

“A Knot in the Chest”: The Somatic Experience of Displacement and Loss in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* through the lens of trauma and embodiment. The focus is on how physical sensations and bodily metaphors convey experiences of war, displacement, and grief. Drawing on the trauma theory of Caruth, Herman, van der Kolk, and embodiment theory, this analysis highlights the use of visceral imagery and the human body to represent psychological trauma. Close reading and qualitative textual analysis were performed to extract key takeaway passages from the novel. For example, Ugwu’s wounds and thirst, Olanna’s panic symptoms, and the sensory richness of crisis everyday life present somatic experiences of psychological trauma. For instance, the bodies of Ugwu and Olanna became living repositories of coerced violence, and they also created trauma in their post-war life. Olanna took too much time to recover from her panic attacks caused by the horror of the war. Ugwu also experienced physical abuse and was wounded at the end of the war. Olanna helped and pampered him to recover from the traumatic experiences. Adichie’s use of these embodied depictions deepens empathy and underscores the political stakes of the Nigerian Civil War. Through the lens of the somatic approach to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, this article demonstrates how the trauma of war is etched on the body, which has ramifications for comprehending cultural memory and postcolonial healing of the body, the bodies that survived, who perished, and who contributed to the agony of the conflict. They contend that the somatic portrayal of trauma serves as a kind of testimony that is far more effective than the traditional modes of historical narration. The body asserts that the paper is both witness and archive; it makes collective suffering in the context of the recent Nigerian Civil War part of the private sphere, not the public.

Keywords: War, Trauma, Somatic Experience, Displacement, Loss

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* painstakingly constructs a narrative of the Biafran War, examining the significant effects of relocation and loss on individuals and communities. The book is more than a retelling of historical events; it is a study of character and intimate embodied experience in the context of a world gone mad. Basing their existence even more firmly in the immediate context of the somatic experience, what Judith Butler terms “the human inhumanely exposed to a kind of suffering that is not its own doing,” or what Sianne Ngai calls “the affective and often aesthetic reach of our imaginings of life.” Adichie shows how loss and displacement are real physical conditions suffered by people amid conflict (Borah, 2021).

By using vivid sensory descriptions, she captured an almost universally felt sense of discomfort and pain. The reader is made to comprehend the tremendous effects of war on survivors' bodily and mental health. These physical experiences emphasise the long-lasting, almost eternal wounds that loss and dislocation carve into the human psyche.

This conflict results in a deep emotional and psychological scarring. These scars are examined through the story, reflecting the conflict's effect on protagonists' bodies and minds. Their bodies become locations of pain and memory. This story sheds light on the symptoms of these psychological scars. Exhaustion, sleeplessness, and stomach problems are three common signs of a person being disquieted and confused. Adichie's characters are not just psychologically scarred; they are also suffering physically. This was not a random plot. By having her characters exhibit specific symptoms, which are largely a result of their wartime experience, Adichie draws a parallel between their lived experience and the toll that the conflict takes on both body and mind. The pervasive feeling of anxiety and anguish in the story is not only described but also experienced through the characters' physical reactions, like the repeating motif of a "knot in the chest", which epitomises the gut-wrenching impact of being uprooted and suffering loss. The human cost of migration, driven most often by hope for a better life, can be inestimable and may well amount to an irretrievable tragedy.

This paper will closely read key passages in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, focusing on how principal characters endure and enfold trauma at the level of the body. It will argue that Adichie is deliberate in her crafting of physical discomfort, illness, and sensory disruption to tell the story of how deeply her characters are suffering. This research seeks to elucidate Adichie's intricate comprehension of the comprehensive effects of war on individuals by analysing somatic manifestations within the context of trauma theory and embodied experience, portraying the body as both a locus of suffering and a testament to the resilient, albeit impaired, human spirit. This article examines how Adichie employs the human body as a locus of memory, suffering, and emotional expression, thus portraying war and displacement not merely as socio-

political phenomena but as profoundly embodied experiences. The "knot in the chest" serves as both a description of personal anguish and a social emblem of Biafra's stifled aspirations and suffering fate.

Literature Review

Madhu Krishnan (2011) has analysed the construction of postcolonial exoticism in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* through the character Richard's interactions with Kainene. These interactions illustrate how Richard's desire for Kainene is inseparably bound to his desire for African artefacts. This is particularly true for pots. Metonymically, Richard's desire for Kainene stands in for his larger wish to achieve an African identity, wrestling as he does with the prospects and perils of otherness. Umelo Ojinmah (2012) discusses the vivacity of the characters' lives through the Nigerian-Biafran War. This underscores the character development of Ugwu, who changes from a simple village boy to a capable soldier. This reflects the larger story theme of surviving against all odds and the perseverance of people faced with nearly overwhelming adversity. Maximilian Feldner (2019) examined the formation of national identity against the backdrop of the Nigerian Civil War, using a series of character-driven narratives to focus on identity. It further presents the narrative of popular Nigerian music, especially popular music by Rex Lawson, which symbolises unity and cultural identity. Akpome (2013) examines how Adichie engages in gender, memory, trauma, and narrative perspectives in her works. The problematisation of Nigerian nationhood reveals subtextual ethnic nationalism. As a dispassionate witness to the Biafran cause, Richard enhanced empathy. Emmanuel Mzomera Ngwira (2012) examines the authorship of history in *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Adichie and how it conveys the narrative of the Biafran war. It draws attention to metafictional aspects that are reflective of the process of writing history in the novel. This article expresses the complexity of Ugwu's character, which is formed under harsh conditions. It investigates the importance of Ugwu's journey as a writer and his commitment to narrative. Mohd Farhan Saiel (2023) examined the colonial history of Nigeria and how it impinges on the world of post-independence ethnic diversity. It goes further to show how some ethnic

conflicts, now so pervasive, have their roots in the colonial past. The effects of the Nigerian Civil War on the Igbo people and their subsequent post-war socioeconomic challenges are the focal points of this study. In retelling this often-overlooked part of Nigerian history, the author seeks to put the reader in touch with the Igbo experience during and after the war in a way that not only informs, but also engages. Michael A. Donnelly (2017) describes the attempts made by the Biafran government, from 1967 to 1970, to reach out to the international community in the hope of obtaining support for its cause. It focuses on the lead figure of these outreach efforts: Chinua Achebe, the internationally renowned author, and the Biafran government spokesperson. Bildungsroman is a literary genre that has traditionally been associated with expressing a protagonist's journey toward manhood or womanhood. It is a form that has accorded much value to Western literary culture. The standard view of this form is that it expresses the individual path of a person coming of age and ascribes great significance to the value of each life. Brigitte Sagmon and Elizabeth Gwen Gomez (2024) studied how the novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, was made into a film. It does not just look at the fact that *Yellow Sun* is made into a film, but also tries to go much deeper. It tries to look at the elements of the novel that hold intrinsic worth and whether those elements survived in the process of ecranization. This study highlights the need for an all-encompassing assessment of how adaptations influence narrative understanding and acceptance. Stanley Ordu and Better Odukwu (2022) analyse Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* in respect to two central issues the novel takes up, and which are pertinent to today's world as well: corruption and representation. On the one hand, the novel deals with the commonplace corruption of military authority and the scandalous behaviour of politicians; on the other hand, it deals with how what is happening at the level of everyday life is represented (or misrepresented) in history, social sciences, and literature. Sociological and postcolonial theories were used to analyse the text. It emphasises the importance of avoiding violence, particularly when it comes from the political elite, and the grave repercussions of poorly handling Nigerian politics.

It is evident that the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* has been analysed through various lenses, including post-colonialism, feminism, trauma studies, and identity crisis theory. However, a gap was found. No work has applied the affect theory to this text. This study attempts to do so. It applies the affect theory, which is concerned with somatic experience and displacement, to the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Theoretical Framework

The idea of somatic experience is interconnected with several theoretical approaches such as trauma studies, theories of Displacement and Exile, and affect theory. The trauma is often unspeakable. This condition is often associated with several physical symptoms. The famous claim made by Cathy Caruth (1995) is that trauma cannot be fully comprehended in terms of the first violent incident; it always and unavoidably resurfaces haunt survivors. According to Caruth, trauma is "not locatable in the simple violent... event" (In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*), but rather emerges when an unassimilated experience resurfaces and becomes a physical and mental obsession for the survivor. This novel presents several incidents which create trauma that cannot be articulated by others. A particularly pertinent aspect of van der Kolk's work, at least for our purposes, is his argument that traumatic experiences lodge themselves in the body; that is, they lead to physiological changes and somatic complaints. These complaints implicate the body's systems and are understood to have no physical or pathophysiological reasons.

Van der Kolk states, "[T]he essence of trauma is not the event itself that happened in the past but what the event caused to happen in the present and in the future. Trauma is the imprint left by an experience on mind, brain, and body' (*The Body Keeps the Score*, 2014). This understanding supports our analysis of how physical symptoms can arise as manifestations of what we are calling war trauma. He further insists, "traumatised people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort." Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief theory (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) and J. William Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning theory (accepting the reality



of the loss, processing the pain, adjusting to a world without the deceased, and maintaining a connection with the deceased while moving forward) are classical models for understanding the ways in which people cope with different kinds of loss. However, these models were developed in contexts of relatively stable social support, such as communities offering a “vigil, wake, or funeral” to keep the deceased’s memory alive, indicative of the personal and public realms of reflection that mourning usually entails.

Texts can increasingly be recognised as evoking and representing embodied experiences. This has become the hallmark of literary criticism. Affect theory, as explored by scholars such as Silvan Tomkins and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, takes up the role of emotions and physiological responses in shaping experiences and interpretations. Adichie’s descriptions of physical sensations are so vivid that they engage the reader at an affective level. It is not that we understand these characters’ suffering any less than we would if we were private to their internal monologues. Rather, we grasp their pain with our whole self. Adichie uses the “knot in the chest” as a literary device to transform esoteric emotional distress into something palpable and universal. It allows her to make characters’ various forms of emotional and psychological pain comprehensible (and thus relatable) to the reader.

This paper integrates these theoretical perspectives to analyse how Adichie uses the “knot in the chest” and other somatic expressions. Adichie did not employ these indicators for descriptive details. Rather, she uses them as signs pointing to the characters’ internal landscapes, which were profoundly altered by war, displacement, and loss. Somatic signs are the pathways in the narrative. The trauma of the Biafran War was written on the physical body, which became the text of this novel.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative method to analyse the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It employs close reading and textual analyses. Qualitative research has emerged from a post-positivist worldview. It is fundamentally interpretive, aiming for an understanding through an analysis of the meanings of social actions. A qualitative researcher sees

the participants’ point of view as essential for comprehending the social phenomenon under study. This study aims to interpret the somatic experiences of displacement and loss in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. More specifically, through the lens of trauma studies, it seeks to understand why and how the characters in the novel experience these phenomena. Trauma studies, particularly those that examine the relationship between trauma, memory, and the body, will be consulted for this examination. The incidents and experiences of the characters in the novel have been scrutinised to uncover the themes and patterns that arise from the characters’ physical experiences. The characters’ emotional and physical conditions were conveyed through Adichie’s use of language, pictures, and symbols. These states lead to the manifestation of certain key topics, namely, the connection between trauma and the body, the effects of displacement on the physical and mental well-being of the characters, and the influence of memory on embodied experience. However, the analysis is hampered by its concentration on a few scenes and characters and by its use of textual interpretation as opposed to empirical reader response or sociocultural fieldwork. Furthermore, the application of Western trauma theory to African narratives is subject to certain cultural and theoretical limits. Thus, through a qualitative approach and textual analysis, this novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, has been analysed and has brought out the layers of meaning related to the knot in the chest.

Result

Adichie’s narrative, seen through the lens of trauma, reveals the characters’ suffering and resilience in the very centre of war. The psychological trauma of war is articulated through physical pain and suffering. This section resonates with the somatic experience of the central characters in this novel through ‘a knot in the chest’.

Olanna is the central character sweeping around the recurring theme of trauma in this novel. Her experiences portray the deep effects of trauma on the Igbo people because she directly experienced the horror of war, both physically and mentally. Her physical experiences include seeing the atrocities of war, losing loved ones, and living under the continual

fear of violence, which leads to severe mental wounds from these events. This results in PTSD and persistent anxiety that persists even long after the war is over. Her journey to her uncle Mbaezi in Kano, and her return to her house, gives a harrowing experience of war that has a lasting impact on her body. Olanna witnesses:

The woman with the calabash nudged her and then moved to some other people close by. ‘*Bianu, come*’, she said. ‘Come and take a look.’ She opened a calabash. ‘Take a look’, she said again. Olanna looks at the bowl. She saw the little girl’s head with the ashy-grey skin and plaited hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth. She had stared at it for a while before looking away. Somebody screamed. The woman closed the calabash. ‘Do you know’, she said, ‘it took me so long to plait this hair? She had such thick hair,’ (149)

In this part, memory assumes utmost significance, as Olanna recollects every facet of her journey in great detail. The spectres of the family members she saw in death, as well as the woman with the calabash, are Olanna’s constant companions for the duration of this story.

Olanna’s Dark Swoops began the day she returned from Kano, the day her legs had failed. Her legs were fine when she climbed down from the train and she did not need to hold on to the blood-smeared railings, as she stood for the three-hour drive to Nsukka in a bus, so crowded she could not reach out to scratch her itching back. However, they failed at the front door of Odenigbo’s house. So did her bladder. (196)

In the above lines, Adichie clearly expresses the somatic experience of war through Olanna’s character. She experiences the deep physical and psychological trauma of war, which greatly affects her health. She experienced psychological shock. She feels “hollowness”, which is the result of the overwhelming nature of war.

Ugwu is another character in this novel with a somatic experience of war. He is the author of the metafiction, *The World Was Silent When We Died*. Each reference to this metafiction presents the horrors and unforgettable experiences of the war. Ugwu chronicled his war experience in this book, relating the story of the common people caught in the terrible crossfire of Libya’s destructive conflict. The author

presents all instances of harm that the war wrought upon the population and records within these pages the litany of negative effects that this conflict has inflicted upon the innocent. The book by Ugwu not only retells the upsetting emotional effects of the war, but also provides historical facts about the Biafran War. Thus, the intersection of history, memory, and fiction is palpable throughout the novel. As a witness to violence and victim of exploitation, Ugwu, the houseboy, undergoes a form of torture that is both physical and mental. His journey is not only survival; it is also a quest to regain a lost sense of self. In this process, he tries to comprehend the kind of war that takes such a toll on the most vulnerable and youthful members of society. Innocence is not only lost but also replaced by characters that war seems to have carved into the minds and consciences of those who undertake such epic journeys. He was forced to join the Igbo army and witnessed horrors of war such as rape and brutal death. As a soldier, he always has the pressure to prove himself among a group of soldiers. Thus, he forced himself to rape a girl and felt devastated. In the hospital, he lies among corpses “on mats, on mattresses, on the bare floor...so much blood everywhere” (312). Adichie clearly expresses his trauma through her somatic experience, which is described as, “Ugwu almost dies of infection: “The blood of the man next to him smelled like his” and “one part of his buttocks was wrapped in fiery red pain; it consumed him” (313). Ugwu’s inner torment is made palpable by these descriptions: the gnawing yearning, the paralysing dread, and the indescribable thirst that consumes him are vividly echoed back at him by devastatingly hot, purulent burns; by eyes and lips swollen to the point of bursting; and by blood—his, or another poor, petrified soul—running impossibly red and hot, like molten iron.

Odenigbo was an affluent and erudite individual who served as a mathematics professor at the University of Nsukka. He had a profound interest in politics, and he and his friends were in the habit of daily discussions about political and colonial affairs. Odenigbo did not consider himself a Nigerian but an Igbo man. He said, ‘I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black, because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was

Igbo before the white man came” (20). Odenigbo’s bodily and emotional experience of war is depicted through the way he decays into a state of even more obvious physiological and psychological unhealth as conflict progresses. At the outset, he was obviously healthy, vigorous, and passionate intellectual. As a university professor, he was intimately involved in the burgeoning Biafran nationalist movement. In and out of the classroom, he exhibits manic intensity in his political and intellectual pursuits. Biafra’s downfall to the Nigerian Army brings silence and makes him an alcoholic. The patient relied on alcohol as a form of self-medication. He felt guilty about cheating Olanna with Amala. When Olanna was absent from their house, under the force of his mother, he slept with Amala, and Amala gave birth to a girl child. To avenge him, Olanna slept with Richard. This betrayal, guilt, and fall of Biafra reflects the internal knot of despair and disillusionment to Odenigbo.

Kainene is another strong character who faces the somatic experience of war. She is a firm and an independent character of the novel. She maintained a close relationship with Richard, who loved her without condition and supported her in all of her endeavours. When she learned, however, that Richard was in bed with Olanna, she did not kick Richard to the curb. Instead, she lit a flame and burns all his manuscripts that he had written for a book. She then cuts off all ties with her sister. The Biafran War pulled the sisters back together. She threw in her lot with Biafra and was convinced that the Biafrans were going to stomp the Federal Government and win war. When it appeared to be sure that Biafra was going to lose, and when the Biafran people were starving and dying from a lack of medicine, she spent all her money, opened a refugee camp for women and children in Orlu, and served as their nurse. She works tirelessly in the refugee camp and tries her best to give food and medicine to all girls and women in the camp. Richard helped her with the camp by giving her the money that he had. This kind of tireless work and management of the camp brings a physical and psychological toll and exhaustion to her. At the end of the story, she disappears from the enemy territory and never returns. Her disappearance remains unresolved until the end of the novel.

Starvation and the lack of medicine pervade the

lives of the Biafran people in this novel. Children suffer from kwashiorkor. Their bellies are swollen and many die because of a lack of food and nutrition. This is also the somatic experience of a knot of hunger and despair. Adichie points out, “Children with copper-colored hair and bloated bellies lay listlessly on mats, flies crawling over their faces. The limbs were then stuck. Their eyes too large for their faces” (279). These lines depict the trauma of war to children. Hunger serves as a knot in the somatic experience. This is a result of the failure of Biafra’s ideology, which leads the nation to despair and hunger. It brings pain and suffering to everyone. War affects everyone, both physically and psychologically. Another sensory experience of war is the smell of blood and the sounds of bomb shells. For instance, when Olanna visits Ugwu in the hospital, she experiences, “The stench of unwashed bodies and dried blood settled in her nostrils and would not leave” (312). “The sound of shelling was like thunder, but wrong, twisted” (308). By infiltrating the body and establishing a shared emotional space, the sensory details are somatic invasions. Even quiet is tinged with the danger of violence in this collective sensory environment of war created by embodied senses. According to trauma theory, trauma is frequently perceived as “an event that is not fully known or available to consciousness but nonetheless returns”, as stated by Cathy Caruth. The noises and odours of conflict refuse to be left behind.

Discussion

Somatic experiences through trauma have been a recurring theme in this novel. The central characters, Olanna, Kainene, Odenigbo, and Ugwu, undergo horrific experiences of war, which result not only in their psyche but also in their body. Adichie’s narrative aligns powerfully with trauma theories, especially those of Bessel van der Kolk, who maintains that “the body keeps the score” (Kolk, 200). Characters do not just feel sadness or fear; their bodies react to and store their experiences. For instance, Olanna’s “dark swoops” (23) are not just panic attacks but visceral, suffocating experiences that physically manifest her terror and grief. Similarly, Ugwu’s haunted eyes and physical carriage after his time as a soldier are testaments to moral and physical

injuries that often do not appear in standard medical examinations. This interconnectedness, which many postcolonial Nigerian writers share, challenges any simple division between psychological and physical suffering.

The ‘Knot in the chest’ serves as a multifaceted symbol. This symbolically refers to different dimensions of war trauma. In the case of Olanna, the knot represents her personal experience of the horror of war, the loss of loved ones, home, and the Biafra. She experiences suffering and pain by witnessing hunger, the death of children, and the bloodshed. There is a constant fear of death throughout the novel. For instance, Igbo people have prepared a bunker at the back of their house in order to save themselves from air raids. When Olanna and Odenigbo get married, they hear a plane’s siren and try to hide in the bunker while cutting a cake. The horrifying experience of war has affected their health and psyche.

In the case of Ugwu, the knot represents the guilt and moral compromises he witnessed and participated in during the war. This guilt burdens him and makes him write *The World Was Silent When We Died*. Regarding Kainene, she suppressed all her emotions and tried hard to help women and children who suffered physically and mentally. She spends all her money to provide food and medicine to people in her refugee camps. This tireless work exhausted her physically and mentally. She could not accept men taking advantage of the situation, instead of helping them to heal mentally and physically. Kainene’s ‘knot’ represents her physical and mental exhaustion. Displacement is another somatic experience faced by the Biafran people. Being yanked by homes and communities fosters bodily hurt. Displacement unseats not only the individual but also the community, which is inevitably uprooted when the individual is. One safe space after another is lost, as Olanna has to make and unmake the false starts of a life held not by the pillars of home but by the flotsam and jetsam of a precarious existence.

Adichie often demonstrates how inadequate language captures the extremities of experiences during war. At these times, the body speaks. When Olanna is reduced to silence by the horror of what has happened, her physical collapse or her dark

swoops communicates the depth of her trauma more powerfully than words. This closely aligns with Caruth’s concept of the unspeakability of trauma. For Caruth, the body is the primary site of trauma.

Although every character suffers, Olanna’s bodily experiences are perhaps the most graphically detailed. This might be a dimension of expressing trauma related to gender. Alternatively, it might simply be Adichie’s choice of character profoundly connected to the intimate, internal, and emotional core of the narrative and the home front. In any case, Olanna’s body becomes a landscape upon which to map the not-so-graphic violations of war (both personal and national), which are Adichie’s focus.

Profound physical and emotional suffering results in real but profound and life-altering changes to individual characters, yet they still manage to display incredible resilience, despite the fact that the war takes on them emotionally and physically. Adichie does not romanticise military resilience, though, and shows how it is often conflated with the term “survivor’s guilt” in dealing with the unarticulated costs of war throughout these individuals’ lives. Characters carry wartime costs within their bodies while undergoing painful life changes that force them to relearn anything resembling a semi-normal life.

Essentially, Adichie illustrates the bodily experience of war in *Half of a Yellow Sun* not merely by listing symptoms, but by employing a more sophisticated literary strategy. With her depiction of the visceral reality of war, she fosters not just sympathy but also real empathy and an understanding of the pervasive and lasting effects of trauma on the human organism. The “knot in the chest” is an embodied history of pain rather than only a sensation.

This study examines portrayals of sexual violence and severe trauma, as illustrated in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The examination of these scenes aims to demonstrate how the theme of trauma, vulnerability, and resilience as a somatic experience in the context of war is articulated by Adichie in her novel. This analysis was conducted only for academic purposes with ethical responsibility, acknowledging the sensitivity of these experiences of both survivors and readers.

Conclusion

Half of the Yellow Sun by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie masterfully transcends a strictly historical telling of the Nigerian-Biafran War. Instead, it probes much deeper into the profound embodied experiences of the characters. This article argues that the physical manifestation and central metaphor of “a knot in the chest” provides a key interpretive framework for understanding how the novel handles the somatic dimensions of displacement and loss.

The experiences of Olanna, Odenigbo, Ugwu, and Kainene betray the idea that trauma is mere abstraction. It is not. It is the lived reality of many, not only here but also across an ever-shrinking world. When they or we suffer, we do this viscerally. The body knows. The body remembers. Knowledge and memory remain etched invisibly on the surface of the skin. Adichie seems to have intended to persuade readers. The long, sinuous path Olanna and others traverse is one of self-discovery, the kind of raw reality that makes one intimately acquainted with the nature of both mental and physical suffering.

Adichie performs several significant literary and humanistic functions when she expresses the somatic effects of war in a powerful way. For one, she accomplishes the humanisation of the conflict’s staggering statistics, pulling readers into the understanding of the personal, private, and very intimate costs of a public and historical event. For another, she is giving voice to the physicality of trauma, which is far too often silenced and is way too often kept as a secret, side-by-side with the mind’s working-over in the “What the hell just happened?” department. In the end, *Half of a Yellow Sun* powerfully evokes the “knot in the chest” and other bodily experiences with sickness and health to make the case for human resilience, but it also serves as an unambiguous reminder of the lasting visible and invisible effects of war.

In the case of Biafra, starvation and slaughter take on the quality of “bodily memories” that all Nigerians (and the readers of this novel) share and can witness. By drawing her audience’s attention to the physical “feeling” of history and war, that is, the bodily sensation of a knot in the chest, or the sharp pain of a limb, went awry. Adichie’s novel transforms an otherwise abstract history into

something far more common than human. Through some kind of twisted familial solidarity, the readers of this novel are somehow more connected to the violence wrought by the Nigerian state upon its citizens in the late sixties.

However, this study is limited by its exclusive textual analysis and close reading, which does not include first-person narratives or cross-cultural reader response data, which could provide insight into more comprehensive readings of embodied trauma. In addition, a specific emphasis on certain characters and scenes might lead to missing other facets of the novel’s treatment of collective suffering. Future studies could enhance comparative reading with other African war novels or enrich oral testimonies and interdisciplinary empirical data on trauma performance in postcolonial contexts.

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