeria against Biafra. While Biafra was handicapped in terms of arms and ammunition to fight Nigeria, Britain gave Nigeria support. Professor Ekwenugo tells Special Julius, Odenigbo and Olanna with certainty, Britain’s support for Nigeria against Biafra. He tells them, “Definitely Britain. Our boys brought us some Nigerian shell cases from the Nsukka sector for analysis. Every single one had the UK WAR DEPARTMENT on it.” Another person adds, “We keep intercepting British accents on their radio messages too.” (p.199) The British Prime Minister,



Harold Wilson is mentioned on a number of occasions in the novel, alleged to have given arms to Nigerians to kill Biafrans.

The writer again uses 'The Book' to highlight the role Britain played in the course of the war. The writer posits:

The arms and advice that Britain gave Nigeria shaped other countries. In the United States, Biafra was 'under 'Britain's sphere of interest.' In Canada, the prime Minister quipped, 'Where is Biafra?'... The French sold some arms but did not give the recognition that Biafra most needed. And many Black African countries feared that an independent Biafra would trigger other secessions and so supported Nigeria. (p.258)

Britain supported Nigeria against Biafra and this influenced the posture of other countries to the plight of Biafra. In Africa Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast and Gabon were the only countries that recognised Biafra. This posture of many of the world leaders to the suffering of Biafrans make significant the writers title of The Book:

**The World Was Silent When We Died.** This title given to 'The Book' captures the helplessness of Biafra in the war situation.

The novelist goes on further to show how the northerners in control of the central government and other key positions (courtesy the British colonial system) run the affairs of the country to occasion the January 1966 coup. It is through the evening conversations of Odenigbo and his friends that the unstable nature of the Nigerian political landscape is revealed. On one occasion, Odenigbo brings up the issue of the bad treatment meted out by the Prime Minister, Balewa, to the Tiv people. Odenigbo tells his friends:

Nobody is saying that burning government property is a good thing, but to send the army in to kill in the name of order? There are the Tiv people lying dead for nothing. For nothing! Balewa has lost his mind! (p.91)

When agitations come from the labour front, Balewa and the people at the helm of affairs refuse to accept their demands. Odenigbo tells Olanna about his plans to support the labour front. He tells her, “I’ve decided to talk to Dr. Okoro about the Labour Strike. It’s unacceptable that Balewa and his cronies should completely reject their demands. Just unacceptable. We have to show support.” (p.100) Balewa is seen as not handling labour and other national issues properly. With regard to foreign policy, Balewa establishes a defence pact with Britain and then breaks off diplomatic relations with France for testing atomic weapons in Algeria. Odenigbo tells his friends:

It’s quite clear Balewa did it because he wants to take away attention from his defence pact with the British. And he knows that slighting the French will always please his masters the British. He’s their stooge. They put him there, and they tell him what to do, and he does it. (p.110)

When Professor Ezeka explains that Balewa broke off diplomatic relations with France because he wants the North Africans to like him, Odenigbo is surprised. He responds:

... You think he cares much for other Africans? The white man is the only master Balewa knows. Didn't he say that Africans are not ready to rule themselves in

Rhodesia? If the British tell him to call himself a castrated monkey, he will... This defence pact is worse than apartheid and segregation, but we don't realise it. They are controlling us from behind drawn curtains. It is very dangerous!

(p.110)

According to Odenigbo, the defence pact that Balewa establishes with Britain gives the British an opportunity to still exert political control in independent Nigeria. This neo – colonialism is detested by intellectuals like Odenigbo.

Corruption is another reason that is given for the coup. When the coup occurs, one of Odenigbo's friends intimates that the civilian government was corrupt. He says, "This is the end of corruption." (p.125) The narrator also reveals through Ugwu, the corrupt practices engaged in by the people in government. Ugwu thinks these people are not like normal people:

He read about them in the *Renaissance* and *Daily Times*- they paid thugs to beat opponents, they bought land and houses with government money, they imported fleets of long American cars, they paid women to stuff their blouses with false votes and pretend to be pregnant. Whenever he drained a pot of boiled beans, he thought of the slimy sink as a *politician*.

(p.126)

This corruption of politicians, the infamous foreign policy of Balewa in addition to the labour agitations and his mishandling of the Tiv people precipitate the January

1966 coup. One guest in Odenigbo's house says about the coup, "This is what we have needed to happen since that general strike." (p.125) Clearly, the labour agitation which was not handled properly by Prime Minister Balewa is one of the reasons why some people are happy with the coup. Odenigbo and his circle of friends provide significant information about the coup. They are all generally happy with the coup because to them, the people in government were not running the affairs of the country properly. They meet in his house on the day the coup is staged and they express their joy. Okeoma says, "Those majors are true heroes." Okeoma, Professor Ezeka and Odenigbo are all Igbos and they applaud the coup. Miss Adebayo, the only Yoruba amongst Odenigbo's friends also agrees with the staging of the coup. She says, "Those North Africans are crazy to call this an infidel versus righteous thing" (p.125) and Odenigbo laughs approvingly to this. To Miss Adebayo, it is unreasonable for the North Africans to consider the January coup in religious terms; infidels – the Southerners against the righteous-the Northerners who are Muslims. This interaction between Odenigbo and his friends in Nsukka represents the acceptance of the first coup in Igboland by both the Igbo and non-Igbo intelligentsia. The coup is applauded by Igbo and non-Igbo people alike because, as evident through the discourse between Odenigbo and his friends, there is proof of bad governance by the government in power.

Another major contributing factor to the Nigerian Civil War presented by Chimamanda in the novel is tribalism. In the novel, a deep-seated antagonism between Igbos and Hausas is presented. For example, when Olanna, visits her uncle in the north, she passes by the Igbo Union Grammar School and remembers the meeting held in his



uncle's compound years ago during which "irritated men and women talked about the northern schools not admitting Igbo children." (p.38) The

Igbos in the north build their own schools before their children can access education. On another occasion when Olanna asks Arize whether she should find a Hausa man for her as a husband, Arize exclaims, "No, no! Papa would kill me first of all if he knew I was even looking at a Hausa man like that." To this her mother adds, "Unless your father will kill a corpse, because I will start with you first." (p.42) This "double killing" implied by Arize's mother portrays how deep the anti-Hausa sentiment is among the Igbos. Clearly, Arize's parents would not want a Hausa man for a son-inlaw. Mohammed, Olanna's former boyfriend who is a Hausa prince also makes it known that Olanna's parents were against their relationship just as his mother was.

He tells Olanna, "Your parents felt the same way as she did." (p.46) There is therefore an entrenched Igbo-Hausa antagonism.

The Igbo community's attitude upon the death of the Sardauna of Sokoto during the first coup further corroborates the deep-seated nature of the Igbo-Hausa antagonism. The Igbos generally are not saddened by the death of the political and religious leader of the northerners. They actually make fun of it because to them the Sardauna "was an evil man." (p.130) A Rex Lawson's song is used to make fun of the death of this important northern figure, the head of Muslims in Nigeria. Auntie Ifeka explains to Olanna:

Our people say that the chorus sounds like *Mmee – mmee – mmee*, the bleating of a goat. They say the Sardauna sounded like that when he was begging them not to kill him. When the soldiers fired a mortar into his house, he crouched behind his wives and bleated, '*mmeemmee-mmee*.' (p.130)

When an important person like the Sardauna is killed in a coup perceived as an Igbo coup and the Igbo community makes fun of his death as explained above, it only shows the extent of the antagonism between the Igbo's and the Hausas. One critic acknowledges the ethnic tensions in Nigeria. He says, "In Nigeria, there is the presence of deeply embedded hatreds of the groups among themselves.(Obiechina 530) The Hausa-Igbo rivalry is an example of the embedded hatred between the groups.

The writer presents the clannishness and love of wealth of some Igbo's which creates anti-Igbo sentiments. This she does through Chief Ozobia and the setting of Lagos and Kano.

Chief Ozobia is an Igbo character through whom the love of wealth of Igbo's is revealed. He lives in Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria and homeland of the Yorubas. Chief Ozobia has a lot of businesses and "owns half of Lagos." (p.59) Since Lagos is a prominent Yoruba town, it is surprising that in the novel, there is no fully developed Yoruba character in Lagos. Mention is only made about the Yoruba by Susan and Mrs Ozobia. Susan, on seeing a crowd of brightly dressed people dancing in front of lit-up canopies on the streets of Lagos tells Richard her 'pretty boy'(p.53), "There you go. The Yoruba get into huge debt just to throw these parties." (p.55) At the beginning of the civil war, when Mrs Ozobia visits Olanna at Abba, she tells her, "that Yoruba care-taker we left in Lagos will loot the house...."

(p.188) Chief Ozobia, an Igbo is presented as an influential person in Lagos.

Chief Ozobia owns many businesses in Lagos as well as Port Harcourt to the extent that his daughter, Kainene has to move from Lagos to settle in Port Harcourt to take care of these businesses. Yet, Chief Ozobia is prepared to take every measure to acquire more wealth. He is prepared to mortgage his beautiful daughter, Olanna to secure a contract. This comes to light through a dialogue between the twin daughters. Kainene asks Olanna,

So will you be spreading your legs for that elephant in exchange for Daddy's contract?" Daddy literally pulled me away from the veranda, so we could leave you alone with the good cabinet minister." (p.35)

When Olanna responds that her father will get the contract without her sleeping with the minister because he will give the minister ten per cent, Kainene responds,

The ten per cent is standard, so extras always help. The other bidders probably don't have a beautiful daughter. The benefit of being the ugly daughter is that nobody uses you as sex bait." (p.35)

Chief Ozobia with all his wealth is prepared to pay ten per cent in addition to freely giving her beautiful daughter away to secure one more contract. This goes to show the extent he is willing to go for the sake of wealth. When the first coup occurs, he leaves Nigeria and returns when there is calm to establish more business contacts.

Kainene tells Richard about her father, "Daddy hasn't wasted any time in ingratiating himself. He ran off until things calmed down, and now he's back to make new friends." (p.134) Clearly, Chief Ozobia is a shrewd business - minded man. He is a wealth - driven Igbo whose major concern is the steps he has to take to acquire more wealth.

He fits perfectly into Achebe's description of a group of Igbos whose behaviour can easily offend the other tribes. This group of Igbos, Achebe says, in their quest for success "invites envy and hatred, or even worse, obsess the mind with material success and dispose it to all kinds of crude showiness." (Achebe 45)

The clannishness of Igbos is also revealed in the novel in a dialogue between Kainene and Richard. Kainene tells Richard, "I've just got the contract to supply army boots for the battalion in Kaduna." Richard expresses his joy on hearing this news. Kainene then explains why she was able to get the contract. She explains, "The man in charge was an Igbo and Madu said he was keen to give the contract to a fellow Igbo. So I was lucky. And he's asking only for a five per cent cut." (p.81) The condition under which Kainene gets the contract emphasizes the extent to which the Igbos like to favour their own.

With the wealth driven mind of Igbos as in the case of Chief Ozobia and their clannishness revealed in Kainene's contract which together culminate in the Igbo having influential positions in the homelands of other tribes, it becomes very likely for other tribes to dislike them. This is exactly what comes to light in Lagos in a dialogue between Richard and Susan. Susan in response to Richard's question about the killing of Igbos in the Northern part of Nigeria says:

I just hope it doesn't spread to Lagos...There are lots and lots of Igbo people here – well, they are everywhere really, aren't they? Not that they didn't have it coming to them, when you think about it, with their being so clannish and uppity and controlling the markets. Very Jewish, really. (p.154)



Susan thinks the Igbo people like to favour their own, behave as if they are more important than the other tribes, control the markets and for that matter is indifferent to their plight. To her, the Igbos are comparable to the Jews of old who looked down on non-Jews. It is not only Susan who thinks that the Igbos are one group of people who apart from their eastern region are also spread all over Nigeria. A good-looking man on a plane from Kano to Lagos, tells Olanna that the Igbo Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos has been removed. He tells her:

Why should an Igbo man be the Vice Chancellor in Lagos? The problem with Igbo people is that they want to control Everything. Everything. Why can't they stay in their East? They own all the shops; they control the civil service, even the police. (p.227)

Evidently, the Igbos are spread all over Nigeria. Chief Ozobia is influential in Lagos-western region and Kainene gets a contract in Kaduna-northern region. This is the situation that Achebe talks about in an article titled "The Igbo Problem". In this article, Achebe employs J.P Clark's image of "ants filing out of the wood" in his poem "Night Rain" to demonstrate how the Igbos moved out of their east, scattered and seized the floor of the Nigerian socio – political landscape. This situation, he admits has created a general hatred of the Igbos. Achebe posits:

Nigerians of all other ethnic groups will probably reach consensus on no other matter than their common resentment of the Igbo. They would describe them as aggressive arrogant and clannish. Most would add grasping and greedy. (45)

The clannishness of the Igbos which results in the general hatred for them leads to the immediate cause of the war which is the harassment and horrendous massacre of the

Igbos after the second coup. The writer highlights the widespread nature of the anti-Igbo sentiments by using two different locations to portray how Igbos are treated after the second coup. Events in Lagos and Kano tell readers the fate of Igbos.

Given the fact that Lagos is a brisk business Yoruba town where non – Yorubas like Chief Ozobia own a lot of businesses, it is significant that the novelist allows readers to see what happens to Igbos living there after the second coup. The first coup of January 1966 led by mainly Igbo soldiers makes mostly northerners victims. Obviously, the northerners are not happy with Igbos for leading a coup of which they are the victims. In Lagos, anti – Igbo sentiment is very much present. When Olanna and Arize go to the Ebutte Metta market in Lagos to shop for fabrics, they see a crowd in front of the market where Igbos are being identified and beaten. Arize speaks Yoruba to Olanna while they retreat and they escape this maltreatment. A man in safari suit is not lucky. He is slapped on the back of his head while being told, “You are Igbo man! Don’t deny it! Simply identify yourself.” (p.132) The novelist foreshadows the impending sad fate that awaits Igbos through Baby. When Olanna and Arize escape, they are bewildered by what they have seen. Arize tries to comfort Olanna by telling her, “Things will calm down.” Olanna smiles believing that “things would indeed calm down.” She then, in an attempt to console, tickles Baby who all this while has been crying as a result of the scene. Surprisingly, “Baby did not laugh. Baby stared back at her with frightened eyes that were not yet dried of tears.” (p.133) Here, the still frightened eyes of Baby and the tears in her eyes despite her mother’s tickle foreshadows something more frightening, more sorrowful awaiting the Igbos and this is what happens in especially the north.

By presenting the molestation of Igbos in Lagos (by presumably Yoruba people) the writer demonstrates that the anti-Igbo sentiment is widespread and not prevalent among only northerners who are considered the major victims of the first coup. This maltreatment witnessed by Olanna, Arize and the man in safari suit in Lagos brings to mind Chinua Achebe's own experience of Lagos in events leading to the civil war.

He says:

The people were jeering and saying,  
'Let the Igbo go, food will be  
cheaper in Lagos. That kind of  
experience is so powerful. It is  
something I could not possibly  
forget. I realised suddenly that I had  
not been living in my home; I had  
been living in a strange place.  
(Mabura 210)

While the Igbos are beaten in Lagos, they are brutally killed in Kano. Readers see how Igbos are massacred on a large scale in Kano after the second coup. Both northern soldiers and civilians set out purposely to kill Igbos living in Kano and other towns in the north. Frederick Forsyth explains that the labelling of the January coup as an Igbo coup by the BBC provided the basis for the massacres. He says, "the label 'Igbo coup' provided rhetorical cover for the ethnic cleansing executed by political and military functionaries in the North in response to what was, in fact an all party coup in January." (56) In Kano, the writer presents various scenes of how Igbos are killed by northerners. For instance when Olanna, driven by Mohammed, goes to her uncle's house to pick her relatives, she finds them already dead. The carnage is graphically described:

Uncle Mbaezi lay face down in an  
ungainly twist, legs splayed.

Something creamy – white oozed through the large gash on the back of his head. Aunty Ifeka lay on the veranda. The cuts on her naked body were smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips. (p.147)

Olanna sees the group of Hausa men who have committed this crime. To her surprise, Abdulmalik, the Hausa friend of Uncle Mbaezi who had once given her a pair of slippers is part of this group. It is he who says, “We finished the whole family. It was Allah’s will.” (p.148) Abdulmalik thinks he has carried out a religious duty but Mohammed’s view sharply contrasts with his. Mohammed shakes all over after seeing the carnage. He tells Olanna:

Allah does not allow this. Allah will not forgive them. Allah will not forgive the people who have made them do this. Allah will never forgive this. (p.148)

Mohammed’s statement stresses the fact that religion cannot be used as an excuse for the massacres.

After Mohammed shoves Olanna onto a crowded train, she sits on the floor of the train beside a woman with a calabash on her lap. Throughout the journey, Olanna bumps against the calabash and at a point, “she liked the firm feel of the wood. She edged her hand forwards until it was gently caressing the carved lines that crisscrossed the calabash.” (p.149) When the train crosses the River Niger, the woman motions Olanna and some other people to take a look.

Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl’s head with the ashy – grey skin

and the plaited hair and rolled – back eyes and open mouth. She stared at it for a while before she looked away. Somebody screamed. (p.149)



This scene that Olanna witnesses shortly after seeing her freshly killed uncle and aunt presents a traumatic, unforgettable experience for her. She sees the head of this murdered girl and listens to the girl's mother talk about how long it had taken her to plait the daughter's hair only for her to be killed. What Olanna goes through in Kano is traumatic so it is not surprising when she experiences the Dark Swoops and is unable to walk for sometime on her return to Nsukka. The narrator explains the Dark

Swoops:

A thick blanket descended from above and pressed itself over her face, firmly, while she struggled to breathe. Then, when it let go, freeing her to take in gulp after gulp of air, she saw burning owls at the window grinning and beckoning to her with charred feathers. (p.156)

After killing their Igbo colleagues in the barracks, Northern soldiers went to the airport in Kano to search and kill the Igbos there. Richard is an eye-witness to what happens. The Northern soldiers ask, "Where are the Igbo people? Who is Igbo here? Where are the infidels?" (p.152) They identify Nnaemeka, the young Igbo customs officer who had been speaking to Richard. Shortly afterwards, "the rifle went off and Nnaemeka's chest blew open, a splattering red mass..." (p.153) The bartender is also identified as Igbo. "One of the soldiers walked up close and shot him and then aimed at the bottles of liquor lined up behind and shot those. The room smelt of whisky and Campari and gin." After killing the Igbos in the lounge,

The soldiers ran out to the tarmac and into the aeroplane 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 colour on the dusty black stretch. (p.153)

The vivid description of the killing of Nnaemeka, the bartender and the Igbos who are pulled out of the plane, is re-enforced with appeals to readers' senses of sight and smell. Readers can vividly picture Nnaemeka's chest being blown open and can also visualise the dresses of the Igbo passengers stained with blood. It is not also difficult for readers to smell the strong scent of liquor from the several broken bottles of whisky, campari and gin. The scent of liquor engulfing the lounge helps create in the readers mind the dizzy effect that usually comes after one witnesses a traumatic scene like what takes place here.

The novelist in presenting the molestation and massacres of Igbos uses different settings and multiple points of view. The Igbos are beaten in Lagos but in Kano, they are actually killed. It is not through just one character that these killings are seen. Olanna sees it in Sabon Gari in Kano and on the train to Nsukka. Richard sees these killings at the airport in Kano. Arize and Olanna are eye witnesses to the beating of Igbos in Lagos. The different settings giving very vivid and graphic descriptions as well as the different characters who witness the beating and killing of Igbos in Lagos and Kano respectively, present an apt picture of what Igbos who were not in their home region suffered after the second coup.

The horrendous massacre of Igbos, in especially Kano, leads to the secession of the Eastern region of Nigeria and finally to the civil war. Many people believe that "following the flood of refugees (Igbos) from the rest of the country into the eastern region, demands for secession became increasingly insistent." (Guy 417) It is at Nsukka, through Odenigbo and his friends and the entire Nsukka university community that readers see the reaction of Igbo people to the massacre of their people

in the north. When the massacres following the second coup occur, the usually lively discussions of Odenigbo and his friends change. The narrator says:

The conversations no longer ended in reassuring  
laughter, and the living room often seemed clouded  
with uncertainties, with unfinished knowledge, as if  
they all knew something would happen and yet did  
not know what. (p.142)

Here, the novelist foreshadows and prepares readers' mind for the impending doom that awaits Igbo as they secede and it results in the civil war. Once the killing of Igbo people on a large scale occurs up north, the basis for laughter for Odenigbo and his friends is no more. The deaths of their people leave them sad and uncertain as to the next step they as a people would take.

Through the discourse between Odenigbo and his friends, readers learn the reason these intellectuals give for the secession of Eastern Nigeria. Odenigbo thinks that secession is the only way out for Igbo. He tells his friends:

What peace are we looking for?  
Gowon himself has said that a basis  
for unity does not exist, so what  
peace are we looking for?  
Secession is the only answer. If  
Gowon wanted to keep this country  
united, he would have done  
something long ago. For goodness'  
sake, not one of them has come out  
to condemn the massacres and  
months have passed! It is as if all our  
people who were killed don't matter!  
(p.158)

To this, Professor Ezeka adds, "Eastern Nigeria seethes and will continue to seethe until the federal government addresses the massacres." Okoema also posits that, "...a unitary government was the very reason that he (Gowon) and his people killed

Igbo officers.” (p.159) Obviously, Odenigbo, Ezeka and Okoema think that since the issue of the massacre of Igbos in the north had not been addressed, secession was their only means of security.

The writer makes the domestic life of Odenigbo and Olanna become a forum for public discourse by focusing on the discussions they have with their friends. One critic is right when he says that, “In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the domain once called ‘private life’ is the place for politics.” This is demonstrated in the life of Odenigbo and Olanna through whom “the novel transforms the function of the household by centering on their intellectual salon.” (Marx 612)

To emphasize the stance of the Igbos, that secession is their only means of security, the novelist moves outside the enclave of Odenigbo and his friends to a larger picture of the entire university community and the town of Nsukka at large. When secession is finally announced by Ojukwu (the military leader of the people of Eastern Nigeria) on behalf of his people, a rally is held at Freedom Square in Nsukka at the centre of the university campus. Lecturers and students gather, singing with lots of placards raised high. Olanna’s placard reads: “WE CANNOT DIE LIKE DOGS.” (p.162) That of Ugwu reads: “GOD BLESS BIAFRA.” (p.163) The narrator tells readers that traders in the market are dancing and giving away the best of their goods for free on this day that Biafra is born. This larger Nsukka picture of secession being good news for students, lecturers and market women emphasizes the fact that the move of secession is accepted by many Igbo people.



The novelist goes on to demonstrate how determined Igbos are to protect their new nation; Biafra. After the 'In Case of War' seminar held at the University of Nsukka, Ojukwu appears at the administration block. He asks his audience:

I came to ask you a question. What shall we do? Shall we keep silent and let them force us back to Nigeria? Shall we ignore the thousands of our brothers and sisters killed in the north? (p.170)

When his audience responds in the negative, he adds, "If they declare war, I want to tell you now it may become a long-drawn-out war. A long-drawn-out war. Are you prepared? Are we prepared?" (p.171) The people respond in the affirmative saying, "Yes! Yes Ojukwu give us guns! There is anger in our hearts!" This scene presents an apt picture of how determined the Igbos are to defend their nation. Ojukwu confirms this notion when he adds, "Even the grass will fight for Biafra." This statement that the character Ojukwu makes is based on a historical fact because he is known to have said that the revolt of the Eastern region of Nigeria represented "the crystallization of the black man's search for independence and recognition." (Ojukwu 200)

Contrary to Richard's perception that after the secession of the eastern part of Nigeria,

There would be no war. The Nigerians would let Biafra be; they would never fight a people already battered by the massacres. They would be pleased to be rid of the Igbo anyway. (p.168-169)

war is declared by the federal government of Nigeria to bring the rebellious Biafra to order. Kainene explains to Richard who is surprised at the declaration of war. She tells him, "It's the oil. They can't let us go easily with all that oil." (p.180) The writer in an

interview with BBC reiterates this view when she says that oil was the main reason why Nigeria fought Biafra, that the war wouldn't have been fought if there was no oil.

The first war scene the novelist presents is the fall of Nsukka. When the federals enter Nsukka, the sound of shelling *boom – boom – boom* is heard as Olanna and Ugwu are in the kitchen. They leave Nsukka hurriedly packing a few things and wrapping a pot of soup in a dishcloth. As many cars and people leave Nsukka, the roads are crowded. The writer presents a scene of confusion as people evacuate Nsukka.

Dust swirled all around, like a see-through brown blanket. The main road was crowded; women with boxes on their heads and babies tied to their backs, barefoot children carrying bundles of clothes or yams or boxes, men dragging bicycles. (p.179)

Like Olanna and her family, many Biafrans leave their towns hurriedly taking very little to the next safest place or town. Some Biafrans did not even know where they were going.

The novelist presents another graphic scene of the war during the fall of Port Harcourt. Richard and Kainene hear the sounds of shelling. They know for certain that Port Harcourt is about to fall so they pack hurriedly to move to Orlu. At this very moment, there is also an air raid and Richard, Kainene, together with their two stewards, Harrison and Ikejide, run to the orchard to take cover. As they run to take cover,

Then came the cold whistle of a mortar in the air and the crash as it landed and the boom as it exploded. A piece of shrapnel, the size of a fist, wheezed past. Ikejide was still running and, in the moment that Richard glanced away and back, Ikejide's head was gone. The body was running, arched slightly

forwards, arms flying around, but there was no head. There was only a bloodied neck. (p.317)

The short time that Richard looked away and back is enough for the shrapnel to cut off completely Ikejide's head. This projects the fact that war time life draws a very thin line between life and death. Again, the picture of a headless body running appeals to reader's sense of sight and emphasizes the suddenness of the death.

The writer presents the challenges as well as the few successes of Biafra in the course of the war. When war is declared, Biafra is constrained because as a new nation, it is difficult to mobilise troops and arms. The militarily unprepared state of Biafra is captured in the account involving the Biafran leader, Ojukwu as reported by Kainene:

Madu told me today that the army has nothing, Absolutely nothing. They thought Ojukwu had arms piled up somewhere...so Madu and some of the officers who came back from the North went to tell him that we have no arms, no mobilization of troops, and that our men are training with wooden guns, for goodness' sake! They wanted him to release his stockpiled arms...Apparently he has no arms at all and he plans to defeat Nigeria with his fists. (p.183)

Kainene's source of information is authentic since Madu is a Colonel in the Biafran army. When they are fully plunged into the war, Biafra has neither enough arms nor troops to fight. Okeoma, Odenigbo's lecturer friend at Nsukka, joins the army. There is also conscription through which people are forcibly recruited to fight for Biafra. On a particular occasion, Ugwu is conscripted together with a man at least sixty-five years and a boy of about fifteen. The old man tells the soldier, "If it has come to this, that you are conscripting somebody my age, then Biafra has died." (p.357) What the old man says is significant in that it allows readers to see the lack of capacity of

Biafra for the war. In a dialogue between Odenigbo and his friends in Umuahia, Special Julius states that the lack of arms and troops is the cause of the fall of the capital of Biafra, Enugu, as well as the many towns that had been captured by the federals. He asks, “How can you leave civilians to defend our capital with mere machetes? This is the same way they lost Nsukka...” (p.285) The lack of logistics and troops affect Biafra greatly in the war.

Biafra’s plight is further compounded by the fact that they are blockaded and so cannot easily have access to arms and even food. In a dialogue between Olanna and her friend Mrs Muokelu, the impact of the blockade on Biafra comes to light. Mrs Muokelu tells Olanna:

Gowon sent them to bomb Awgu Market in the middle of the afternoon while women were buying and selling. He has refused to let the Red Cross bring us food, refused *kpam – kpam*, so that we will starve to death...If we had people pouring guns and planes into our hands as they pour into Nigeria, this thing would have ended a long time ago... (p.279)

Nigeria is thus supported by other countries, while Biafra is all alone, with no arms and no food. A visiting American journalist tells Richard, “You know there’s food piled in Sao Tome crawling with cockroaches because there’s no way to bring it in.” (p.370) The shortage of food as a result of the blockade forces Mrs Muokelu, a fervent believer in Biafra to embark on trading behind enemy lines. She tells Olanna, “What is there to buy in Biafra? They have blockaded us *kpam – kpam*.” (p.293) The continuous use of the onomatopoeic vernacular *kpam – kpam* by Mrs Muokelu demonstrates the severity of the blockade.



The writer shows how despite all these challenges, Biafra still prevails. This is revealed by Madu as he convinces Richard to write for the Propaganda Directorate of Biafra. He tells Richard:

You can tell them how we continue to stand and prevail even though Nigerian Mig-Seventeens, II Twenty-eights, and L-Twenty-nine Delfins flown by Russians and Egyptians are bombing us every day, and how some of them are using transport planes and just crudely rolling out bombs to kill women and children, and how the British and the Soviets are in an unholy alliance giving more and more arms to Nigeria, and how the Americans have refused to help us, and how our relief flights come in at night with no lights because the Nigerians will shoot them down during the day. (p.305)

The lack of full stops in the extract and the repetition of the conjunction ‘and’ give an unending litany of limitations of Biafra. Throughout the novel, it is seen that while Nigeria receives massive support from Britain and other international allies, Biafra receives very little help. In the novel, Tanzania is the only African country that had recognized Biafra. Odenigbo says that Nyerere will go down in history as a man of truth for his recognition of Biafra. Many people argue that the posture of many of the world leaders to the plight of Biafra “made it clear to ethnic and religious minorities that their rights and claims were not deemed legitimate and so could be trampled upon with impunity.” (Suleyman 42) This assertion may not be true but for Biafrans like Odenigbo, the world leaders’ lack of recognition of Biafra was a way of saying that the Biafran course was wrong.

The Uli airstrip becomes very important to the survival of Biafra. It is “Biafra’s only link to the outside world, this wonder of an airstrip where food and arms evaded Nigerian bombers.” (p.309) Even this airstrip at Uli is not spared the frequent bombings of the Nigerians. When Richard drives two American journalists to catch their flight out, there is a bombing.

A loud explosion shattered the air. The airport manager shouted, ‘This way!’ and they ran after him to an uncompleted building. They lay flat on the ground. The window louvers rattled and clattered. The ground quivered. The explosions stopped and scattered gunfire followed. (p.372)

As soon as the explosions end, men set to work on the tarmac to prepare it for the landing of a relief plane. The Biafrans, despite their constraints, work very hard to defend their nation. The *Ogbunigwe*: ‘high-impact landmine’ is invented by Biafrans and they use it to kill many Nigerian soldiers. When Ugwu sees it after hearing so much about it, he is disappointed. It is “a dull metal container full of scrap metal.” (p.359) The writer describes an operation with the *ogbunigwe*. Ugwu’s first operation after his conscription finds him using the *ogbunigwe*. He buries it after which there is an exchange of gun fire from both the Nigerian and the Biafran side. When the federal troops move within Ugwu’s killing range, “he detonated his *ogbunigwe* and it pushed outward in a spray of violent metal...carefully, he connected the cable and the plug in his hands and the immediate, forceful blow-up startled him.” He then moves out of his trench together with his colleagues to find the “scattered corpses of the vandals.” (p.362)

This scene on the operation of the *ogbunigwe* undertaken by Ugwu presents a vivid battle -front experience of the war between Biafra and Nigeria. It is realised that in the novel, apart from this *ogbunigwe* scene, there is also the fall of Nsukka, Port Harcourt, the bombing of the airstrip at Uli and the bombings and fall of Umuahia through which readers are allowed to see vividly what transpires during some theatres of the war. The other instances on the war are described through dialogues between characters as happens between Kainene and Richard, Mrs Muokelu and Olanna showing the presence of a blockade and Madu and Richard on the limitations of the Biafran army. The writer uses vivid and graphic scenes as well as dialogues between characters in order to reveal to readers the course of the Nigerian Civil War. In addition to the causes and the course of the Nigerian Civil War, the writer also highlights the general suffering, fear, death, malnutrition and changes the war brings in the lives of Biafrans. She does this through the setting, characters and the plot structure of the novel.

The war creates fear in several people. In Umuahia, readers are presented with the fear that usually characterizes war-time life. Here, there are frequent bombings by ‘enemy planes.’ (aeroplanes of the Nigerian army) Whenever the people are alerted about these air raids, they have to run to the bunker or the nearest safest place to avoid being killed. The novelist describes what happens to the people of Umuahia during these air raids.

Somebody from the house nearby screamed, ‘Enemy plane!’ at the same time as Special Julius shouted,

‘Take cover!’ and leapt across the veranda, overturning the palm wine. Neighbours were running, shouting words that Olanna could not understand because the stubborn searing sound had shrilled its way into her head...The first explosion sounded distant. Others followed, closer, louder and the earth shook. (p.276)

These air raids are so frequent that it makes the inhabitants of Umuahia live in perpetual fear. Olanna at a point is so much afraid of these air raids that when her friend, Mrs Muokelu comes to visit her and they are conversing, she jumps up asking, “Was that a plane?” (p.278) Mrs Muokelu laughs while she responds, “Somebody closed their door in the next house and you say it is a plane?” Olanna then sits down on the floor, legs stretched out, obviously “exhausted from fear.” The people of Umuahia are not only faced with the fear of death but they are also confronted with the challenge of living with the reality of loved ones dying as a result of the war. A relative of Alice comes to Umuahia to inform her about the death of her relatives. He tells the neighbours:

The vandals took over our town many weeks ago and they announced that all the indigenes should come out and say ‘One Nigeria’ and they would give them rice. So people came out of their hiding and said ‘One Nigeria’ and the vandals shot them, men, women and children. Everyone. There is nobody left in the Njokamma family. Nobody left. (p.384)

Alice’s reaction upon hearing about the annihilation of her entire family by Nigerian soldiers attracts readers’ sympathy. She lies on the ground, moaning with clumps of sand in her hair. The narrator says:



She was strengthened, emboldened, by the madness  
of grief and she fought off everyone who tried to hold  
her. She rolled on the ground with such force that the  
stones cut her skin in tiny red gashes. (p.384)

The experience of Alice depicted above shows the sense of loss and the grief that war brings to people.

One of the pathetic effects of the war is malnutrition. Umuahia and Orlu are two locations in the novel from where readers see the hunger and resultant deaths, especially of children as a result of the war. In Umuahia there are so many people and very little food for them to live on. They therefore have to depend on relief centres for their food. When Olanna is confronted with this reality, she is very uncomfortable. On her first day at the relief centre:

Olanna joined the queue and held herself from pushing back at the woman who tried to nudge her out. She let the woman stand in front of her. The incongruity of queuing to beg for food made her feel uncomfortable, blemished. (p.268)

With time, Olanna gets used to the situation. When she goes to the relief centre again, she “surprised herself by how easily she joined in the inward rush of the crowd, how she moved nimbly from queue, dodged the swinging canes of the militia, pushed back when somebody pushed her.” (p.272) Olanna realizes that the survival of her family depends on what she will bring from the relief centre so she struggles like the others to be able to get something for her family. When the relief centres run out of food, the people especially the children are malnourished. Adanna, Baby’s friend in Umuahia gets kwashiorkor which at the time is known as ‘Harold Wilson Syndrome.’ Olanna goes to visit Adanna who is sick to find that “her belly was swollen and her skin was a sickly tone, much lighter than it was only weeks ago.”

(p.338) Adanna's situation is similar to that of the child found in Achebe's poem, "Refugee Mother and Child" who is described as having "washed-out ribs and driedup bottoms struggling in laboured steps behind blown empty bellies." (lines 5-7) When Olanna tells Adanna's mother to find either milk or crayfish to cure her child, she asks Olanna, "Milk, *kwa*? From where?" It takes the benevolence of Olanna for Mama Adanna to get a tin of sardines and some dried milk. The hunger in Umuahia is so severe that lizards become delicacies as soups are usually cooked without meat. Orlu is a location in the novel from where readers discover the difficulty of war-time life. From Orlu, readers see the last punishing phase of the Nigerian Civil War. Even before readers are fully plunged into the state of affairs at Orlu, the writer gives hints when Olanna visits her twin sister, Kainene at Orlu before Umuahia falls. The picture of Orlu portrayed is one of extreme hunger to the extent that every living thing becomes thin. Kainene drives past "palm trees stripped of fronds, past a thin soldier pulling along a thinner goat." (p.346) The priest at the refugee camp is lean. The people at the refugee camp, especially the children are also very thin. This suggests the extent of hunger and deprivation.

When finally Umuahia falls and Olanna and Odenigbo move to Orlu to join Kainene and Richard, readers are not surprised with the state of affairs in Orlu. By this time, both Olanna and Odenigbo have lost so much weight. Olanna looks bony while Odenigbo is lighter and narrower. (p.392) When Dr Nwala comes with the news of Okeoma's death, he has become thinner and lankier and looks as "though he would break in two if he sat down abruptly." (p.391) The children at the refugee camp die frequently as a result of malnutrition. The writer employs irony in highlighting the plight of children during this war. A child whose name is 'Chidiebele' which means

“God is merciful” dies out of malnutrition. This child is unfortunate not to have enjoyed God’s mercy which his name proclaims and dies of hunger. Why is God’s mercy unable to reach this child whose name acknowledges this mercy? The irony only goes to emphasize the pathetic condition of innocent children who died as a result of hunger during this war. The extent of suffering and hunger in Biafra depicted in the novel gives credence to what Ntiyong Akpan, head of the civil service of Eastern Nigeria says about the Biafran story. He says:

This is a story of the greatest tragedy that can befall a people – a story of extreme human suffering and losses, to which the most innocent were the greatest victims-a story of human, moral and physical disaster. (ix)

The depiction of war time life in Umuahia and especially in Orlu, with innocent children dying of hunger demonstrates that the Biafran story is a sad one indeed. Significantly, the weather in Orlu corresponds to the suffering prevalent there. There is a severe harmattan. As Olanna and her family settle in Orlu, “The new harmattan winds blew dust everywhere.” (p.388) Suppliers can no longer bring gari to Kainene for the camp so they embark on ‘Plant Our Own Food Movement’ so that they will grow what they will need. However, the harmattan is so severe that nothing comes out of their efforts. “The soil was parched. The harmattan cracked lips and feet.” (p.389) The “scorched and failing farms” (p.398) are unable to meet their demands. The harmattan gets so intense that “the well dried up.” (p.390) They are as a result of the harmattan left with no source of water and very little food. The refugee camp as a result is engulfed in the “thick, ugly odour of unwashed bodies and rotting flesh from the shallow graves behind the buildings.” (p.390) Just as the harmattan scorches and kills the plants in Orlu, hunger resulting from the war also kills the people of Orlu. The

imagery of parched soil, cracked lips and feet, scorched farms, dried-up well and the refugee camp being engulfed in the odour of rotting flesh, present an apt picture of intense suffering in Biafra.

In the midst of all these, the people try to remain human. Olanna, has become bony and sees the death of many malnourished children but does not lose hope. She makes an effort to sharpen the intellect of these starving children. She teaches these children under the flame tree. Ugwu also after his conscription escapes death and comes to Orlu and helps at the refugee camp. In the evenings, he sits under the flame tree and “writes in small careful letters on the sides of old newspapers, on some paper Kainene had done supply calculations on, on the back of an old calendar.” (p.397) These are all efforts on the part of the two characters to maintain their sense of self. It is under the flame tree that they take actions to light up their difficult war world. The flame tree then comes to represent the urge of these two characters to maintain their worth as humans irrespective of the war. Their actions confirms the social scientific hypothesis that

Life during civil war is not entirely abnormal – which is to say, life during war is not life as it should be, but something enough like the ideal to appear a significant deviation from it, rather than an exception to it. (Marx 615)

Apart from the setting, the plot structure of the novel mirrors how war-time life brings incoherence and confusion into one’s life. Plot is explained by Holman as “the sequence of events in a novel, the emphasis falling on causality.” (385) The novel is divided into four parts. Two parts are titled ‘The Early Sixties’ while the other two are titled ‘The Late Sixties.’



In Part One (Early Sixties), Ugwu is sent to Odenigbo in Nsukka and the two live together for a while before Olanna visits and finally settles with Odenigbo. Richard, Kainene's fiancé also moves to Nsukka and joins Odenigbo's friends in their evening chats. Odenigbo's mother comes around and insults Olanna. Olanna leaves and later moves back to Odenigbo's house. The two decide to have a baby.

In Part Two (The Late Sixties), there are Olanna, Ugwu, Odenigbo and Baby who is already four years old. The January coup occurs. Later the second coup occurs. Olanna is in Kano and witnesses the massacre of Igbos. She escapes and returns to Nsukka. Richard does not visit Odenigbo and Olanna anymore, but the reason is not given. Secession takes place and war begins. Odenigbo and his family move to Abba and then to Umuahia.

Part Three returns us to the Early Sixties and readers are sent back to Nsukka. Olanna is away in London when Mama visits with Amala. Odenigbo sleeps with Amala. Olanna returns from London and detects Odenigbo's infidelity. She moves into her own flat where she also sleeps with Richard. Olanna and Odenigbo settle their differences but he goes to warn Richard never to come to his house again. Amala is pregnant. She gives birth to a baby girl. Since neither she nor Mama wants the baby, Olanna takes her and calls her Baby.

The last part, Part Four (Late Sixties) sends readers back to the war. Umuahia finally falls and Odenigbo and his family join Kainene and Richard at Orlu. Kainene goes to trade behind enemy lines and does not return. The war finally ends and Odenigbo and his family move back to Nsukka. All efforts to find Kainene prove futile.

The plot of the novel is in the form peace-war-peace-war. In the chronological order, the writer could have finished with everything about the early sixties before talking about the late sixties but she decides to make it a 'back and forth' kind of plot, using the time shifts. It can be argued that the plot structure of the novel is appropriate in that it captures war-time life. Life during war is neither coherent nor comprehensible. It is full of confusion and this is portrayed in the time shifts that give the plot a back and forth nature where the writer presents certain incidents, withholds some information, moves ahead before coming back to give the details left out. This happens with the birth of Baby. In part two where the war occurs, there is Baby who is four years old, but it is in part three that the circumstance leading to her birth comes to light. Odenigbo sleeps with Amala, his mother's maid from the village and gets her pregnant. Olanna moves to her own flat where she also sleeps with Richard. This period represents a trying period, a domestic tension or war in the relationship of Odenigbo and Olanna. This is one of the few times their lovely relationship goes sour. Ugwu says that was the first time he heard Olanna shout. On one occasion when Olanna came to visit Odenigbo,

Ugwu did not shut the kitchen door, so that he could stand by it and listen, but he might as well have closed it because Olanna's raised voice was audible enough. 'It's you and not your mother. It happened because *you* let it happen! You must take responsibility!' It startled Ugwu, how that soft voice could change to something so fierce. (p.240)

The writer captures the tumultuous moments between Odenigbo and Olanna in part three and separates it from part two when the civil war takes place because part three represents a different kind of war; a personal war between the couple.

Also, the writer herself confesses in her interview to the BBC World Book Club that her brother told her that he was confused by the plot, that at a point he paused to ask himself if he had missed anything. Just as the sad ending of the novel demonstrates that “...you cannot write about war and have a happy ending,” so does the plot of the story reveal that one cannot write coherently about life during war. Again, for the writer who lost both grandparents in the war and confesses that some of the reasons that led her to write this novel are, “because my father has tears in his eyes when he speaks of losing his father, because my mother still cannot speak at length about losing her father in a refugee camp,” writing about it will not be an easy task. She says about the novel, “it was an emotionally exhausting book to write, and I often stopped just to cry.” (The Story Behind the Book 2) The arrangement of peace-warpeace-war could also have been chosen to serve as a breather, so that she would not have to talk continuously about the war till the end. The writer allows readers to meet the characters in the time of peace so that when we meet these same characters in their changed circumstances during the war, readers can appreciate how much change the war has brought in the individual lives of these characters.

Characters are also used in addition to setting and plot to portray the effects of the Nigerian Civil War. The writer creates a wide range of characters in the novel. This work looks at the effects of war through the main characters, Odenigbo, Olanna, Kainene, Richard and Ugwu. The war affects these characters in diverse ways.

For Olanna, the war brings changes in her personal values. She is beautiful and has a “curvy, fleshy body.” (p.23) When she moves in to settle with Odenigbo, she is not concerned about getting married to him. She just wants to be close to Odenigbo.

“She feared that marriage would flatten it (their relationship) to a prosaic partnership.”

(p.52) During the war, Odenigbo once again proposes marriage to her as to him it did not make sense for them to live together and not get married. For

Olanna

It had made sense to her, the decision not to marry, the need to preserve what they had by wrapping it in a shawl of difference. But the old framework that fit her ideals was gone now that Arize and Aunty Ifeka and Uncle Mbaezi would always be frozen faces in her album. Now that bullets were falling in Nsukka.  
(p.187)

The events leading to the war and the war itself makes Olanna do away with her ideal of guarding her relationship with Odenigbo by not marrying. She now agrees to marry Odenigbo because the war has destroyed her old framework. On her wedding day, the war denies her the happiness that usually comes with marriage ceremonies. When Professor Achara gives her a plastic bouquet of multi-coloured flowers, Olanna is taken aback. She tells him, “What is this? I want fresh flowers.” Professor Achara responds, “But nobody grows flowers in Umuahia. People here grow what they can eat.” (p.201) Finally, Olanna does not hold flowers because what war time offers her is only a plastic bouquet which she doesn’t like. On her wedding day she looks so beautiful but still has a sad smile on her face. During her wedding reception she seems to have overcome the sadness and was enjoying her day but then there is an air raid which occurs just before they cut their wedding cake. This air raid denies Olanna a simple wedding photograph as the photographer loses his camera.



Olanna's marriage life with Odenigbo during the war is not like what they shared back at Nsukka. While Olanna is frightened by how little they have, Odenigbo shows forceful reassurance and so as Odenigbo murmurs into her ears, Olanna mourns her money in the bank of Lagos. "This was the first time she felt detached from him" (p.262) When Odenigbo's mother dies, his inability to handle this loss properly causes him to resort to drinking. Olanna, who once wanted Odenigbo close to her now wants to back away when he comes close to her. She tells Kainene about Odenigbo, "I want this war to end so that he can come back. He has become somebody else." (p.338) She continues:

He just drinks and drinks cheap *kai* – *kai*. The few times they pay him, the money goes quickly. I think he slept with Alice, that Asaba woman in our yard. I can't stand him. I can't stand him close to me. (p.338)

The lovely relationship of Olanna and Odenigbo goes sour because of the changes that the war brings to their individual lives. The writer says in an article about the novel:

When you are deprived of the comforts of the life you know, when you go from eating sandwiches to eating lizards, how does this change your relationship, your sense of self, your idea of selfconfidence, your relationship with the people you love? How does it change the things you value?  
(Adichie 51)

The experiences Olanna go through in the course of the war, cause a change in the relationship between her and Odenigbo.

The war also causes a change in Olanna's personal belief system. At Nsukka, when

Mama brings Amala's baby to Olanna, Ugwu examines the baby and tells Olanna, "Mama said the baby looks like her mother. It is her mother come back." In response to this, Olanna says, "People just look alike, it doesn't mean they reincarnate."

(p.253) Despite Ugwu's insistence, Olanna does not believe in reincarnation. However, when the war hits her hard in the face with the disappearance of her twin sister, she is devastated. She gives her uncle money to consult a *dibia*. She goes to the River Niger to throw in Kainene's photograph. When she does not get the desired results, Odenigbo tells her not to believe in what the *dibia* says. She responds, "I do believe in it. I believe in everything. I believe in anything that will bring my sister home. (p.433) Olanna not only believes in reincarnation, but in everything including the *dibia*. She tells Odenigbo, "Our people say that we all reincarnate, don't they?...when I come back in my next life, Kainene will be my sister." (p.433) The pain of losing her sister is so great for Olanna, so much so that the only means for her to make meaning in her life and move on is to hold onto the cultural belief of reincarnation.

The war does not only affect Olanna. It affects Odenigbo as well. Odenigbo before the war is described as a confident man. A man who throws "his legs out in an aggressive confidence: the gait of a person who would not ask for directions but remained sure that he would somehow get there." (p.27)

At the beginning of the war, despite his changed circumstance, he believes fervently in Biafra and puts in efforts to make war-time life secure and comfortable for his family. He builds bunkers in both houses in which they stay in Umuahia. He moves from being an instructor of Mathematics to working at the Manpower Directorate of

Biafra. Despite the tedious nature of his work at the Manpower Directorate of Biafra, the long walk, Odenigbo comes “home each day with lit up eyes.” (p.262) He tells Olanna, “We’ll get our life back soon, in a free Biafra.” (p.262) Odenigbo’s calmness about the war situation actually bewilders Olanna.

Odenigbo’s change in behaviour comes when he experiences a personal loss. The death of his mother changes him completely. He returns home after his inability to cross the occupied roads to go and bury his mother. He keeps himself in the room crying and blaming himself saying, “I never did enough for Mama.” (p.331) When his wife consoles him, he tells her he is fine.

But he no longer went into the interior with the Agitator corps, no longer returned with lit – up eyes. Instead, he went to Tanzania Bar everyday and came back with a taciturn set to his mouth. When he did talk, he spoke of his unpublished research papers left behind in Nsukka, how they were almost enough to make him a full professor, and heaven knew what the vandals would do with them.  
(p.322)

With his mother’s death, Odenigbo loses his optimism about Biafra. He talks less, drinks more and also broods over the things the war has denied him of. Whenever Biafra succeeded in conquering the Nigerian soldiers in some towns, Odenigbo always celebrated with Olanna. However, with his mother’s death, he only watches the dancing neighbours with blank expression. His drinking is so intense that Olanna could still smell the heavy scent of local gin in their room while she sits in the yard.

It trailed him, it clouded the paths that he walked. His drinking in Nsukka – his auburn, finely refined brandy- had sharpened his mind, distilled his ideas and his confidence so that he sat in the living room and talked and everybody listened. This drinking here silenced him.

It made him retreat into himself and look out at the world With  
bleary, weary eyes. (p.380)

The juxtaposition of Odenigbo's character in *Nsukka* with that of Umuahia brings out how changed he is presently as a result of the war.

Kainene is another character through whom readers see how war can effect changes in the life of a person. Kainene is described as having boyish hips and looks "almost androgynous" (p.60) She is presented as a strong and resilient person throughout the entire novel. She is very frank and does not try to please anyone. Before the war, readers learn that Kainene is someone who does not forgive easily. When Olanna betrays her by sleeping with her lover, Richard, she remains calm though deeply hurt. Olanna herself confesses, "Kainene doesn't forgive easily. It will make no sense at all to tell her." (p.243) As expected, when Kainene finds out what has happened between Olanna and Richard, she questions Olanna while remaining "frightenly calm." Kainene ends the telephone conversation saying, "It was unforgivable." (p.243) When the war occurs, the experiences that Kainene goes through changes her unforgiving attitude. She sees how her steward Ikejide is killed. She also sees the many children who die from hunger at her refugee camp. She then pays Olanna a visit at Umuahia. Later when Olanna also visits her, she tells Olanna, "There are some things that are so unforgivable that they make other things easily forgivable." (p.347) Here, the novelist highlights the intensity of the suffering of the Biafrans in the course of the civil war. For someone who holds onto hurt like Kainene, who had purposed not to forgive her sister, to finally come to realize that her sister's offence is forgivable compared to what they as Biafrans have suffered at the hands of the

Nigerians only demonstrates that the Biafran plight is an immense one.



Kainene's confidence and fearlessness remains intact till the very end. Caught in the war situation, she does not sink into depression. She takes charge of a refugee camp as the food supplier. She witnesses countless people, especially children who die out of hunger but she does not lose hope or become bitter. Olanna looks at her and thinks of "how unrelenting Kainene's confidence was." (p.347) It is with this confidence and fearlessness that she decides to go and trade behind enemy lines. When the crops at the camp fail as a result of the harmattan, she can also no longer get supply of food for the camp. She is determined to get food for the camp so decides to trade behind enemy lines. It is sad that at the end of the novel, Kainene is missing and there seems to be no clue about her whereabouts. Kainene's disappearance at the end of the novel is the writer's way of allowing readers to experience the grief and sense of loss that war brings. This is because the writer allows readers to know very well this confident, fearless and extremely strong character. When such an admirable character is lost through the war at the end of the novel, readers feel the loss and can appreciate "the monumental loss of human capital that Biafra represented." (Adichie 51) Hodges, commenting on the significance of the disappearance of Kainene at the end of the novel says that it

Makes a more fitting metaphor for what's lost at war's end than her death would have been. Her death would be final and measurable, her absence remains irresolvable. As a result, there is no closing of the book; indeed, the novel's last gesture is towards a book yet to be opened...This lack of closure is relevant because the legacy of the Biafran war (itself the legacy of colonial policy) continues to shape life in Nigeria. (11)

The effect of the Nigerian Civil War can also be seen through Richard. He is a

British who comes to Nigeria mainly because of his fascination with Igbo-Ukwu art.

He is a writer who for a greater part of the novel does not know what he is writing.

He falls in love with Kainene and is happy with her. He witnesses the massacre of Igbo at the Kano airport and is shattered. While in Susan's bathroom after the incident,

He stared at himself and wondered if it really happened, if he really had seen men die, if the lingering smells of shattered liquor bottles and bloodied human bodies were only in his imagination. But he knew it had certainly happened... He lowered his head to the sink and began to cry.  
(p.155)

Richard sees the killing of Igbo and he expresses grief like any other Biafran would do. He contrasts with Susan. They are both British, but while Susan hears about the massacres and makes a callous statement, Richard witnesses it and is seriously affected. In fact,

He had often wished that he would lose his mind, or that his memory would suppress itself, but instead everything took on a terrible transparency and he had only to close his eyes to see the freshly dead bodies on the floor of the airport and to recall the pitch of the screams.  
(p.165)

The seeing of the massacres becomes an unforgettable experience for him which makes him an ardent defender of the Biafran cause. It can be argued that it is from this time that Richard begins to write with a sense of purpose and direction. He reads the foreign press' reportage on the Nigerian situation and feels a strong urge to write and correct the misinformation. He writes about the massacres and states the historical antecedents

of the antagonism between the tribes of the north and south of Nigeria. Richard plays a significant role in the novel. He serves as a white chronicler of the events on the war.

Though he is British, Richard is honest enough to identify Britain's role in the massacres. He sees the plight of Biafrans, identifies with them even as he examines and appreciates the difficult situation Biafrans are in. He feels he is a "Biafran in a way he could never have been Nigerian – he was here at the beginning; he shared in the birth." (p.168) He agrees to write for the Propaganda Directorate of Biafra. When he takes two American journalists around, he is actually annoyed with their attitude.

He keeps saying, 'we' and 'our', drawing attention to his being part of Biafra. The war brings Richard closer to Kainene. He moves from Nsukka to join her at Port Harcourt and they later move to Orlu. At Orlu they become very intimate. This is "the only reason he (Richard) was grateful for the war." (p.308)

When Kainene disappears at the end of the novel, he is devastated. Kainene is the person through whom Richard establishes his connection with Biafra. Her disappearance breaks his connection with Biafra. At the end of the novel, Kainene is no more, Biafra is no more, hence his sense of belonging is destroyed. It is therefore not surprising to find him give up the book he had wanted to write about the war since he realizes that (perhaps without Kainene, his only link with Biafra) the war is not his story to tell. As he gives up all hope of finding Kainene, he knows that without her "his life would always be like a candlelit room; he would see things only in shadows, only in half glimpses." (p.430) Through Richard, the emptiness that the deaths of people in the cause of war brings to loved ones left behind is emphasized. Ugwu is one character through whom the effects of the civil war can be seen. He is about thirteen

years when he is sent to serve Odenigbo. He stays with him for about four years before the civil war.

When the war occurs, Ugwu seems not to understand their changed circumstances.

He complains about their house and hates the relief food. After his final conscription, Ugwu is afraid and yet excited to be fighting for Biafra. When he is told about their upcoming operation, “Ugwu’s fear mixed with excitement at the thought that he was a soldier fighting for Biafra.” (p.359) His success in his first operation wins him the admiration of his friends. He is not lucky in his second operation. An accident occurs that leaves him hospitalized while word is sent to Olanna that he is dead. When he is found and he joins them at Orlu, he helps at the refugee camp. He then begins to write about Arize’s death in Kano and other important events about the war. One of the significant effects of the war is that it brings out the potential in Ugwu. Like Richard, the war kindles him into writing. It is significant that Ugwu is the author of the snippets of *The Book* within the novel. Earlier in the novel, it seems to be

Richard’s since he is the only writer in the novel. It comes as a surprise when at the end of the novel, readers learn that ***The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died*** is written by Ugwu. The writer explains that she makes Ugwu and not Richard the author because she is “interested in the less obvious narrators.” and also to “make a strongly-felt political point about who should be writing the stories of Africa.” (*The Story Behind the Book* 3)

The war also causes a change in the value system of Ugwu. Initially, Odenigbo and Olanna are Ugwu’s role models. He wants to read more and become like his master. With the secession and war, Professor Ekwenugo and Ojukwu become his inspiration.



He tells Olanna, “Ojukwu is a great man.” (p.177) He also looks up to Professor Ekwenugo as evidence of Biafra’s survival. The narrator says, “Professor Ekwenugo had always been his (Ugwu) proof that Biafra would triumph.” (p.354) When the Professor dies Ugwu’s proof is no more. In addition to this Ugwu’s experience on the battle front causes him to rethink. He is now not interested in listening to Radio Biafra to hear the war reports.

When they listened to Radio Biafra,  
Ugwu would get up and walk away.  
The shabby theatrics of the war  
reports, the voice that forced morsels  
of invented hope down people’s  
throats, did not interest him. (p.399)

At this point, Ugwu seems to be aware of the reality and does not want to live on false hope. His belief in the triumph and greatness of Biafra is no more. When Harrison brings the radio close to him, telling him about the great speech his Excellency, Ojukwu is about to give, Ugwu responds, “There is no such thing as greatness.” (p.399) This profound statement that Ugwu makes demonstrates his maturity in the course of the war.

So far, this chapter of the study has looked at the causes, the course and the effects of the Nigerian Civil War in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The causes of the war presented in the novel include the role of the British, the hatred of the Igbos, the massacre of Igbos in northern Nigeria and the secession of eastern Nigeria which directly leads to the war. These causes are revealed by the writer through dialogues, different settings, and characters, among others. For instance the writer uses ‘The Book’ to highlight the role colonialism played in creating and entrenching the ethnic rivalry that leads to the war. There is also the exploitations of different points of spatial setting to show the

widespread nature of the anti-Igbo sentiment that leads the pogroms and finally the war. The effect of the war is mainly seen through the plot structure of the novel, characters and the settings of Orlu and Umuahia. The writer uses a back and forth plot which captures the incoherence and confusion of war time life. The changes that occur in the main characters in the course of the war also demonstrate the effects of the war. In the novel, the writer presents how the Nigerian state's systems and structures failed resulting in the massacres and a breakaway republic. She also presents how the Biafran state failed under attack from Nigeria and its international allies. The novel can therefore be seen as presenting

an instance of state failure twice over – first a Nigerian failure so severe that it led to civil war and a breakaway republic and, second, the Biafran State's own collapse under attack from Nigeria and its international allies. (Marx 611)



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PRESENTATION OF MILITARY RULE IN

#### ***PURPLE HIBISCUS***

Post-independence Africa is faced with a major challenge of political leadership as many African countries have been plunged into military rule in their journey of selfgovernance. It is not surprising that Chimamanda discusses the theme of military rule in her two novels since her country has a history of several military rulers. Nigeria celebrated a decade of uninterrupted constitutional rule recently on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2009. It is an indisputable fact that “an African literary artist must have a stake in the serious political and social issues of his times and people. He cannot create in a vacuum if his works must have relevance, authenticity and acceptance.” (Emeyonu 35) It is exactly for this reason that Chimamanda in her novel, *Purple Hibiscus* and handles into detail the very nature of military rule. *Purple Hibiscus* was written a few years after the installation of a constitutional government in Nigeria. According to Susan Andrade, *Purple Hibiscus* “sees no end in sight to political corruption and as Adichie wrote her novel early in the new century, it was not clear that the then recently elected government would avoid another coup.” (Andrade 97)

This chapter examines Chimamanda Ngozi’s presentation of military rule in *Purple Hibiscus*. The literary devices with which the novelist highlights the nature and effects of military regimes will be discussed.

*Purple Hibiscus* demonstrates clearly the brutalities that military rule unleashes on the citizens of the country. *Purple Hibiscus* captures a wealthy Nigerian family and the

oppressive domestic environment in which they live. The head of the family, Eugene Achike, caught up in fanatic Catholicism terrorizes the entire family and imposes a senseless order on the family. The family finally breaks up when Eugene's wife, Beatrice, tired of the cruel abuses of her husband, poisons him. The love between mother and children is however so strong to re-unite the entire family as they look forward to a home filled with love and freedom. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the novelist uses the brutal experiences that the Achike family goes through under the headship of Eugene Achike to highlight the brutalities and excesses of military rule and the effect of this bad governance on the general well-being of the people of Nigeria. The novelist thus uses the smaller picture of the family to depict the larger picture of the country.

The ineffectiveness of military rulers is portrayed by Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus*. Though *Purple Hibiscus* is Adichie's first novel, it is set not in the sixties when the civil war took place. The setting is much later, a decade or more after the civil war. It can therefore be deduced that by this time, Nigerians had experienced enough coups and life under various military governments to be able to judge whether or not military rule is the way forward. In *Purple Hibiscus*, when a coup takes place, it is not met with any sort of warm reception as found in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It is during family time for the Achike family. On that fateful Saturday that the coup took place, Kambili, the main character in the novel and the narrator of the story tells readers that his father, Eugene upon hearing that a coup had been staged:



looked sad; his rectangular lips seemed to sag. Coups begat coups, he said, telling us about the bloody coups of the sixties, which ended in a civil war just after he left Nigeria to study in England. A coup always began a vicious cycle. Military men would always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk.  
(p.32)

Adichie through Eugene emphasises the fact that one successful coup attempt is a motivating factor for several others to follow, jeopardizing the stability of a country. It is because of this fact that this coup is met with strong opposition by the general public. Kambili tells readers about the demonstrations after the coup. She says:

The first week after the coup, Kevin plucked green tree branches every morning and stuck them to the car, lodged above the number plate, so that the demonstrators at Government Square would let us drive past. The green branches meant Solidarity....I wondered what it would be like to join them, chanting "Freedom" standing in the way of cars. (p.35)

From the demonstrations against the military regime and from what Eugene tells his family, it becomes clear that military regimes seem to have lost their popularity. When readers compare the reception of the January 1966 coup, depicted in *Half of a Yellow Sun* with that of the coup which takes place in the eighties, portrayed in *Purple Hibiscus*, the opposition of the general populace against military rule becomes very clear. This presentation confirms what M.S.C Okolo says:

At one point, it was commonly understood that the armed forces were agents of modernisation. This may have contributed to the favourable reception that military coups once enjoyed in much of Africa. This is no longer the case. Now the dominant view is an opposition to military intervention.

(42)

The novelist by capturing the demonstrations and Eugene's opinion makes it clear that military rule, according to the majority of Nigerians, is no longer popular. Apart from presenting the coup, the novel also gives a detailed account of life under a military government through the happenings in the Achike family. The novelist's use of symbolism, characterization, setting, irony, point of view among others, all aid in the effective presentation of the oddities of Nigeria under military rule.

The writer establishes parallels between the Achike family under the headship of Eugene and Nigeria under the leadership of the military. For example, when Kambili breaks the Eucharistic fast, Eugene is not concerned that his daughter ate to sustain the medicine she had taken. He beats his wife and children for conniving to break the Eucharistic fast. Kambili describes how Papa beats the three of them with his "heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle." (p.110)

It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back. (p.110)

Kambili compares their plight to that of cows being shepherded by Fulani nomads.

She says:

Sometimes I watched the Fulani nomads, white jellabas flapping against their legs in the wind, making clucking sounds as they herded their cows across the roads in Enugu with a switch, each smack of the switch swift and precise. Papa was like a Fulani nomad— although he did not have their spare, tall body as he swung his belt at Mama, Jaja and me, muttering that the devil would not win.  
(p.110)

The ironic juxtaposition of the plight of members of the Achike family to that of cows only goes to emphasise the pathetic situation in which they find themselves.

The cows are senseless and so need the nomad's switch to guide and direct them, Kambili, Jaja and Mama obviously are not.

Similar to what happens in the Achike family is soldiers' treatment of the general public, which readers learn from Kambili. The military men in charge of Nigeria subject the populace to coercion and the militarization of social life. The novelist through Kambili presents how civilians are molested by soldiers during the military regime. Kambili tells readers that after the coup,

there were soldiers at the roadblock near the market, walking around, caressing their long guns. They stopped some cars and searched them. Once, I saw a man kneeling on the road beside his Peugeot 504, with his hands raised high in the air.  
(p.35-36)

The presence of soldiers on the road can be seen as a way for the military to intimidate civilians. Why will soldiers and not the police man a roadblock? And for what offence will a man be asked to come out of his car and kneel down with hands raised? These

are all indications of an attempt to 'militarise' society. Even poor market women are not spared. They get their share of the molestation and

militarization. Kambili tells readers that in the market:

Soldiers were milling around. Market women were shouting and many had both hands placed on their heads, in the way that people do to show despair or shock. A woman lay in the dirt, wailing...I saw the soldier raise a whip in the air. The whip was long. It curled in the air before it landed on the woman's shoulder. Another soldier was kicking down trays of fruits, squashing papayas with his boots and laughing. (p.52)

The offence of these poor market women is that their stalls are considered as illegal structures. For their offence, the market women are not allowed to take their wares or move their structures. The soldiers demolish their structures as well as the goods they are selling. The soldiers are actually delighted to be carrying out this duty. The ruthless handling of the general public by soldiers depicted above attests to the fact that "repression, human rights abuse, the abuse of power, ...and the general devaluation of life increased under military rule more than at any other time." (Ihonvbere 511) Like Eugene Achike who is not perturbed that his daughter broke the Eucharistic fast for a reason, the military government is also not concerned that these stalls are the source of livelihood of these women and so they demolish them while whipping the women. Another instance where the writer establishes a parallel between the Achike family and Nigeria under the military is the scolding of Jaja and Kambili's feet by Eugene. Eugene's father comes to Nsukka while Jaja and Kambili are visiting Aunt Ifeoma. Eugene learns about the presence of his father (whom he considers a heathen) in



Ifeoma's house and goes to pick his children. He is angry with his children for not telling him about their grandfather's presence in Ifeoma's house. He is angry that they "saw the sin and clearly walked right into it." (p.201) For this offence, Eugene deliberately scalds the feet of his children. Kambili narrates her ordeal:

He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it towards my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen... I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding. (p.201)

Kambili's narration of her ordeal is touching. It is quite bizarre that anyone will intentionally boil water and pour on someone's feet in the name of discipline, but this is what happens to Jaja and Kambili.

On the national scene, the military men do not scald anyone's feet but they engage in actions that can be equated to what Eugene does to Jaja and Kambili. Ade Coker, the editor of the Standard newspaper, is one character in the novel who suffers immensely under the military regime. He does a big cover story in the Standard about how the Head of State and his wife paid people to transport heroin abroad. He questions the recent execution of three men and asks who the real drug barons are. For publishing this story, soldiers arrest him on his way from work. Kambili imagines how Ade Coker was arrested:

I imagined Ade Coker being pulled out of his car, being squashed into another car, perhaps a black station wagon filled with soldiers, their guns hanging out of the windows. (p.46)

The situation could not be any better, if not worse than what Kambili imagines. After one week, Eugene gets Ade Coker out of jail. Eugene tells his family about the experience of Coker in jail, “They put out cigarettes on his back. They put out so many cigarettes on his back” (p.50) The putting out of cigarettes on the back of Ade Coker can be likened to the scalding of the feet of Jaja and Kambili though the degree of pain is different. The military terrorize Ade Coker because he has strayed; he has put out a story that casts a slur on the Head of State and his wife. He is thus disciplined by the putting out of cigarettes on his back just as Eugene also puts his children in check by scalding their feet so that they will not ‘walk into sin.’

One other significant incident that can be used to link the happenings in the Achike family with that on the political scene of Nigeria is the miscarriage of Beatrice. Eugene beats up his pregnant wife to the extent that she miscarries. The only possible offence of Beatrice is her request to stay in the car and not visit Father Benedict after mass. Beatrice due to her pregnancy feels nauseous and asks that she be allowed to wait in the car while the rest of the family drop in to visit Father Benedict as they usually do after mass. Eugene does not show any concern for his wife. He asks her twice, “Are you sure you want to stay in the car?” (p.37) Beatrice finally joins them to visit the priest and they return home. After lunch, Eugene prays and asks God “to forgive those who had tried to thwart His will, who had put selfish desires first and had not wanted to visit His servant after mass.” (p.40) After lunch, Kambili is in her room when she hears some sounds:

...when I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents hand carved bedroom door. If I imagined it hard enough, then it would be true. I sat down, closed my eyes and started to count. Counting made it

seem not that long, made it seem not that bad. Sometimes it was over before I even got to twenty. I was at nineteen when the sounds stopped. (p.41)

Eugene beats his pregnant wife severely after which he carries her over his shoulder “like the jute sacks of his rice factory.” As he carries her to the hospital, blood stains are left behind and it is Jaja and Kambili who “cleaned up the trickle of blood, which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red water-colour all the way downstairs.” (p.41) Eugene beats his wife for trying (not succeeding) to thwart his efforts of visiting the servant of God, causing her to miscarry. Kambili and Jaja see the blood stains resulting from the beating their mother has received and it is they who have to clean the mess.

Similarly, on the political scene of Nigeria, the military take brutal actions against certain people that seriously affect their children. This is what happens in the case of Ade Coker. Nwankiti Ogechi, a radical pro-democracy activist, mentioned in the novel disappears without a trace. Ade Coker has a source that informs him that the powers that be have wasted Nwankiti. The Head of State proposes to give an exclusive interview to Ade Coker provided he does not publish any story on the whereabouts of Nwankiti. Ade Coker refuses this offer and publishes the story given by ‘The Source’ which results in the suspending of Nigeria from the Commonwealth.

According to the Source:

Soldiers shot Nwankiti Ogechi in a bush in Minna. And then poured acid on his body to melt his flesh off his bones, to kill him even when he was already dead. (p.207)

Ade Coker is not spared for putting out this story. He is severely punished for failing to see that this kind of information falls under the 'NTBB' (Not To Be Broadcast category of President Sam in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*) Ade Coker is sent a parcel from the Head of State while at breakfast with his family. He is blown up when he opens the package. His death is pathetic. Kambili tells of her nightmares in which she sees Ade Coker's "charred remains spattered on his dining table, on his daughter's school uniform, on his baby's cereal bowl, on his plate of eggs." (p.213) The description of the death of both Nwankiti and Ade Coker allows readers to visualize the victims suffering such fate and then cannot help but feel sorry for these people who died speaking the truth and fighting for the course they saw as right for their country. They do not only get killed, but their entire family go through a traumatic experience as in the case of the daughter of Ade Coker. That poor child after seeing her own father blown up before her eyes is unable to speak. It is after rigorous medical attention both at home and abroad that the child is able to say, 'mama' almost four months after the father's death. Jaja puts her situation more pathetically, "she will never heal. She may have started talking now, but she will never heal." (p.263) Here, the novelist highlights the fact that there are some experiences that people go through that affect them for life. For a child to go through this experience is traumatic indeed. Years will pass but the psychological effect of this episode on the innocent child will still be there because each time she closes her eyes, the scene will come as fresh as before. The novelist by portraying the effect of brutal military action on an innocent child invites readers to question if brutal military rule is the way forward.

The novelist allows readers to place Jaja and Kambili's cleaning of their mother's blood side by side with the effect of the blowing up of Ade Coker on his daughter. Jaja



and Kambili are affected psychologically and are also traumatized by this ruthless handling of Mama and indeed the entire family. Earlier, when Kambili told Jaja about Mama's pregnancy, Jaja closed his eyes for a while, opened them and said, "We will take care of the baby; we will protect him." Kambili confesses, "I knew that Jaja meant from Papa, but I did not say anything about protecting the baby." (p.31) Clearly, Jaja and Kambili recognise the threat that Papa poses to the survival of the baby since their own life is one endless trauma. There are a number of occasions that this incident is recalled by Kambili. When Kambili sits by her books to study, she says, "The black type blurred, the letters swimming into one another, and then changed to a bright red, the red of fresh blood. The blood was watery, flowing from Mama, flowing from my eyes." (p. 43) She continues to see the print in her textbooks as a red blur for a long time. Apart from the print in her textbooks, Kambili easily recalls the incident. On one occasion, she pours juice on their table cloth. She says, "Mama hastily placed a napkin on the spot, and when she raised the reddened napkin, I remembered her blood on the stairs. For especially Kambili, Mama's blood on the stairs is an unforgettable experience. Just as Eugene's handling of Beatrice and the entire family leaves Jaja and Kambili psychologically scarred for life, so does the military Head of State's blowing up of Ade Coker in the presence of his daughter. The brutal discipline of Eugene is not healthy for his family, so is the ruthless handling of civilians by the military.

Having examined the incidents that liken the Achike family to Nigeria under the military, the study will now focus on the tool used for this terrorisation by both Eugene and the military. Eugene uses his fanatic brand of Catholicism to molest members of his family while the military, wielding the coercive powers of the state uses these instruments of violence to intimidate and brutalize the general public. This presentation

of Catholicism and the military is a feature of postcolonial literary theory which examines what exists and happens after the end of colonial rule. Both

Catholicism and the military institution are colonial products.

Eugene's fanatic Catholicism as a means of ensuring discipline and the well being of his family is similar to the military's involvement in politics. Military regimes confirm the assertion by some literary giants like Ayi Kwei Armah that the structures and identity that Africans inherited at independence contribute to some extent, to Africa's present predicament. According to B.N Ayittey, traditionally there were generally no standing armies in indigenous Africa. With the exception of Asante, Dahomey, Zulu and Muslim states, the over two thousand tribes in Africa did not have standing armies. To Ayittey, "standing armies were introduced into Africa by the colonialists to enforce their rule and suppress African aspirations for freedom.

Armies were thus viewed as agents of imperialism and instruments of oppression."

(135) To people like Armah and Ayittey, these foreign systems which were embraced at independence are not entirely compatible with indigenous African systems. Even if they are beneficial, there have been many instances of their abuse that render the benefits irrelevant. That is the case of the military in Africa. The military are trained to defend the state, especially from external aggression. The flagrant involvement of the military in the politics of Africa and the mess that they have created raises questions about the military's contribution to the socio-political development of African states.

Christianity and for that matter Catholicism, like the military institution, is something that is foreign to traditional African society. Wole Soyinka acknowledges this when he posits that

Africa was conquered by civilisations which claimed as their authority both Christianity and Islam, and our authentic being, authentic culture was submerged and really subverted by these two religions. (Appiah 783)

Obviously, Christianity, and for that matter Catholicism, was not part of the ‘authentic pre – colonial’ African identity. Several literary works present Christianity as a tool which was used to subdue and colonise Africa. At independence, Christianity formed part of the ‘acquired identity’ of many Africans. It is this system (Catholicism) that Eugene Achike wants to use to correct the perceived wrongs in his family. There is no doubt that Ifeoma is right when she says that Eugene is “too much of a colonial product.” (p.21) The novelist makes it a point to emphasise the incompatibility of the inherited systems and structures with indigenous African society. This is seen through what Eugene’s father says about the Christian religion. He tells Ifeoma and her children about a conversation he had with some missionaries some time ago:

One day I said to them, Where is this god you worship? They said he was like Chukwu, that he was in the sky. I asked then, Who is the person that was killed, the person that hangs on the wood outside the mission? They said he was the son, but that the son and father are equal. It was then that I knew the white man was mad. The father and the son are equal?... Do you not see? That is why Eugene can disregard me, because he thinks we are equal. (p.92)

The above statement by Papa Nnukwu shows clearly the contrasts between the inherited systems and indigenous African tradition. Eugene’s failure to bridge the gap between his Catholic beliefs and his society makes him cruel and mean towards his

own family. He becomes insensitive and his entire family suffers immensely as a result. He becomes just like the military that have gone overboard in their effort to right the wrongs in society. Eugene therefore comes to represent the unnamed soldier who stages a coup and oppresses people in society. In his case, it is his family that suffers. The Achike family then becomes a symbol of Nigeria under military rule. The writer also uses the setting of the novel to project the abusive nature of Nigeria under the military. The actions in the novel revolve around three places: Enugu, Abba and Nsukka

In Enugu, readers, see the happenings within the Achike family and in turbulent Nigeria. In the Achike family, there is the suffocating discipline put in place by Eugene. The description of the house of the Achike's is suggestive of the experience they go through. Kambili says that their house is very big to the extent that it can hold a hundred people doing the usual somersaults of the 'atilogu' dance. She further indicates that their "compound walls, topped by coiled electric wires, were so high I could not see the cars driving by on our street. (p.17) The huge house with so much space and high walls present an imposing picture which is suggestive of entrapment. While in this big house, members of the Achike family are prevented by the high walls from having a view of the outside world. Also in the house, the strict nature of Eugene prevents them from expressing their thoughts and feelings freely, to the extent that sometimes brother and sister have to rely on an eye language to communicate. It seems members of the Achike family are trapped in the excesses of Eugene.

At home, whenever Eugene feels that a member of the family has gone wrong, he disciplines that person to the point that discipline becomes abusive. For example when



he sees the painting of Papa Nnukwu with Jaja and Kambili, he tears the piece of paper. When Kambili clings to the pieces of paper, Eugene is angry that Kambili is clinging to the photograph of a heathen. To make her move away he beats her so severely that she is hospitalized. Kambili narrates what happens:

‘Get up!’ Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckle on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes...The kicking increased in tempo,...I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of the painting...The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal buckle landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy, because I could hear a swoosh in the air. More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped into the quiet. (p.217)

Kambili stays in the hospital for a while as a result of this severe beating. Due to this and many other instances where Eugene severely punishes anyone who goes against his orders, mother and children are filled with fear so much so that even speech is guarded by the principle of pleasing Papa. For instance when Papa talks about Nigeria going down as a result of the military regime, Kambili confesses, “God will deliver us,” I said, knowing Papa would like my saying that. (p.39) Between Jaja and Kambili, continuous oppression has resulted in their inability to speak freely and so they resort to an ‘ansusu anya’, a language of the eyes with which they are able to communicate. They use this language of the eyes when Mama is obliged to join them to visit Father Benedict after mass despite her feeling nauseous. Kambili says, “Jaja spoke to me with his eyes: *What if she vomits?*” (p.38) Neither Jaja nor Kambili can question Eugene’s decision so they have to speak about it with their eyes.

On another occasion when Jaja and Kambili are told that they will be visiting their aunt in Nsukka for the first time, Kambili asks Jaja if he wants to go to Nsukka.

Kambili reports, ‘ Yes’ he said, and his eyes said that he knew I did too. And I could not find words in our eye language to tell him how my throat tightened at the thought of five days without Papa’s voice, without his footsteps on the stairs.” (p.116) Jaja and Kambili cannot express any outward excitement at the news of going to Nsukka for fear of displeasing their father. Even when their father is not close by, they still have to fall on their eye language to express themselves. Their father’s authoritative nature has made them withdrawn. Readers learn this through what Ade Coker and Amaka say about Jaja and Kambili. Ade Coker says, “They are always so quiet, so quiet.” (p.65) Amaka also says that Kambili behaves funny, while Jaja looks strange. She concludes, “Something is not right with them.” (p.150) Eugene’s family undoubtedly is affected by his abuses.

The oppressive domestic environment of the Achike family in Enugu corresponds to what happens there on the national scene. Eugene’s tyrannical rule in his family affects his wife and children negatively. They are unable to express themselves for fear of incurring the displeasure of Eugene. In the same vein, the people of Nigeria are afraid to speak their minds for fear of what the military government will do to them. When the coup is staged, apart from the Standard, all the other newspapers are afraid to criticize the military’s involvement in Nigerian politics. In a dialogue between Eugene and his family, he reveals the reason for the silence of the newspapers. He tells his family, “What a headline. They are all afraid. Writing about how corrupt the civilian government was, as if they think the military will not be corrupt.” (p.33-34) Again,

when soldiers close the offices of the Standard newspaper, the other newspapers are afraid to report it and those who do give the story no prominence. Kambili tells readers that in the Guardian newspaper, “The story of soldiers closing down the Standard was tucked into the middle page, next to advertisements for women’s shoes imported from Italy.” (p154) Both the Achike family and the people of Nigeria are ruled by fear.

In Abba, the hometown of the Achike’s the tension and hostilities within the family minimizes. The house of the Achikes in Abba is equally if not more imposing than that of Enugu. Readers are told that the house has a fountain. It also has high gates that are “looming black.” (p.90) It is also suggestive of entrapment, however, in this case their gates are always opened due to the communal nature of village life as almost the entire village troops into the house as part of the celebration of Christmas. This lessens the tension in the family. Kambili tells readers about significant changes that they enjoy in their village, Abba, which they do not have in Enugu. She says that in Abba, “our rooms adjoined; back in Enugu, they were far apart.” (p.66) She explains that “In Abba, Jaja and I had no schedules. We talked more and sat alone in our rooms less, because Papa was too busy entertaining the endless stream of visitors...” (p.67) It can be seen that in Abba, the tension in the Achike family is less because communal living in the village does not allow Eugene enough time to enforce his strict orders. For instance, when Eugene gets angry with Jaja and Kambili for staying more than fifteen minutes at their grandfather’s house, Kambili thinks Papa will slap them. To her surprise, Papa just tells them to finish eating and go and pray for forgiveness after which he leaves to attend to some other business. Kambili says that after Papa went upstairs, “The silence he left was heavy but comfortable, like a well-worn prickly cardigan on a bitter morning.” (p.77) Clearly, Kambili and Jaja

enjoy a little freedom and respite in Abba. Also the strict order imposed on their lives seen in their daily schedules their father gives them is absent in Abba.

Jaja and Kambili's evolution into a life of liberty becomes complete in Nsukka. The writer uses the setting of Nsukka (Aunt Ifeoma's house) and the unique character of Ifeoma to establish the contrast between an oppressive domestic environment and a liberal one.

When Jaja and Kambili arrive at Nsukka, the first thing Kambili notices is how different her cousins behave at table compared to how they behave at home. At home, when a new product from Papa's factory is brought home, mother and children are expected to "compliment Papa's new product. We always did, each time an employee from one of his factories brought a product sample for us." (p.21) The family is expected to compliment Papa's products and not criticize. This explains why when Amaka comments on Papa's juice, Kambili is shocked. Amaka tells Papa, "It's a little too sweet. It would be nicer if you reduced the sugar in it." (p.106) At this comment, a knot forms in Kambili's throat and so she is unable to get a mouthful of rice down. For Kambili and her family, they must always speak with a purpose at table; you say only what will please Papa.

At Nsukka, Ifeoma and her family behave differently at table. Prayer over the food is very short. Mother and children talk freely with the children talking more. Amaka and her siblings are allowed to take their food from the dining area to the living room to watch TV. Kambili observes her cousins at table and acknowledges:

I had felt as if I were not there, that I



was just observing a table where you  
could just say anything at anytime to  
anyone, where the air was free for you  
to breathe as you wished. (p.128)

Kambili by this statement attests to the fact that table manners at Nsukka are very different from what pertains in Enugu.

Apart from table manners, Ifeoma's way of training her children is very different from that of Eugene. Ifeoma allows her children to make their own choices without imposing on them. For instance when she decides to go on pilgrimage to Aokpe, Jaja and Obiora decide to stay behind but she does not mind. Kambili tells readers that Aunt Ifeoma smiles and says that since there was no male she would call Father

Amadi to join them. She is unlike Eugene who forces the entire family to visit Father Benedict after mass. Again, when Amaka refuses to be confirmed because she does not want to take a Christian name, Ifeoma gets annoyed but she does not beat her.

Probably, she sees it as Amaka's decision and she respects it. In the case of Eugene, Jaja does not come first in his first Holy Communion class and he deforms his little finger as a punishment. Jaja did not refuse to take part, he only did not come first.

Kambili narrates what happened:

Papa took him upstairs and locked the door. Jaja in tears came out supporting his left hand with his right and Papa drove him to St. Agnes hospital. Later, Jaja told me that Papa had avoided his right hand because it is the hand he writes with. (p.153)

When one compares Ifeoma's treatment of Amaka with Eugene's treatment of Jaja, it becomes clear that while Ifeoma is very liberal, Eugene is unreasonably strict.

Ifeoma being liberal does not mean that she does not correct her children when they go wrong. When Obiora insults her friend, she asks her son immediately to go and wait

for her in her room. After apologising to her friend, she storms inside and tells Obiora with a raised voice, “I do not quarrel with your disagreeing with my friend. I quarrel with how you have disagreed. I do not raise disrespectful children in this house do you hear me?” (p.250) It can be seen that Ifeoma allows her children to make their own choices and express their thoughts freely, but when they stray she makes sure to discipline them. Readers learn how Ifeoma disciplines her children through what Amaka tells Kambili. Amaka says:

I always got the stick on my palm and Obiora got his on his buttocks. Afterwards, we would talk about it for hours. I hated that. Just give me the lashes and let me out. But no, she explained why you had been flogged, what she expected you to do not to get flogged again. (p.250)

From what Amaka tells Kambili, it is gathered that Ifeoma’s way of punishing her children aims at correcting the children’s wrong behaviour without instilling fear in them. With Eugene, as seen in the deforming of Jaja’s little finger, he brutally punishes which instils fear in his children.

This liberal family environment Ifeoma offers Jaja and Kambili gives both of them a new opportunity to discover themselves. Jaja and Kambili discover a kind of family life that is absolutely different from what they have experienced in their entire life. This experience offers both of them a chance to re-assert themselves. As Kambili puts it, she is “like a football coach who had done a good job with her team and was satisfied to stand next to the eighteen-yard box and watch.(p.129) This brings out the best in her children. Kambili confirms that their situation is very different from her and Jaja. She compares the training her cousins receive from their mother with what she and Jaja have. She says:

It was what Aunt Ifeoma did to my cousins, I realised then, setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time believing they would scale the rod. And they did. It was different for Jaja and me. We did not scale the rod because we believed we could, we scaled it because we were terrified that we couldn't. (p.231)

Kambili by this statement makes it clear that Aunt Ifeoma offers her cousins a better opportunity that helps bring out their potential. In the case of Kambili and her brother, the fear that the autocracy of their father has instilled in them does not enhance the discovery of their potential. This fear makes Jaja and especially Kambili behave strangely.

The liberal atmosphere of Aunt Ifeoma's house brings tremendous changes in the lives of both Jaja and Kambili. Kambili herself observes the changes in Jaja. Jaja's shoulders broaden at Nsukka. He smiles broadly when Papa asks that they stay longer at Nsukka. Kambili discovers dimples that she never knew Jaja had. Both of them learn how to laugh. Kambili says, "I laughed. It seemed so easy now, laughter.

So many things seemed easy now. Jaja was laughing too..." (p.288) Kambili apart from learning to laugh also learns the art of questioning. She stops being moody. On one occasion, she admits as she asks Amaka a question:

What was Aunt Ifeoma talking about with her friend? I asked. I knew I would not have asked before. I would have wondered about it, but I would not have asked. (p.228)

Obviously, Aunt Ifeoma's house offers Kambili and Jaja new opportunities. Jaja after Nsukka turns defiant. Kambili who always tries to please his father, for once defies him. When Papa tears the painting of Papa Nnukwu, she continues to cling to the torn pieces even when his father tells her to get away to the extent that she gets seriously injured by her father. The acts of defiance by both Jaja and Kambili point out their quest to extricate themselves from the oppressive grip of their father. The 'positive defiance' of both Jaja and Kambili is as a result of the exposure Aunt Ifeoma gives them at Nsukka. Kambili recognises this and that is why even when her aunt is no longer at Nsukka, she decides to just go there and visit whoever is now residing in her aunt's house. She explains the significance of Nsukka in their lives when she says, "Nsukka could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up to your throat and come out as a freedom song. As laughter." (p.303) Aunt Ifeoma's house at Nsukka helps Jaja and Kambili to live out the university motto, "To restore the dignity of man." Kambili and especially Jaja seek desperately to take steps to re-assert themselves after Nsukka.

At Nsukka, there is also the university community from where aspects of the nature of military regimes are revealed. At the University of Nsukka, a sole administrator has been introduced and this sparks protests and demonstrations. Aunt Ifeoma explains:

We cannot sit back and let it happen, where else have you heard of such a thing as a sole administrator in a university. A governing council votes for a vice chancellor. That is the way it has worked since this university was built, that is the way it is supposed to work (p.227)



The novelist presents the university as a microcosm of the country. This is because the sole administrator is “the university’s equivalent of a head of state.” (p.228) Just as in a country, the electorates are the ones supposed to elect their president and not someone to impose himself on the electorates so is the case of the university that the governing council votes for the vice chancellor. The military, wanting to impose their type of rule in the university introduce the sole administrator. Just as in the novel people protest against the military regime and ask for freedom, so is it at the university. The students and some lecturers vehemently oppose the sole administrator. The mismanagement of the country under the military seen in the shortage of fuel and high prices of goods, strikes of health workers among others is seen in the university where there is not enough supply of water and electricity for the students. This precipitates the demonstrations that result in the closure of the university. Just as people who protest against military regimes are victimised, so is it in the university. Aunt Ifeoma and other lecturers who openly speak against the sole administrator are blacklisted as disloyal and Ifeoma is denied promotion to senior lecturer. The novelist undoubtedly presents the university, in addition to the family (Achike family) as a parallel of Nigeria under military rule.

Apart from the setting, the writer also uses characters to show the effects of military regimes. Eugene’s callousness affects his family just as the people of Nigeria are affected by the unbridled use of force by the military. The psychological effect of intimidation and brutality on individuals is exemplified through the characters Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili. How each of these characters reacts to the abuses of Eugene reflects the diverse ways different people of Nigeria react to the dictatorship of the military.

It is quite interesting how Beatrice reacts to the many abuses of her husband. She initially submits to the brutalities of Eugene. She thinks she is privileged to have Eugene as a husband. She believes that “A husband crowns a woman’s life.” (p.83) When she feels nauseous as a result of her pregnancy and does not want to visit Father Benedict, Eugene thinks she has put selfish desires first. He prays for her forgiveness. She accepts this as Kambili says that after Papa’s prayer, “Mama’s ‘Amen!’ resounded throughout the room.” (p.40) She accepts that she is at fault. When she is beaten by Eugene which results in her miscarriage, she returns from the hospital to the house and does nothing to stop Eugene’s abuses. In fact it is Eugene who rather asks the family to recite sixteen different novenas for her forgiveness. Beatrice watches as Eugene abuses their children. She seems powerless, unable to challenge or resist because she does not want to be “a woman with children and no husband.” (p.83) She continues to stay with Eugene and suffers a second miscarriage. In a dialogue between her and Aunt Ifeoma in the presence of Kambili she narrates what she went through:

You know that small table where we keep  
the family Bible, *nne*? Your father broke it  
on my belly. My blood finished on the floor  
even before he took me to St. Agnes. My  
doctor said there was nothing he could do to  
save it. (p.253)

Even after this painful experience, Beatrice still goes back to Eugene. She asks Ifeoma who insists that she leaves Eugene’s house, “Where would I go if I leave Eugene’s house? Tell me, where would I go?” (p.255) From what Beatrice herself says, she appears a helpless victim of oppression. She contains all the abuses of Eugene but when she reaches her breaking point, she takes a drastic and a desperate step; the bravest action she takes in the entire novel. She administers doses of poison in Eugene’s tea and this finally results in his death.

Beatrice's reaction to the tyranny of Eugene can be linked with the reaction of Nigerians to the military rulers. She contains all the abuses of Eugene because she does not have anywhere else to go. She is not also independent, financially. Her continuous stay with Eugene despite his many abuses is so that she and her children will be catered for. In this instance, she becomes just like Ifeoma's friend who says she would rather keep quiet if challenging the tyrant would deny her of her livelihood. Ifeoma's friend explains, "Do you think we do not all know the truth, *eh?* But *gwakerom*, will the truth feed your children? Will the truth pay their fees and buy their clothes?" (p.227-228) Just as Beatrice continues to keep quiet and stay with Eugene for the sake of her well being and that of their children, so does Ifeoma's friend refuse to challenge the idea of sole administrator at the University of Nsukka.

When finally Beatrice decides to end the domination of Eugene, it results in Jaja's imprisonment. She therefore becomes the symbol of the group of people whose inaction against tyranny for a long time compounds the problem so that when finally they take a drastic step, it has dire consequences on society.

On the other hand, Beatrice's elimination of Eugene can be viewed as being central to the liberation of the entire family. On the national scene, people like Ifeoma, tired of raising their voices against the dictator, tired of being victimized for their criticism of the military regime, take the realistic step of leaving Nigeria for other peaceful countries. Chiaku, Ifeoma's friend highlights the impact of the exodus of Nigerians from their country:

The educated ones leave, the ones with the  
potential to right the wrongs. They leave the  
weak behind. The tyrants continue to reign  
because the weak cannot resist. Do you not  
see it is a cycle? Who will break the cycle?

Amaka, Ifeoma's daughter agrees with this when in a dialogue with her brother, Obiora, she asks him, "what do you mean, leave? Why do we have to run away from our own country? Why can't we fix it?" (p.237) Through the dialogue between Chiaku and Ifeoma and that between Obiora and Amaka, the writer emphasizes the fact that leaving does not put an end to despotism. In the light of this, Beatrice becomes the character who takes the boldest action in the entire novel. If she had taken the option of leaving, she would have most probably left her children behind since she cannot support them financially. Her children will then continue to suffer Eugene's abuses. Her action emphasizes the fact that to stop tyranny, it is the tyrant who must go. Beatrice in a way can be likened to Chiaku who believes in staying to end tyrannical rule.

Jaja is a character who reacts in a way different from how his mother does. He is unique in his own right. He remains submissive to Eugene (Papa) until he and Kambili pay a visit to Aunt Ifeoma at Nsukka. There, Jaja sees the liberal environment in which his cousins live. Jaja undergoes tremendous changes in Nsukka. Jaja falls in love with working in the garden and also with the purple hibiscus planted by Aunt Ifeoma. Aunt Ifeoma coaches Jaja to emulate the defiance of King Jaja of Opobo, the defiant king who refused to "sell his soul for a bit of gunpowder like other kings did." (p.152) King Jaja of Opobo's real name was Jubo Jubogha. He used the name Jaja when he was dealing with the British. He was the founder and king of Opobo from December 1870 to September 1887. When at the Berlin Conference of 1884, Opobo was designated a British territory, King Jaja still refused to cease taxing British traders. His continued rebellion against the British caused his arrest and subsequent exile to the West Indies. Like Jaja of Opobo, Jaja Achike whose real name is Chukwuka begins to defy his



father's orders when he returns from Nsukka. He refuses to submit to the unnecessary dictates of his father. He asks to have the key to his room so that he could have his privacy. Kambili says,

"Of course Papa would never give it to him, he knew that, knew that Papa would never let us lock our doors." (p.198) Jaja asks for the key to his room knowing that his father will not give it to him, so it is his way of registering his dislike for the extreme control his father exerts on the family. When Jaja does not go for the Holy

Communion, his father tells him, "You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that." Jaja responds, "Then I will die." "Fear had darkened Jaja's eyes to the colour of coal tar, but he looked Papa in the face now." Jaja repeats, "Then I will die, Papa." (p.14) This dialogue captures the determination of Jaja to put an end to the dictatorship of his father. He wants to be free to make his own choices. He defies his father not caring about the consequences. Jaja is the only person in the Achike family who seeks to disentangle himself outright from Papa's control. If even Papa hadn't died, it is certain that his control over the family would have waned, especially on Jaja. This comes out through a number of incidents.

One of such is the missal-étagère scene. When Papa throws the missal at Jaja for not going for Communion,

It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass étagère, which Mama polished often. It cracked the top shelf, swept the beige, finger-size ceramic figurines of ballet dancers in various contorted postures to the hard floor and then landed after them. Or rather it landed after their many pieces. It lay there, a huge leather-bound missal that contained the readings for all the three cycles of the church year. (p.15)

The figurines and the *étagère* have a symbolic meaning. Kambili says that there are specific times when Mama polishes the figurines on the *étagère*. She says, “She polished them each time I heard the sounds from their room, like something being banged against the door...I would go down to see her standing by the *étagère* with a kitchen towel soaked in soapy water...” (pp.18-19) Evidently, when Eugene beats Mama resulting in her miscarriage, she returns from the hospital and does not eat nor rest. She goes to polish the *étagère* and the figurines. Also when Jaja and Kambili return from Nsukka, Mama’s face is swollen with the area around her right eye like “the black-purple shade of an overripe avocado.” (p.197) Kambili wanting to know when Papa beat Mama asks her mother when she polished the *étagère*. Kambili knows that Mama was beaten the previous day because that was when she polished the *étagère*. The *étagère* and the figurines then come to represent the many times Beatrice is abused by Eugene. So when Eugene throws the missal and it cracks the *étagère* and breaks the figurines, he has symbolically brought to an end his own abuse of his family. The missal containing the three cycles of the church year does not hit any member of the family. It comes tumbling down. Kambili brings out the symbolic meaning of the missal coming down. She says, “When Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything.” (p.23) Religion (Catholicism) symbolized by the missal, which has been used by Eugene to oppress his family is brought down. It is Jaja whose single decision of not going for the Holy Communion occasions this. When after this incident he refuses to join the family at table, Mama takes his food to him in his room without hiding it and Eugene does not say or do anything. Jaja sets in motion the liberation of the family even before Papa dies.

Jaja also breaks the 'structured' conversations the family has during meals. When a sample of cashew juice from Papa's factory is brought home, the whole family tastes it at lunch time and Mama and Kambili give their expected complimentary comments. Jaja refuses to say anything. In another dialogue between Papa and Jaja the writer captures the determination of Jaja to stop doing things to please his father.

Papa asks him, "Jaja have you not shared a drink with us, *gbo*?" He asks for the second time, "Have you nothing to say, *gbo*, Jaja? Jaja then responds, "*Mba*, there are no words in my mouth." Papa is shocked at this response and Kambili tells readers that on hearing Jaja's reply, "There was a shadow clouding Papa's eyes, a shadow that had been in Jaja's eyes. Fear. It had left Jaja's eyes and entered Papa's." (p.21) Unlike Mama and Kambili, Jaja manages to overcome the fear of his father that had terrorized him for a long time. He boldly challenges his father and ignores the consequences because he is determined to rid himself and the family from the oppression of his father. It is this determination to liberate the family that makes him take responsibility for the killing of his father by Mama. He probably sees it as the ultimate price to be paid for their total liberation.

Jaja's step can be equated to what Ade Coker does. Ade suffers for criticizing the military regime. He is arrested once and tortured, yet he is not afraid to write the story about how Nwakiti Ogechi is killed by some top men. The Head of State proposes to give Ade Coker an exclusive interview provided he does not publish the story about the whereabouts of Nwakiti Ogechi. When Ade Coker is told to do the interview with Big Oga and publish the Nwakiti story later, he bursts out:

No way! They don't want Nwakiti  
Ogechi to become an issue now.  
Simple! And you know what it  
means, it means they have wasted

him! Which one is for Big Oga to try  
and bribe me with an interview?  
I ask you eh, which one is that.”  
(p.206)

Ade Coker refuses to be intimidated or bribed to hide the fact that the prodemocracy activist, Nwakiti has been killed. He publishes the story that results in the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth. It is this story he publishes that finally causes his death. Having suffered many incarcerations from the military regime, Ade Coker would most certainly know that putting out such a story will be at a cost. He is simply determined to unmask the tyrant irrespective of the dangers that this move will pose to his safety. Both Ade Coker and Jaja are relentless in their attempt to end dictatorship.

Kambili responds to the abuses of Eugene very differently from Mama and Jaja. The effect of tyranny on an individual is especially evident in the life of Kambili. Kambili endures the tyranny of her father for a long time. For coming second in her class for the first time since class one, she is seriously reprimanded by her father. She is beaten severely for keeping the photograph of her grandfather who is considered as a heathen by his father. The result of all the harsh treatment on Kambili is that she becomes a timid girl who cannot express her thoughts. When she visits her aunt, she is even unable to keep a conversation with her cousins. As a result of the tyranny of his father, fear is so much a part of her life that the only thing she wants to do is to please her father in order not to incur his displeasure. Fear makes her unable to express herself. There are several instances in the novel where Kambili either says something different from what she actually intends to say or says nothing at all. For instance when Papa throws the leather bound missal at Jaja and it breaks the glass étagère and the figurines of Mama, Kambili is sorry that Papa has done this. She herself confesses,



I meant to say I am sorry Papa broke your figurines, but the words that came out were, “I’m sorry your figurines broke , Mama.” (p.18)

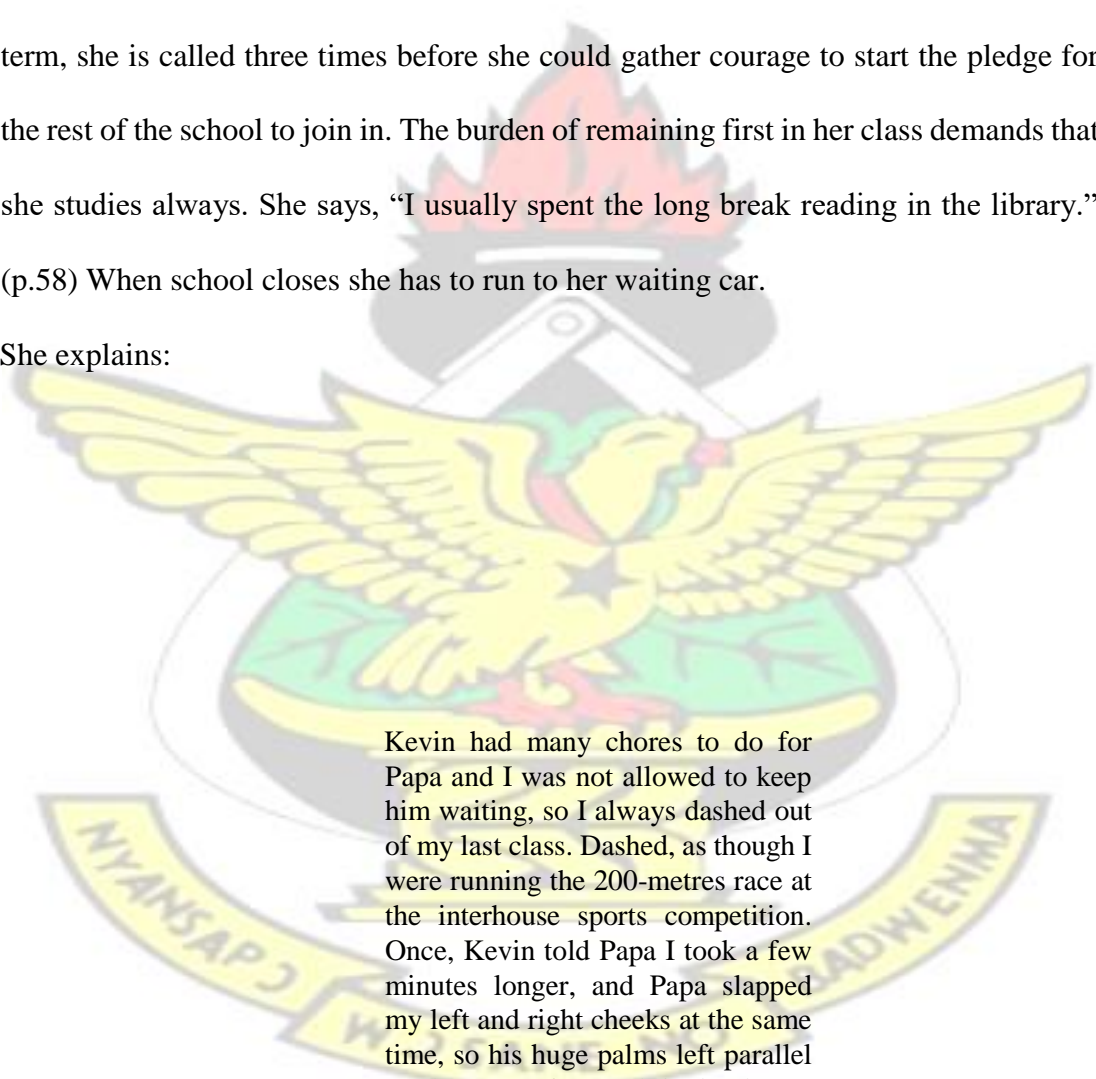
Again when Amaka asks about the sound system they have at Enugu, Kambili says, “I wanted to tell her that I did not have any kind of music system in my room back home, but I was not sure she would be pleased to hear that, just as she would not be pleased to hear it if I had one.” (p.126) Instead of Kambili to freely express her thoughts, she fears how Amaka will react and so talks about a colour painting instead. On another occasion, when Kambili returns home from Nsukka, she wants to tell Mama about the largeness of their room, the empty space and the lifelessness of their furniture. Instead of expressing this, she asks Mama if she has polished the étagère.

Apart from saying something different from what she had intended to say, there are moments when Kambili fails to express her thoughts and keeps quiet or at best coughs to avoid speaking. For example, when Father Amadi asks her why she has not laughed or smiled, she says, “ I wanted to say I was sorry that I did not smile or laugh, but my words would not come, and for a while even my ears could hear nothing.” (pp.146-147) Again when Amaka’s friend asks Kambili a simple question wanting to know if all that long hair she has is natural, a simple yes or no eludes her and she runs out into the toilet. On another occasion when Aunt Ifeoma asks Kambili and Jaja if they would like to see Nsukka, Kambili is lost for words because she doesn’t want to say anything to displease her father. She tells readers, “I mumbled to my plate, then started to cough as if real, sensible words would have come out of my mouth but for the coughing” (105) However, when Jaja gives an answer that Papa is pleased with, Kambili wishes that she had said that. From all indications, Kambili’s life is ruled by fear. The fear of

saying or doing something that Papa will not be pleased with. This is because of the authoritative and brutal nature of his father.

This affects her so much that even when she is with her peers, she is unable to express her thoughts because she is scared of what the other person might think or feel. At school, Kambili does not play and interact with her classmates like the others. On the day of reopening when her father reprimands her for not coming first the previous term, she is called three times before she could gather courage to start the pledge for the rest of the school to join in. The burden of remaining first in her class demands that she studies always. She says, "I usually spent the long break reading in the library." (p.58) When school closes she has to run to her waiting car.

She explains:



Kevin had many chores to do for Papa and I was not allowed to keep him waiting, so I always dashed out of my last class. Dashed, as though I were running the 200-metres race at the interhouse sports competition. Once, Kevin told Papa I took a few minutes longer, and Papa slapped my left and right cheeks at the same time, so his huge palms left parallel marks on my face and ringing in my ears for days. (p.59)

Kambili's inability to interact with her classmates wins her the tag, 'backyard snob.' Her inability to express herself well and her silence at moments when she would have liked to say something presents her as a helpless victim of terror and dictatorship. It is definitely true that "Kambili's silence represents the restless silence of African people in their inability at challenging those things that trample on the personality of African peoples." (Oha 203)

Of all the three characters (Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili) who are victims of domestic tyranny, Kambili is the most affected. She is also the only character who does not take any drastic step to end their oppression. Even when Papa dies, which in itself symbolises an end to their suffering, she says, "I wanted to tell Jaja that my eyes tingled with unshed tears, that I still listened for, wanted to hear Papa's footsteps on the stairs. That there were painfully scattered bits inside me that I could never put back because the places they fit into were gone." (pp.293-294) Obviously, Kambili at this point has not grasped the implications of the death of their father. She contrasts with the Nigerian society which rejoices upon the death of Big Oga with prodemocracy groups formed to see to the institution of a civilian government.

Apart from Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili who suffer forms of intimidation and oppression, there are other characters in the novel whose sufferings reveal the excesses of military regimes. Among these are Eugene and Aunt Ifeoma.

Eugene's place among the victims of tyranny is distinct. This is because Eugene represents a paradox. He is both perpetrator and victim. Kambili tells readers that in

church, Father Benedict refers to “the pope, Papa and Jesus- in that order.” (p.13) On Palm Sunday, Father Benedict uses Papa to illustrate the Gospel on the Triumphant Entry. Father Benedict says:

Look at Brother Eugene. He could have chosen to be like other Big Men in this country, he could have decided to sit at home and do nothing after the coup, to make sure the government did not threaten his business. But no,...Brother Eugene spoke out for freedom. (pp.12-13)

Eugene uses his newspaper to speak out for freedom but he does not give his wife and children any freedom, not even to air their opinions. He says about his children, “They are not like those loud children people are raising these days, with no home training and no fear of God.” Somebody who speaks out for freedom instills fear in his children and now says that loud children have no training. Ade Coker’s response to what Eugene says accurately captures the paradox of Eugene’s character. Ade Coker says, “Imagine what the Standard would be if we were all quiet.” (p.66) What Ade Coker says is valid in that you cannot keep children who have been made extremely quiet and expect that there would be loud and bold people out there who will speak out against tyranny.

Another instance that highlights the paradox of Eugene as a character is in his treatment of his own father. Eugene gets Ade Coker out of jail and Coker does a postscript where he thanked his publisher, Eugene: “*a man of integrity, the bravest man I know.*” (p.50) Apart from this, Eugene also wins a human rights award from Amnesty World. Ironically, this man of integrity who is concerned about the human rights of other people is the one who refuses to properly take care of his own father because his father



has chosen a way of worship different from his. It is Kambili who gives readers details about how Eugene treats his father:

Papa himself never greeted Papa Nnukwu, never visited him, but he sent slim wads of naira through Kevin or through one of our umunna members, slimmer wads than he gave Kevin as a Christmas bonus.(pp.69-70)

Eugene does not visit his father when they go to Abba to spend Christmas. He only sends his children to spend not more than fifteen minutes in their grandfather's house. Even this arrangement was made after his father complained to the members of their extended family that he did not know his grandchildren. Papa Nnukwu cannot go to Eugene's house because, "when Papa had decreed that heathens were not allowed in his compound, he had not made an exception for his father." (p.70-71) The old man is actually catered for by his younger daughter, Ifeoma who is a widow and is struggling to make ends meet, looking after her three children all by herself. It is ironical that a winner of a human rights award cannot respect the freedom of worship of his own father and neglects him because he is a traditionalist. When Papa Nnukwu dies, Eugene does not take part in the funeral because it is a pagan funeral. He however gives Ifeoma so much money for it. So much to enable Ifeoma buy seven cows for the funeral. Eugene gives his father slim wad of notes but gives so much for his funeral. This is the paradox of a human rights award winner and the man of integrity who is made to occupy the same position with Jesus in church.

The character of Eugene is not only perpetrator but he is also sufferer of the excesses of a military regime. Eugene is a principled man who does not keep quiet when wrong things are done. His newspaper, the Standard is always fearless in its criticism of the

military regime. Eugene's criticism of the military regime attracts the wrath of the soldiers. Kambili reports what Mama tells them has happened to their father. She says:

Soldiers had gone to one of the factories carrying dead rats in a carton, and then closed the factory down, saying the rats had been found there and could spread disease through the wafers and biscuits (p.214)

Eugene becomes a target of the military regime because he is critical of them. They therefore find ways of bringing him down to nothing. With his factory closed down, Eugene is so disturbed that he no longer visits his other factories as he used to do. He rather spends long hours with father Benedict saying special novenas. He is thus affected by the action which is taken against him. It is for this reason that many people will keep quiet over the wrongs of military regimes.

The paradox in Eugene as a character lies in the fact that while he on the one hand advocates a return to civilian rule, he practices in his home the dictatorship and indiscriminate use of force characteristic of military regimes, which he criticizes. It is ironical that Eugene with all his abuses against his family wins a human rights award from Amnesty World. The novelist by presenting the paradoxes in Eugene's character presents the forms of oppression that can take place in society. She seems to say that it is not only the military that is guilty of incarcerations and abuse that these vices begin on the smaller stage of the family before they assume the national dimension. Clearly, the novelist portrays domestic oppression as a parallel to abuses on the political scene.

By doing this, the novelist

explains that the issue of governance in Africa would change when the individuals begin to examine within

themselves the correct approaches to life that would enhance the development of good governance. Thus the micro problems and correction pave way for the macro direction and correction. (Oha 203)

The symbolic presentation of the Achike family to depict Nigeria under the military becomes effective because it brings the problem of repressions in various homes. It enables readers to question if Eugene's kind of strict discipline is the way forward for his family. If this kind of discipline is not good for the family, then the same goes for the 'discipline' the military tries to instil in society when it seizes power. For Africans to get a good society good family relations should be built up. The nation gets better when families get better.

Aunt Ifeoma is another character in the novel who suffers the intimidation of the military regime. She is the sister of Eugene and a lecturer at the University of Nsukka. Kambili describes her as being tall and well proportioned. Readers are told that Aunt Ifeoma walks fast like someone who knows where she is going and what she is going to do. One striking feature about Aunt Ifeoma that Kambili usually mentions is her fearlessness. She is described as "tall, exuberant, fearless, loud, larger than life." (p.103) On one occasion, Kambili recognises the African past of valiant warriors in her. She says:

When she barged into the dining room upstairs, I imagined a proud ancient forbear, walking miles to fetch water in homemade clay pots, nursing babies until they walked and talked, fighting wars with machetes sharpened on sun – warmed stone. She filled a room. (p.88)

The above description of Ifeoma undoubtedly presents her as someone who is

fearless, full of valour and determination. It is therefore not surprising that she speaks against tyranny. When the 'sole administrator' is introduced in the university, she is one of the lecturers who speak strongly against it. She is denied promotion to senior lecturer because she is seen as disloyal. When the university students riot against the 'sole administrator', the authorities think she is the one who incited them to riot. She therefore becomes a target for the security agents. They come to her house looking for supposed documents designed to sabotage the peace of the university. When the security officers begin their search in the house:

They did not look inside the drawers they flung open, they just threw the clothes and whatever else was inside on the floor. They overturned all the boxes and suitcases in Aunt Ifeoma's room, but they did not rummage through the contents. They scattered, but they did not search. (p.236)

After scattering everything in the room, they leave warning Aunt Ifeoma to be very careful. It becomes clear that the motive of the security officers is to frighten Aunt Ifeoma to keep quiet. As a result of all these, Ifeoma is left with no other option but to leave Nigeria for America. As Obiora puts it, "... By the time we get to university the good professors will be fed up with all this nonsense and will go abroad." (p.237) Here, Adichie presents a situation where out of frustration with autocratic governments, strong and fearless people with skilled labour are lost.

Apart from the setting and the characters, the first person narrative that the writer uses is effective in portraying Nigeria under military rule. In the first person narrative, because the narrator is an actor in the events being narrated, it gives the story a strong sense of authenticity. It is remarkable that Adichie chooses Kambili of all the



characters in the novel, to be the narrator. Kambili narrates the abuses they suffer from Papa; the deforming of Jaja's little finger, Mama's miscarriages, the scalding of their feet, Papa's neglect of Papa-Nnukwu, among others. She also narrates the oppression in Nigeria by the military regime; the whipping of market women, the arrests of Ade Coker, the death of Ade Coker and how it affects Papa, the ransacking of Auntie Ifeoma's room. She observes the turbulence of a military regime in her country with innocence but at the same time, she is a victim of a 'military-like' family. The effect of brutality and autocracy can be seen on the personality of the character who narrates the story. The first person narrative technique used by the novelist thus becomes particularly effective. Heather captures her thus:

Kambili is like a war correspondent embedded within her own family anesthetized to the violence and familial masochism (loving hurt hurting love) that create a constant tight rope the characters must walk. This consistency and reliability of firsthand account helps create the emotional authenticity and airtight atmosphere. (Heather 1)

The choice of Kambili, a dumb character who herself is struggling with religious and domestic problems of her home makes her able to sincerely expose the several military oddities in her nation with the eyes of an innocent observer. The motif of innocence helps Adichie to achieve concrete realism devoid of exaggeration. The style of innocence captures reality completely and less distortedly. Also Kambili until the latter part of the novel is passive and voiceless and this voiceless person who finally becomes vocal enough to be the narrator brings out something symbolic. It serves as a source of re-awakening for all, especially the down trodden, to rise up and speak against tyranny. This is because from all indications, the military's involvement in politics does not augur well for the development of the nation.

The end of the novel marks the beginning of hope for the Achike family and for turbulent Nigeria. Big Oga, the political tyrant mentioned in the novel is alleged to have died atop a prostitute. The interim civilian government sets out to release all prisoners of conscience and Jaja is to benefit from this arrangement. Kambili makes plans for what they will do when Jaja comes back home from jail. There is hope for the individual members of the Achike family (in the absence of Eugene) to move on in life in a free and friendly environment. Kambili says at the end of the novel,

Above, clouds like dyed cotton wool  
hang low, so low I feel I can reach  
out and squeeze the moisture from  
them. The new rains will come down  
soon.

The rain represents life. It also represents the soothing and relief the family will enjoy after having gone through so much to get their liberty. The novelist in the third part of the novel titled 'The Present' begins with the historic present. For example when Kambili and Mama leave the prison yard after visiting Jaja to inform him about his impending release, Kambili says:

Mama shrugs and says nothing. She is walking  
slowly; her limp has become more noticeable,  
her body moving sideways with each step. We are close  
to the car when she turns to me and  
says, "Thank you, nne." (p.310)

This use of the historic present in the third part of the novel makes immediate and definite the coming of the new dawn of hope, liberty and freedom for the Achike family and for Nigeria.

The liberation of the Achike family is also seen in the symbolic title of the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. Before Jaja and Kambili go to Nsukka all the hibiscuses in their front yard “were a startling red.” (p.24) According to Carl Jung’s mythological analysis, the colour red “because of its association with blood, easily suggests passion, sacrifice or violence.” (Dobie 59) In the case of the Achike family, the red signifies violence. The period of the red hibiscuses indicates the time of the unchallenged brutal reign of Eugene in his family. However, Nsukka brings the reign of the red hibiscuses to an end and they are replaced by the lovely, beautiful purple hibiscuses from Ifeoma’s house in Nsukka. According to Heather,

The Purple Hibiscus becomes a metaphor for freedom and independence. While a flower may seem delicate in constitution, purple is historically associated with royalty and divinity. The purple flower then comes to signify Kambili’s urge to bloom, her natural instinct to look for the light. (1)

The purple hibiscus does not represent only Kambili’s urge to bloom but that of her entire family, especially Jaja. This is because it is Jaja who brings the flowers to Enugu from Nsukka, plants them and turns defiant. It is Beatrice who takes the step to eliminate the tyrant and it is Jaja who accepts to pay the price for their freedom. Both Kambili and Beatrice then take steps to get Jaja out of jail so that the entire family is then truly liberated. The purple hibiscus then marks the urge to bloom for the entire family. The death of Eugene brings relief and enduring love to the Achike family just as the death of Big Oga marks the turning point in turbulent Nigeria. Also the purple hibiscus is a man-made creation. Aunt Ifeoma tells Jaja that the purple hibiscus was the result of the “experimental work” (p.136) of her friend, Philipa, who is a lecturer in botany. This suggests that our freedom and independence are in our own hands.

So far, this chapter has examined the abusive nature of military rule as presented by Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus*. This chapter examined the fact that during the immediate post-independence period, people welcomed coups because of the disappointing performance of the various African governments. With time, people realised that though the politicians seem to be failing the populace, military rule is not the way forward. Military rulers were therefore not welcomed onto the political scene. The excesses, human rights abuses, among others which occur during military rule and the fact that they hamper the peace, stability and growth of a country are depicted in *Purple Hibiscus*. This comes out mainly through the symbolic presentation of the Achike family, characters, paradox, setting, symbol, dialogue and the first person narrative technique.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **CONCLUSION**

This study has examined the causes, the course and the devastating effects of the Nigerian civil war in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The writer presents various causes of the war, prominent among which is the legacy of colonialism. The novelist highlights the fact that in the creation of Nigeria, the British colonial powers manipulated the differences between the various ethnic groups creating animosity among them. At independence, the British ensured that governance was in the hands of the northerners, deepening the antagonism between the north and the south. When the people in charge of the governance of the country failed, it triggered the first coup.

The tag ‘Igbo coup’ used by the BBC further deepens the ethnic antagonism, triggering the second coup and then the massacre of the Igbos. It is this massacre of Igbos in the north that forces the Igbos to secede, since to them, secession was their only means of



security. The various causes of the civil war are highlighted through devices such as setting and characterization. The intellectual salon of the couple Odenigbo and Olanna plays a significant role in the revelation of the chaotic situation of the Nigerian political landscape. A parallel narrative device is also used by the writer to emphasise what is already revealed in the main narrative. The devastating effects of the war such as such as malnutrition, fear, confusion, deaths, suffering, among others, are presented through devices such as setting, characterization and the plot structure of the novel. Although a lot of writers, specifically, those who experienced the war first hand, have already written on the war, Adichie achieves striking success in the way she is able to use her unique style to recreate the civil war.

The study has also examined the fact that during the immediate post-independence period, there has been failure of leadership on the part of democratically elected governments. It is this failure of leadership that has led to successive coups and brutal military regimes in Nigeria. Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* highlights the excesses and human right abuses of military rule and the effects of these on the development of the individual and the nation. In doing so, the novelist uses her unique style of addressing national issues without direct focus on the national scene. The symbolic presentation of the Achike family allows the writer to focus on tyranny in the family while at the same time bringing to the fore the issue of dictatorship on the national scene. She thus merges the domestic with the national. Through the use of devices such as characterization, setting, symbolism among others, the effects of tyranny are revealed.

A careful look at the political situation in Africa would reveal that the situation depicted in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus* pertains to other African countries as well. For instance, colonialism has played a major role in some armed

conflicts in Africa. The Hutu-Tutsi rivalry that led to war in Rwanda in 1994 and the Northern-Southern rivalry that triggered the war in Sudan in 1983 are classic examples.

Also, poor leadership has always been the reason for the staging of coups in Africa. These military men however turn out to be tyrants after they assume political office. Iddi Amin of Uganda is a good example of such tyrants. The two novels are therefore of great relevance to the African situation.

A critical examination of the current political situation in Africa with regard to armed conflicts and military takeovers demand that certain prudent measures be taken to attain a politically stable continent.

First of all, careful analysis of the political situation in Africa shows that the root cause of most of the armed conflicts and military takeovers are economic. When leaders fail to improve the standard of living of their people through the equitable distribution of national resources, majority of the citizens become disenchanted. When leaders seem to give key positions in government to particular groups of people and concentrate development in certain parts of the country while neglecting the other parts, it generates antagonism between those who feel neglected and the advantaged. When this happens, the least provocation can lead to armed conflicts and military takeovers. To prevent this situation, the onus is on African leaders to be selfless and to have integrity. Also democratic institutions must be strengthened to check leaders so that they do not become self-seeking but rather initiate good policies that foster economic development in the country. Moreover, leadership must ensure equitable distribution of national resources across the country so that no group of people feels left out. When this is done, animosity between the different groups of people in the country will be

minimized, likewise the tendency for armed conflicts. Neither will there be room for any group of military men, for genuine or selfish reasons, to stage a coup.

Also it is undisputable that there are ethnic and sometimes religious rivalries among the different groups on the continent and these animosities at times underpin the many incidences of conflicts and civil wars. What must be done is not just to continue to reiterate the causes of these ethnic animosities. We must be tolerant of the individuality of every group and focus on the things that unite us as one people rather than on those that divide us. As Africans, “we need to conceive of a world in which the idea of difference is just that: difference, rather than something necessarily better or worse.” (Adichie 46) Every ethnic and religious group should be accorded due respect in order to foster a cordial relationship between the various ethnic groups in the different African countries. Actions and comments that seem to demean a particular ethnic group should therefore be avoided.

Also, leaders whose acts of omission or commission plunge their countries or that of others in civil war should be made to face the law as happened to former Liberian leader Charles Taylor. Mr. Taylor was found guilty at the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague, Netherlands, for aiding and abetting war crimes in neighbouring Sierra Leone’s brutal civil war. He was subsequently handed a fiftyyear-jail term. As a check, the African Union must have its own special criminal court in Africa so that leaders and public officials who misconduct themselves while in office can be prosecuted here in Africa and not at The Hague. This will send a clear signal to African leaders and other public officials that “with leadership comes not just power and authority, but also responsibility and accountability.” (CNN news) Again, when civil

wars break out, African and international organizations should intervene quickly with mediation talks so as to foster peace, reduce the duration of the conflict and alleviate the plight of the suffering masses.

Finally, ECOWAS, the AU and other international organizations should impose sanctions against coup makers as happened to the March 2012 coup makers of Mali. ECOWAS lifted sanctions against coup leader, Captain Amadou Sanogo and his colleagues in April only after they agreed to hand back power to a civilian government. When African and international bodies take such firm stance against coup leaders, it sends a clear signal that coups and coup makers are no longer welcome on the continent. If a president is not performing, the appropriate democratic procedures should be followed to effect change without resorting to coups.

These and other prudent measures can be put in place so that the African continent overcomes the challenges of armed conflicts, putsches, uprisings, tyranny, among others that retard the development of the continent.



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