

Rethinking the Nigerian/Biafran Civil War in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*: A War Fought to Foster Unity or Genocide Against a Particular People

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Abstract

The thirty-month civil war fought between the Nigerian federal government and the secessionist Biafra from 1967 to 1970 has widely been justified by non-Igbo Nigerians, the aggressors, and foreigners as “a war fought to keep Nigeria one.” The aim of this article is therefore to examine the remote causes of the Nigerian/Biafran civil war and to ascertain whether or not this general mantra of keeping Nigeria one by wasting more than three million lives with property worth millions of pounds all from one tribe is a genocide. In this article the theory of new historicism and qualitative descriptive research methods are applied to examine this historical event from the perspectives of Chimamanda Adichie's artistic recreation, but realistic representation of the Nigerian/Biafran war in her award-winning novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This article concludes that one of the causes of the Nigerian/Biafran civil war is the fear of political domination among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria and that the war is a genocide against the Igbo nation, hence the definition of genocide by the United Nations, as any act committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.

Keywords: *Nigeria, Biafra, Genocide, Civil War.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian/Biafra civil war fought between the secessionist Biafra and the Nigerian federal military government between 1967 and 1970 is a part and parcel of Nigeria's postcolonial history, and has provoked and generated myriads of literary works, which include: Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra*, (1973) Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976) Isdore Okpewu's *The Victims* (1970) and *The Last Duty* (1979) Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of A Yellow Sun* (2007) and the latest of all, Chinua Achebe's “There was a Country” (2011). All these literary works have used different characters in their depiction of the events of the period and to recast the war situation. One striking feature of all of them is that they share a common characteristic of those who were the target of attacks during the 1966 pogrom, which led to the civil war, the geographical space in which the war took place, and those who were victims of the pogrom and the civil war.

There had been so much contestation that the then Federal Military Government, under General Yakubu Gowon fought the secessionist Biafra in order to keep Nigeria one. This article seeks to introspect the remote causes of the civil war and to ascertain whether the war was a genocide aimed at annihilating a particular ethnic group or actually a war fought to keep

Nigeria one, from the fictive but realistic representation of the Nigerian/Biafran civil war in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This article adopts the framework of new historicism and qualitative descriptive research methods in order to ascertain the causes of this holocaust and those that are the victims of this great historical event as re-casted by this quintessential writer. New historicism is an extrinsic theory that allows the study of literature from societal, historical, and cultural perspectives; thus, the literary text is read parallel to non-literary texts that stress similar historical issues on times as captured in the literary text (<https://eprojectmatter.com/project>). Available literature and events during the 1966 pogrom as well as the subsequent civil war earlier stated point to the same direction of target attacks on a particular people, the "Igbo people". The pattern of attack on the people of eastern Nigeria particularly the Igbo people affirm the definition of genocide by Raphael Lemkin (1944) cited in Emefiena (128). He stated that: the word genocide means a coordinated set of actions aimed at annihilating an identifiable group of people. The United Nations in 1948 took genocide to mean any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious groups such as:

- a. Killing members of the group
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction in whole or in part.
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (Emefiena,129)

Charles Keil, an American ethnomusicologist cited in (Lasse &Dirk 2014) witnessed the 1966 massacre, and led the chapter to keep Biafra alive at the State University of New York at Buffalo, he described the pogrom in Makurdi, Nigeria late September 1966 thus....

The pogroms I witnessed in Makurdi, in late September 1966 were foreshadowed by months of intensive anti-Ibos (sic) and anti-Easterner conversation among Tiv, Idoma, Hausa, and other northern residents in Makurdi and fitting a pattern replicated in the city after city, the massacre was led by the Nigerian army. Before, during and after the slaughter. Colonel Gowon could be heard over the radio issuing a guarantee of safety to all easterners, all citizens in Nigeria, but the intent of the soldiers the only power that matters in Nigeria was painfully clear; after counting the disemboweled bodies along Makurdi road I was escorted to the city by soldiers, who apologized for the stench and explained politely that they were doing me and the world a great favor by eliminating Ibos (sic). "They eat dogs they must die like dogs, we find them, we kill them, and they do us the same no be so? "They were born with greed in their heart, they are the only people spoiling Nigeria ever since one Nigeria without Ibos. We make sure they will never worry us again. I am paraphrasing the kernel conversation with dozens of soldiers conducted at Night clubs, roadblocks, and in their barracks within the ten months between the pogrom and July 1967, when I left Nigeria. I met a few soldiers mostly officers who are convinced that the Ibos are innately evil, expandable, exterminable, but were exceptional (102).

Adeniran (2002) unambiguously stated that it was the unabated pogrom that sparked off the Nigerian/Biafran civil war (102).

Soyinka (2006) aligning with Adeniran, stated that the reason that led to the secession and subsequently the civil war thus:

“It would be a distortion of history and an attempt to trivialize the trauma the Igbo had undergone to suggest as some commentators tried to do that it was the lure of the oil wealth that drove them to seek a separate existence. When people had been subjected to a degree of inhuman violation for which there is no other word but genocide, they have to seek an identity different from their aggressors” (101)

The correspondence of Time Magazine, October 7, 1966, quoted in (Forsyth 1969) reported the gruesome murder of the Igbo people in Kano thus....

The massacre began at the airport near the fifth battalion’s home city of Kano. A Lagos-based Jet had arrived from London, and as the Kano passengers were escorted into the custom shade a willed-eyed soldier stormed in brandishing a rifle and demanding “Ina nyamiri” the Hausa for where are the damned Ibos? (sic). There were Igbos among the custom officers and they dropped their chalk and fled only to be shot down at the main terminal by other soldiers screaming the blood curses of Muslim holy war, the Hausa troops turned the airport into shambles, bayoneting Ibo workers in the bar, gunning them down in the corridor, and hauling Igbo passengers off the plane to be lined up and shot. From the airport the troops fumed out through downtown Kano, hunting down Ibos in bars, and hotels on the streets. One of the contingents drove their Land Rover to the railway road station where more than one hundred Ibos were waiting for the train and cut them down with automatic fire weapons. The soldiers do not have to do all the killings. They were joined by thousands of Hausa civilians who rampaged through the city armed with stones, cutlasses, matchets, homemade weapons of metal, and broken glasses, crying heathen and Allah. The mob and troops invade the Sabongari (stranger’s quarters) ransacking, looting and burning Igbo homes and stores and murdering their owners, all night long and into the morning the massacre went on. They are tired but fulfilled. The Hausas drifted back to their homes to get some breakfast and sleep. Municipal garbage trucks were sent out to collect the dead and dump them into mass graves outside the city. The death toll will never be known, but it was at least a thousand (78).

Lasse Heerten and Dirk Mosses (2014) carried out a study entitled “The Nigerian/Biafra civil war: Postcolonial conflict and the question of genocide” They enumerated the factors that caused the Nigeria-Biafra civil war as follows:

- (i). The British colonial rule divided the Nigerian population along ethnic lines
- (ii). The Nigerian/Biafran civil war was a sponsored ideology driven by ethnic hatred against the easterners the (Igbo) people. The study concluded that the memory of the war remained wrenching in Nigeria and Nigeria's diaspora circle and that whether genocide was committed constitutes a recurrent bone of contention within Nigerian society. ([https://dio.org/10.1080/146235282014936700.cros mark1080](https://dio.org/10.1080/146235282014936700.cros%20mark1080)).

Joseph C. Mckenna (1969) quoted in Lasse & Dirk (2014) while commenting on the inhuman treatment meted to the Igbo people by their Nigerian compatriots made a case for why he thinks that the people of southeastern Nigeria could seek a separate existence from their aggressors. He stated that: “Unable to feel secure away from their native soil, the Ibos (sic) saw themselves as a target of genocide. The trauma induced by the September (1966) riots, coming

on the heels of the violence in May and July, cannot be overestimated. Secession had become almost inevitable (178).

The Times magazine (August 23, 1968, p. 24) cited in Emefiena (2013) describes the song chanted by Hausa soldiers marching off to the war thus:

Nigeria (Hausa) “Mu je mu kerkeshe su, mu tartara kayan su, mu ber su suna kukan banza”

Nigerian (English) Translation “We go, we slaughter them, we ravish their precious wares, we abandon them crying useless tears”.

From the relics of the war song, the intention is not hidden or by any means disguised neither did it suggest Nigeria’s unity but has the ultimate intention of total extermination and annihilation of the Igbo people. Emfiena maintained that....

As the war progressed, the chants turned into terrible reality. In captured villages, front-line troops were followed by rag-tag ‘sweepers from northern Nigeria. They nailed the Igbo tribesmen on the wall of their wooden huts, they sprayed them with automatic rifle fire or set touches to their clothes. Mop-up soldiers rape women, sometimes line up whole villages to be shot. The Ibos (sic) concluded that the Hausa tribesmen fully intended to use the war to systematically exterminate them (115).

Okocha (1994) stated that Asaba witnessed most of the abominable atrocities carried out by the federal troops of Nigeria, he submits that....

“Some bodies strewn on the pathways were the remains of babies hacked to death from the clutches of their helpless nursing mothers. At the police station, my mother instinctively spread her hands and attempted to gather in one spot all her children. She was calling on Jesus and obviously was in and out of hysteria. Suddenly, a boy I know him, he was a student of St. Patrick’s college Asaba, was dragged out and mortally wounded. As he was writhing in agony, he cried is this death? Is this how people die? Please mama come and help me... Mama bianu!! Some people help me!!The officer responded. He ordered a Mercedes 411 truck to run over the poor boy” (52).

Elizabeth Bird and Fraser Ottanelli cited in Lasse and Dirk (2014) collaborating Okocha’s view recounted the atrocities committed by Nigerian troops and unambiguously stated that....

“The Asaba massacre took place in August 1967 after the Biafran forces had launched a major offensive, crossed the Niger, and marched through the Midwestern state towards Lagos. Failing to capitalize on the momentum, the Biafrans come to a halt about 100 km east of the capital and withdrew. After the federal forces retaliated violence against the civilians...they became victims of massacre and rape. They however maintained that the memory of the Asaba massacre is still alive although the Nigerian state has repressed the publication of the terrible events and its commemoration. For many in Asaba, the memory of the massacre remains painful and stands in the way of inter-ethnic reconciliation” (175).

Osagie-Jacobs (2010) cited in Emefiena, (2013) stated that “the genocide against the Igbo in northern Nigeria and the so-called war to keep Nigeria one is one of the most vicious inhumanity of man to man since Cain slew Abel, he maintained that...though they are the innocent victim they are intimidated to believe they are the guilty ones” (170).

Dr. Mensa's International Commission report (1969) cited in Emeffiana (2013) states that....

Documentary evidence abounds in the speeches of northern Nigeria leaders in the regional parliament, by publication in Northern Nigeria official newspapers, brochures and magazines of intention to liquidate Biafrans physically as a method of solving a disagreement.... Finally, I am of the opinion that in many of the cases cited to me hatred of the Biafrans and a wish to exterminate them was a foremost motivational factor (116).

From the reviewed literature, the targets of attacks and the massacres are not mistaken or by any means disguised. To buttress the shattering, dehumanizing, and traumatic experience of the Igbo people all over Nigeria, during the pogrom mostly in northern cities and villages. And subsequently the war and the systematic genocide of the civilian population.

Chimamanda Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* has drawn a litany of scholarly interest and investigation, being a novel that dwelt so much on historical and political events in Nigeria. Some of the works of these scholars will be reviewed here.

Onyeka Ike (2003) examined contestations, conflicts, and corollaries of sociohistorical conditions in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. He concluded his study by stating unequivocally that a number of socio-political contestations and conflicts represented in the novel still subsists in various forms despite the multiplicity of their dire corollaries, mainly since their precursors have not been decisively dealt with.

Augustine Uka Nwyanwu and Okwudiri Anasiudu (2019) studied the trauma of a nation and the narrative of suffering in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The study submitted that *Half of a Yellow Sun* captures the agonies and traumatic experiences of the Igbo ethnic nation in Nigeria which were both at the psychological and physical levels during the Nigerian civil conflict.

Charles Cliff Feghabo (2022) studied the valorization of womanhood in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The study examines Adichie's redefinition of the status of femininity vis-a-vis education through the action of the male/female gender and the rural illiterate/highly educated female gender captured in duality. Adichie in the text configures education as an undercurrent for the exploitation of the educated female.

From the reviewed studies on Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, there is a gap in knowledge that needs to be filled, and this is the re-occurring question of whether the Nigeria/Biafra civil war was actually fought to unite Nigeria or an orchestrated genocide targeted at a particular ethnic group. None of these previous studies has investigated this crucial aspect of Nigeria's post-colonial history.

2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES THAT BIRTHED THE CIVIL WAR

At independence on 1st October 1960, Nigeria was practicing a parliamentary system of government with the prime minister as the head of government. There is also the president who holds no executive powers, his functions are purely ceremonial. The political structure of the country constitutes of four regions which are: Eastern Nigeria, Western Nigeria, Northern Nigeria, and Midwestern Nigeria each having a premier as the head of the respective regions. The civilian administration was said to be characterized by a high level of corruption. There were political upheavals in different parts of the country which include: the violent political crisis in western region and the Tiv riots of 1965. On the wee hours of January 15, 1966, a

group of army officers struck and ended the life span of the first republic, and several political officeholders were killed. It is most pertinent to state here that the January coup was greeted with much jubilation across the country, but later weeks and months came about speculations that the coup was staged by the over-ambitious Igbo people who wanted to dominate every facet of Nigeria's national life. On the wee hours of July 29, 1966, a group of northern officers in the Nigerian army staged a counter-coup. The head of state and the supreme commander, Major General J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi was killed in Ibadan alongside his host Lt. Col Francis Adekunle Fajuyi military governor of the western region. No fewer than two hundred army officers of Igbo extraction lost their lives. The northern officers then selected Lt. Col Yakubu Gown as the new head of state. This fact is collaborated by Chinua Achebe (2011) thus....

The weeks following the coup saw easterners attacked both randomly and in organized fashion there seem to be a lust for revenge, which meant an excuse for Nigerians to take their resentment on the Igbos (sic) who led the nation in virtually every sector: politics, education, commerce and arts. It was a desperate time soldiers were being used by elements in power to commit a number of crimes against the Ibos (sic). Military officers are rounding people up and summarily executing them especially in the north, we were told by victims fleeing the pogroms. In Lagos where we live, soldiers were used in target raids of certain places and homes including our home (67)

The attack on the Igbo people continued unabated in different parts of Nigeria and the Igbo people were like rats that must be annihilated at all cost. It was a period of mass exodus of the Igbo people from different parts of Nigeria; no place was safe again for the Igbo man except the east. There were no Igbo families that did not get a fair share of the pogrom. Those that were lucky came back home with either one eye missing, a hand, or a leg. These ugly events and the inability of Gowon's federal military government to halt the massacre of people of southeastern extraction forced the leaders of thought of the southeast to prevail on the then Military governor of the then-eastern region Lt. Col Chukwemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu to announce the independent republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967. This was followed by the declaration of police action against the Eastern region by Gowon's federal military government and then the thirty months of civil war in which about three million lives were lost.

3. FICTIVE BUT REALISTIC REPRESENTATION OF NIGERIAN/BIAFRAN CIVIL WAR IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN*

Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is an encrypted travail of southeastern Nigerians especially the Igbo people during the 1966 pogrom against the Igbo people in all parts of Nigeria especially in northern Nigeria and subsequently, the civil war that followed the heels of the 1966 massacre. The massacre and pogrom of the Igbo people in northern Nigeria is an open wound that cries for recognition, despite re-christening the massacre and civil war "a war to keep Nigeria one" by the aggressors. All available literature and all other Nigerian/Biafran civil war narratives are all pointing in one direction of the genocide against a particular ethnic group. The counter-coup of July 29, 1966, in which Major General J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi was assassinated brought Lt. Col Yakubu Gown to become the head of state of Nigeria despite his unacceptance by some officers in the army that thought that the order of succession and seniority should be maintained. With this development, the killing and massacre of Easterners continued unabated. Adichie used the character of Ugwu, Odenigbo's house boy to represent the general feelings of the Igbo people at that time. He heard the number of Igbo

people that were killed in the northern cities of Maiduguri, and Kano on the news and wanted to throw away the radio....

They repeated the news of the killings in Maiduguri until Ugwu wanted to throw the radio out of the window, and the next afternoon after the men left, a solemn voice on ENBC Radio Enugu recounted eyewitness accounts from the north: teachers hack down in Zaria, a full catholic church in Sokoto set on fire, a pregnant woman split open in Kano. (165)

This quintessential novelist vividly made a graphic imaginative but realistic representation of the charged atmosphere at the railway station in Enugu during the arrival of survivors fleeing the 1966 pogrom from different parts of Northern Nigeria....

Mats and dirty wrappers were spread all over the platform and people were crumpled down on them, men and women and children crying...and tending wounds. Ugwu did not want to go into that ragged bazaar but he steeled himself and walked into a man sitting on the ground with a red stained rag wound around his head. Flies buzzed everywhere ... Ugwu did not look to see how deep the knife wound on his head was. The man's right eye was gone, in its place a juicy red pulp. The rickety train pulled up, so full that some people held on the outside of the couches, clutching at metal bars. Ugwu watched as tired, dusty, bloody people climbed down...these limping and defeated people.... (165)

Adichie used the character of Richard Churchill a Briton, who had come to explore the Igbo art, and had an Igbo girl-friend, Kainene Ozoibia to depict how non-Nigerian and non-Igbo people feel about the massacre of the Igbo people at Kano airport in 1966. The victims are Igbo custom officers in the airport, Igbo passengers who have boarded a flight from London en route Kano to Lagos, and any other human being that has the semblance of an Igbo man or woman....

Nnemeka turned to go back to his desk. Richard picked up his briefcase. The side entrance busted open and three men ran in holding long rifles. They were wearing green army uniforms and Richard wondered why soldiers would make a spectacle of themselves dashing in like that, until he saw how red and wildly glassy their eyes were. The first soldier waved his rifle around, "*In nyamiri*" where are the Igbo people. "Who is an Igbo here? Where are the infidels?" A woman screamed. "You are Igbo" The soldier said to Nnaemeka "No I come from Katsina! Katsina! The soldier walked over to him "say *Allahu Akabar!* The lounge was silent. Richard felt cold sweat weighing on his eyelashes. Say *Allahu Akabar*, the soldier repeated The rifle went off and Nnemeka's chest blow open, a spattering red mass, and Richard dropped the note in his hands. Passengers were crouched behind the chairs. Men got on their knees to lower their heads to the floor. Somebody was shouting in Igbo, "my mother," oh! My mother, oh! "God has said no". It was the bartender. One of the soldiers walked up close and shot him, and then aims at the bottles of liquor lined up behind and shot those. The room smelt of whiskey and Campari and gin. They were more soldiers now, more shots, more shouts of *nyamiri* and *araba*.... The soldiers ran out to the tarmac and into the aero plane and pulled out Igbo people who had already boarded and lined them up and shot them and left them lying there.....Richard felt himself wet his trousers there was a painful ringing in his ear. He almost missed his flight because as the other passengers walked shakily to the plane he stood aside vomiting (175-1760)

The mindless wave of killing of all persons of south easterner extraction in northern and western Nigeria; children, pregnant women, and all cadres of persons identified as Igbo continued unabated. The pogrom occurs simultaneously with the looting and burning down of Igbo people's possession, both within the military barracks, cities, and villages especially in northern Nigeria. Adichie, used the character of Colonel Madu an army officer of Igbo extraction who escaped being killed in Kaduna by his military colleagues to represent this period of desperation. The colonel however narrated to Kainene, another character how he was able to escape being killed in the pogrom when he appeared in Kainene's house in Port Harcourt.

Ibrahim saved my life. He told me about the coup that morning. He was not directly involved, but most of them the northern officers knew about it. He drove me to his cousin's house, but I didn't really understand until he asked his cousin to take me to the back yard, where he kept his domestic animals. I slept in the chicken house for two days "No *ekwuzina*" and you know soldiers came to search his cousin's house to look for me. Everybody know how Ibrahim and I were, and they suspected he help me to escape. They didn't check the chicken house, though. Colonel Madu paused, nodding and looking into the distance. I did not know how bad chicken shit smelt until I slept in it for three days. On the third day Ibrahim sent me some caftan and money through a small boy and asked me to leave right away. I dressed like a Fulani nomad and walked through the smaller villages because Ibrahim said that Artillery soldiers had set up roadblocks on all the major roads in Kaduna. I was lucky to find a lorry driver, an Igbo man from Ohofia, who took me to Kafanchan. My cousin leaves there. You know Onunkwo don't you? Madu did not wait for Kainene to respond. "He is the station manager at the railway, and he told me that northern soldiers had sealed off Markurdi Bridge. That bridge is grave they search every single vehicle, they delayed passenger train for up to eight hours, and they shot all the Igbo officers they discovered there and throw them over. Many of the soldiers wore disguises, but they used their boot to find them "what!" Kainene leaned forward (159-160).

Olanna, Odenigbo's girlfriend's visit to Kano coincided with the pogrom in 1966. It is from her encounter and experience with her Hausa boyfriend Mohammed that we learned that Mbaezi her uncle and his entire household were massacred during the pogrom....

Olanna was sitting in Mohammed's veranda drinking chilled rice milk, laughing at the delicious cold trickling down her throat, at the stickiness of her lips when the gateman appeared and asked to speak to Mohammed. Mohammed left and came back moments later, holding what looks like a pamphlet. "They are rioting" he said. "It is the students isn't? Olanna asked. "I think it is religious. You must leave right away, his eyes avoided hers. A bus drive past dusty and yellow, it looked like one of those campaign buses that politicians use to tour rural areas and gave out cash and rice to villagers. A man was hanging on the door, a loud speaker pressed to his mouth, his slow Hausa words resonating. "The Igbo must go. The infidels must go. The Igbo must go" They drove past a crowd of young men on the roadside chanting Araba! Araba!. In Sabongari, the first street was empty. Olanna saw the smoke rising like tall grey shadows before she smelt the scent of burning. "Stay here" as he stopped the car in front of Mbaezi's compound. She watched him run out. The street looked strange, unfamiliar the compound gate was broken, the metal flattened on the ground. Then she noticed Auntie Ifeka's kiosk, or what remained of it, splinters of wood packets of ground nut lying in

the dust. She opened the car door and climbed out. She paused for a moment because of how glaringly bright and hot it was, with flames billowing from the roof, with grit and ash flowing in the air, before she began to run towards the house. She stopped when she saw the bodies. 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. Auntie Ifeka lay on the veranda. The cuts on her naked body were smaller dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips... Muhammed pushed her into the car and then went round and got in "Keep your face down" he said... They drove in frenzied silence, past policemen in blood-splattered uniforms, past vultures perched by the roadside, past boys carrying looted radios, until he packed at the train station and shoved her unto a crowded train (169-170).

The anti-Igbo campaign continued unabated in different parts of Nigeria, particularly in the northern and western parts of Nigeria as the Igbo people were being hunted down. When Olanna went to Lagos with her cousin Arize, after the first coup, to buy bridal things in preparation for Arize's wedding, they were almost attacked and lynched if not for the fact that Olanna speaks Yoruba fluently

The main market entrance was strangely empty. Then Olanna saw the crowd ahead. A man in a yellow singlet stood at the center while two men slapped him, one after the other, methodically leathery-sounding slaps. "Why now, why are you denying?" The man stared at them blankly, bending his neck slightly after each slap. Arize stopped somebody from the crowd called out, we are counting the Igbo people. Oya come and identify yourself. You are Igbo? Arize muttered in her breath "*I kwuna okwu*" (don't talk) as if Olanna was thinking of saying anything and then shook her head and started to speak fluent, loud Yoruba, all the while casually turning so that they could go back the way they had come. The crowd lost interest in them. Another man in safari suit was being slapped on the back of the head. "You are Igboman? Don't deny it simply identify yourself" Arize shrugged. "We hear rumor that they have been doing this in Kaduna and Zaria since the coup; they go out in the street and start to harass Igbo people because they say the coup was an Igbo coup." "*Eziokwu?* Really? (151-152).

A man called Obiozo, Odenigbo's kinsman visited Odenigbo at Nsukka after escaping the pogrom in Kano. He narrated the ordeal of the Igbo people residing in Northern Nigeria....

When Ugwu saw the hollowed-eyed men with the dirty smeared clothes, he knows right away that he should take baby away.... One of the men was speaking while the other drank from a bottle of water the glass ignored on the table. "We saw a lorry driver who agreed to carry us" the man said and Ugwu could tell right away that he is master's kinsman; his Abba dialect was heavy each *f* sounding like a *v* "what happened" master asked. The man placed the bottle of water down and said quietly "they are killing us like ants" Did you hear what I said? Ants. "Our eyes have seen plenty *anyi afujugo anya*" Obiozo said. I saw a whole family, a father and mother and three children lying on the road to motor park just lying there. "What about Kano? What is happening in Kano?" master asked. "It started in Kano" the man said (165).

The killings and destruction of the lives and property of people of Igbo extraction continued with a maddening frenzy in every part of Nigeria especially in northern cities and towns which provoked great tension in southeastern Nigeria. The Igbo man is not safe in any part of Nigeria. The elders and leaders of thought in Eastern Nigeria unanimously urged the

military governor of the region, Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu to declare the Eastern region a sovereign state with the name and title Biafra, after much hesitation and persuasion the military governor declared the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967 thus...

Fellow countrymen and women, you the people of Eastern Nigeria: conscious of the supreme authority of the almighty God over all mankind...aware that you can no longer be protected in your lives and in your property by any government based outside Eastern Nigeria; determined to dissolve all political and other ties between you and the former republic of Nigeria; having mandated me to proclaim on your behalf and in your name that Eastern Nigeria be a sovereign independent republic, now therefore I do hereby solemnly proclaim that the territory and region known as and called Eastern Nigeria ... shall hence forth be an independent sovereign state of the name and title The Republic of Biafra (186).

The secession announcement was responded to with a police action by the leader of the Nigerian Federal Military Government Gen. Yakubu Gowon, against the already badly battered, wounded and traumatized people of the southeast region. Ugwu, Odenigbo's house boy heard the radio announcement of the police action while cooking soup in the kitchen with his master's mistress, Olanna...

That evening while he was cooking dinner, a quiet voice on the radio announced that Nigeria would embark on police action to bring back the rebels of Biafra (203).

Few minutes after the radio announcement, there were distant crushing sounds of explosion

"What is that" she asked "Do you hear it Ugwu?" "What is it?" Olanna dropped the ladle and ran into the living room. Ugwu followed, master was standing by the window, holding a copy of Biafran Sun. "What is that" Olanna asked. She pulled baby to herself. "They are advancing" master said calmly "I think we should plan on leaving today" then Ugwu heard the loud honk of a car outside. Suddenly he was afraid to go to the door, even to go to the window and peek out. Master opened the door. The green Morris Minor had packed so hurriedly that one tyre was outside the drive way, crushing the lilies that boarded the lawn; when the man came out of the car, Ugwu was shocked that he was only wearing a singlet and trousers, and bathroom slippers too. "Evacuate now! The federals have entered Nsukka. We are evacuating now! Right now! I am going to all the houses that are still occupied. Evacuate now" (204-205).

At this point, Odenigbo ordered his girlfriend Olanna to pack a few things so that they leave Nsukka, thinking that it would be temporal, not envisaging that it was the beginning of thirty months of bloodshed of mainly people of Igbo extraction.

"Get few things together Nkem" master said. I will check the water in the car. "Ugwu locks up quick don't forget the Boy's quarters". "Gini what things?" Olanna asked, "What will I take?" Baby started to cry there was the sound again bom!-bom!, bom closer and louder. "It won't be long we would be back soon just take few things, clothes" master gestured vaguely before he grab the car keys from the shelve (205).

The police action declared by the Nigerian military government against the eastern region and its citizens who are being hunted down all over Nigeria snowballed into a full-blown war that lasted for thirty months. There were frequent air raids bombing and killing of south easterners (Biafrans).

As Ugwu, Odenigbo, Olanna, Baby, and other residents on the campus of the University of Nigeria Nsukka were leaving the university town they met with other people who were running away from their homes....

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 bicycle. Ugwu wondered why they are holding kerosene lanterns although it was not yet dark. He saw a little boy stumble and the mother bended and yanked him up, and he thought about home about his little cousins and his parents and Anulika. They were safe they would not leave to run because their village was too remote...when they finally arrived at Abba it was dark, the windscreen was coated in ochre dust and baby was asleep (206-207).

Odenigbo and his household fled Nsukka and returned to his ancestral home Abba, leaving almost all their household items in Nsukka, with the hope that the hostility would end soon but unknown to him it was the beginning of thirty months of starvation, death, and uncertainty. He joined the men of Abba in holding meetings about winning the war effort and Olanna also joined the women in the sewing group.

She joined them two weeks ago in the town hall sewing singlets and towels for soldiers she felt bitter towards them at first, because when she tried to talk about the things she had left behind at Nsukka-her books, her piano, her clothes, her china, her wigs, her singer sewing machine, the television, they ignore her and started talking about something else. Now she understood that nobody talks the things left behind instead they talk about the win the war effort. A teacher had donated his bicycle to the soldiers, cobblers were making soldier's boots for free, and farmers were giving away yams (213).

The war situation has created a situation where all the aggrieved easterners and the Igbo people in particular have come together to fight a common course. Odenigbo had been offered an appointment at the Manpower Directorate at Umuahia which serves as the capital of Biafra after the fall of Enugu. He was planning to relocate to Umuahia with his household when his ancestral home, Abba came under heavy bombardment by the federal troops. He and his household hurriedly left for Umuahia where his colleague Professor Achara had found them an accommodation.

Master came home from a meeting early that evening we'll leave for Umuahia tomorrow" he said "we would have gone to Umuahia anyway. We are just leaving a week or two sooner" He spoke too fast looking at a point in the distancethe wooden gate in the mud wall creaked open and Aniekwena came into the compound. He was master's cousin He looked grin now. Behind him was master's mother "We are ready to go and Odenigbo you mother refused to park her things and come" Aniekwena said. Master closed the bonnet "Mama, I thought we agreed that you will go to Uke? *Ekwuzina nofu!* Don't say that, you told me that we have to run, and that it is better that I go to Uke, but did you hear me agree? Did I say "oh" to you? "Do you want to come with us to Umuahia, then?" Master asked. Mama looked at the car parked full "but why are you running" Where are you running to? Can you hear any guns? "People are fleeing Abagana and Ukpo, which means the Hausa soldiers are close and will soon enter Abba.... Mama you can't stay here. Nobody will be left in Abba (225).

Chimamanda Adichie used the characters of Odenigbo, Olanna, and Ugwu in the depiction of the frequent air raids of civilian enclaves by the Nigerian military authorities. Olanna and Odenigbo have been living together for some time and during the war at Umuahia decided to get married. During the wedding reception in their small rented apartment at Umuahia, an air raid occurred that shattered the rare happiness of those traumatic and desperate days.

Ugwu heard the sound just before they cut the cake in the living room, the swift wah-wah roar in the sky. At first it was thunderous and then it receded for a moment and came back again louder and swifter. From somewhere close, chickens began to squawk widely. Somebody said “enemy plane air raid” “out” master shouted but some guests were running into the bedroom screaming Jesus! Jesus! The sounds were louder now overhead. They ran-master, Olanna holding baby, Ugwu some guests to the cassava patch beside the house and lay on their bellies. Ugwu looked up and saw the planes gliding low beneath the blue sky like two birds of prey. They spurted hundreds of scattered bullets before dark balls rolled out from underneath as if the planes were laying large eggs. The first explosion was so loud that Ugwu’s ear popped and his body shivered alongside the vibrating ground. The second explosion followed and then the third, and fourth and fifth, until Ugwu felt the warm wetness of urine on his shorts and convinced that the bombs will never end; they would continue to fall until everything was destroyed and everyone died. But they stopped.....smoke rose from the compound near the corn grinding station a street away two houses collapsed into dust rubble and some men were digging frantically through the jumbled cement, saying “Did you hear the cry”.....a car was on fire the body of a woman lay near to it, her clothes burnt off, flecks of pink all over her blackened skirt, and when somebody covered it with a torn jute sack Ugwu could still see the charcoal black legs

(232-234).

The massacre and onslaught on the south easterners especially in the Igbo enclave by the federal military government of Nigeria continued unabated through air raids and outright gathering and shooting of the civilian population. Chimamanda Adichie used the character of Alice in the depiction of the collective pains of the Igbo people, especially people whose relations were lined up and shot during the Asaba massacre in 1967

The man knocked again and called out, I am from the “Isioma family in Asaba” Alice opened the door and he went in. Moments later Alice rushed out and threw herself on the ground, rolling this way and that; in the evening sun light, her sand patched skin was tinted with gold. “ogini mere” what happened? The neighbors asked gathering around Alice. “I am from Asaba and I got word from our home town this morning” The man said his accent was thicker than Alice’s, and Olanna understood his Igbo a moment after he had spoken “The vandals took our home town many weeks ago and the announced that all the indigenes should come out and say one Nigeria and they would give them rice, so people came out and said one Nigeria, and the vandals shot them, men, women, and children. Everyone” the man paused. “There is nobody left in Njokama family. Nobody left...what am I doing still alive? They should come and kill me now! I said they should come and kill me” (441).

The war ended in January 1970 with the popular mantra, *no victory no vanquish*; the mantra is false because the Igbo people are vanquished. Igbo officers in the Nigerian Army

before the outbreak of the civil war were captured, imprisoned, and dismissed. Twenty Nigerian pounds were given to every Igboman operating a bank account no matter how much one has in the bank. This novelist used the character of Colonel Madu, to represent this oppressive scenario....

Madu was staying with them in Lagos, now that he had been released from his long detention in Alagbon Close; now that he had been dismissed from the Nigerian Army; now that he had been given twenty pounds for all the money he had before and during the war. On the car radio Gown's speech was broadcast yet again. *No victor and no vanquished*. Newspaper vendors were running around in traffic with their papers wrapped in polythene bags (492-493).

The property left behind by Igbo people while fleeing the 1966 pogrom and civil war was taken over by Nigerians. Chimamanda Adichie made a graphic representation of this scenario through the character of Kainene whose house in Port Harcourt was taken over by a total stranger unknown to Richard Kainene's boyfriend.

Kainene's house was repainted a muted green the bougainvillea that had wreathed it was cut down. Richard went round to the front door and rang the doorbell and imagined Kainene coming to the door and telling him she was fine, she had simply wanted to spend some time alone. The woman who came out had slender tribal marks on her face, two lines on each cheek. She opened the door a crack "yes" Good afternoon" Richard said "My name is Richard Churchill. I am Kainene Ozobia's fiancé" "Yes" I used to leave here. This is Kainene's house. The woman's face tightened. "This was abandoned property. It is now my house" She started to close the door. "Please wait" Richard said "I did like to have our photos please. Can I have some of Kainene's photographs?" "I have a vicious dog and if you don't go now, I will turn it on you. "Please just the photographs" The woman whistled again. From somewhere inside. Richard heard a dog growl he slowly turned and left (489)

4. CONCLUSION

This study has been able to establish with the testimonies and verdicts of available literature the causes of the Nigeria/Biafran civil war, and the genocide visited on the people of southeastern Nigerian especially the Igbo people; and summed up what caused the war and what made the war a genocide against the south easterners: The war is an ideology sponsored ethnic hatred against the South easterners especially the Igbo people, there is also the fear of political and economic domination of the Igbo people among the two major ethnic groups also contributed immensely to the civil war, moreover, the British Colonial Masters, divided the Nigeria population along ethnic lines and this created hatred among the ethnic groups. This study has also established the fact that the Nigerian/Biafra civil war was a genocide targeted against the easterners, especially the Igbo people, going by how the war was executed. After the 1966 pogrom, the Nigerian military government deemed it necessary to declare war against the already battered, and traumatized people of the eastern region. The Nigerian forces violated all known rules of modern warfare by bombing civilian locations, lining up Biafran civilians, and spraying them with automatic rifle fire, as in the case of the Asaba massacre and many others. The Nigerian forces were also followed by ragtag soldiers who carted away the belongings of people of conquered communities. The songs sung by the federal troops (see p.7) were suggestive of the undisguised intention of killing, and total annihilation of the south easterners (Igbo people) which did not in any way suggest Nigeria's unity. The effort made by

the Nigeria government to trivialize the trauma suffered by the eastern region, especially the Igbo people was to expunge History from the primary and secondary school curriculum. Also, there was the negative ingenuity of christening a war that took the lives of more than three million people a war to keep Nigeria one.

From available literature and all other Nigeria/Biafra civil war narratives, the Nigeria/Biafra civil war is a veiled genocide against the Igbo people. Chimamanda Adichie in her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* re-casted the traumatic experience of the Igbo people using fictive characters who suffered various degrees of physical and emotional trauma during this genocide against the southeastern people of Nigeria.

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