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Coming of Age through War: Exploring Bildung in Adichie's half of a Yellow Sun

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a novel of formation with respect to its portrayal of Ugwu, one of the main focalisers of the novel. The novel follows the representation of Ugwu as he develops from a young house boy till he matures to become the chronicler of his people's war time experience. A core proposition of the paper is that even though Ugwu fights with the Biafran army as a child soldier, his war-time experience does not destroy him like we see in other West African child-soldier novels. Rather, he learns important lessons from the war which makes him mature to become the writer of Biafran war history. This makes the novel conform to the Bildungsroman genre unlike most child soldier novels whose protagonists develop abnormally making those novels anti-Bildungsromane.

Keywords: *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Bildungsroman, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Child soldier, Biafra War.

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1. Introduction

Half of a Yellow Sun is the second novel of the renowned Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The novel is based on an actual historical event, the Nigerian/Biafra war. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is set during the turbulent first decade of Nigeria's independence in the 1960s and vividly brings to life the political and cultural crises that beset post-independence Nigeria. The novel moves back and forth in time between the elated optimism of independence in the early 1960s and the terrifying descent into civil war in the late 1960s. Through this narrative strategy, Adichie probes the impact of politics and war on the psyche of ordinary people as she follows the lives of Olanna; her husband, Odenigbo, a university lecturer who is so passionate about the Biafran cause; Ugwu, their houseboy; and Richard, a British writer who is also the boyfriend of Olanna's twin sister, Kainene.

Of interest to this article is the character of Odenigbo's house boy, Ugwu. Ugwu is a village boy who is sent by his aunt to work as a houseboy to Odenigbo, a lecturer at the University of Nigeria,

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Nsukka. Later Olanna, Odenigbo's girlfriend arrives from the UK to live with him. They both enroll Ugwu in a school. In the evenings, Odenigbo receives guests of all kinds of people from the university community who engage in political discussions which Ugwu eavesdrops as he goes about his duties in the house, making him more enlightened and knowledgeable not only in Nigeria's history and politics but that of the world as a whole. However, Ugwu's formal education comes to an end due to the war since he has to flee Nsukka with his master and mistress. Throughout the war, no government ministry functions well and children's education is disturbed by the transformation of schools into refugee camps. Children are underfed and under the threat of frequent bombing. Ugwu, who is improving very fast at school, has to bring his formal education to an end. He is later enlisted in the Biafran army where he engages in killing, looting and even mass rape. This paper examines Ugwu's development before and during the war and argues that unlike the protagonists of other child-soldier novels like Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is not Obligated* and Chris Abani's *Song for Night*, whose protagonist develop abnormally because of their child-soldier experience, Ugwu matures through the war to become a writer of Biafran history.

2. Literature review

Half of a Yellow Sun has received a lot of critical attention. Critics' interests have been on the novel's representation of trauma, history and ideology, its representation of violence and human suffering as a result of war while other critics analyse the novel from a linguistic point of view. In "The Intersection of History, Literature and Trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*" Joke De Mey argues that the novel represents both history and trauma.

According to Madhu Krishnan, the novel's lack of closure is a way Adichie seeks to make sense of the present tensions and ethnic strife in Nigeria through an interrogation of the past, putting special significance on the human scale of trauma and the individually negotiated state of belonging and community engagement. For Daniela-Irina Darie, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie translates the trauma of the Biafran war into storytelling. Majda R. Atieh and Ghada Mohammad analyse *The Story of Zahra* in light of *Half of a Yellow Sun* as revising the role of traumatised female non-combatants in collective change while Ugochukwu Françoise argues that in the novel, one memory leads to the next, and the words reveal Olanna's trauma.

Amy Novak examines Christopher Abani's *GraceLand* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*'s depiction of the trauma of colonialism and neocolonialism and the problem of voice and the ways in which the narratives of these novels work through this structural problem in order to bring forward an African subject who challenges the authority of the addressee. In her thesis, "Gender Performance, Trauma, and Storytelling in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus*", Lauren Elizabeth Rackley explores the implications of trauma on middle class Igbo women's gender performance while in a related thesis, Laureanda Maria Plaias (2013) argues that the "way in which Adichie deals with the rehistoricisation of the Biafran War in the novel can be described as an act of socio-political engagement to remember the violence of the conflict and to place its enduring trauma in historical perspective".

There are other critics who analyse the novel as a representation of history. These Scholars include Daria Tunca, Roshan Morve and Sophia Ogwude. In her article "The Other Half of the Yellow Sun' Ideology in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*", Daria Tunca discusses Adichie's style and techniques in presenting her ideologies in the novel. Roshan Morve also studies the novel from the point of view of history. He argues that the representation of the history of the Biafran war gives the sense of existence of war not only in the past but also in the present. Sophia O. Ogwude's study of the novel involves its representation of history and ideology. She argues that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is Janus-like as it goes beyond recounting historical events to provide a positive social vision. According to Umelo Ojinmah, Adichie's "refusal to forget" underscores one of the fundamental functions of the writer, like those of story tellers, in traditional African society.

Other critics have also discussed the novel's representation of child-soldier experience and the issue of authorship. David Mastey argues that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is not primarily focused on Ugwu's condition as a soldier or the military use of children more generally but the basic function of Ugwu's child soldier experience is to demonstrate one of the many negative consequences of the Nigerian Civil War. In his study, "Representation of child soldiers in Contemporary African fiction", J.A. Kearney

compares five fictional child soldiers and argues that for Ugwu, the “child soldier period is just another way of bringing out his development together with the Biafran war of independence” (Kearney, 2010).

A closer look at the critical essays and reviews of *Half of a Yellow Sun* reveals that even though the novel has received a lot of critical attention, critics’ attention has not been drawn much to the message Adichie is putting across by her portrayal of Ugwu. Even though Mastey and Kearney have discussed Ugwu’s child-soldier experience and his development, they have not explored in detail how Ugwu has developed from childhood to adulthood and how, despite his entry into the Biafran war as a child, he is not destroyed like the protagonists of other child-soldier novels mentioned above. This makes the novel a Bildungsroman and not an anti-Bildungsroman like most child soldier novel referred to in this paper. This paper argues that the novel is a Bildungsroman for Ugwu and maintains that even though at some point Ugwu becomes a child soldier, he does not develop abnormally and his war experience makes him wiser and he even rises to become the historian of his people. In the next section, we discuss in detail the Bildungsroman genre in a broader sense, narrowing it down to the African Bildungsroman.

3. The Bildungsroman

The Bildungsroman, according to Swales (2015), is “any novel having one central figure whose experiences and whose changing self, occupy a role of structural primacy within the fiction”. Both in theory and practice, the Bildungsroman is concerned with a much more diffuse and more general process by which the individual grows and advances.

The German word, Bildungsroman translates into several English synonyms. These include novel of education, novel of transformation, novel of culture, novel of initiation or coming of age story. Marianne Hirsch prefers the term “novels of formation” to all its other synonyms. She posits that the “novel of formation is a novel that focuses on one central character, a figurenroman. It is the story of a representative individual’s growth and development within the context of a defined social order” (Hirsch, 1979). The term Bildungsroman which was first used in critical vocabulary by Wilhelm Dilthey, a German philosopher and sociologist, originates from the two separate strands of thought in the genre, namely the concept of Bildung (giving form) and the theory of the novel (der Roman). Dilthey first employed the term in an 1870 biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher and then popularised it with the success of his 1906 study, *Poetry and Experience* (Boes, 2006). He argued that in a Bildungsroman, we witness a regular development in the life of a person and each of the stages has its own inherent value and is at the same time the basis for a higher stage. As a genre, Bildungsroman traces the development of a young person as he strives to achieve self-understanding and a sense of social responsibility. The protagonist is mostly a sensitive and talented young man who encounters series of problems and makes several false starts before accomplishing his goals.

The diverse definitions of the Bildungsroman indicate that in the novel of formation, character change and identity formation are essential. At the end of the narrative, the hero comes to himself and arrives in the world and can look back to get an overview of the plan that governs his life (Garff, 2013). In the African Bildungsroman, initiation of the protagonist is crucial since almost all the protagonists undergo traditional initiation before they leave home. The connection between the Bildungsroman and initiation is what makes Joseph Conrad argue that storytelling or the creative reconstruction of memories based on universal symbols is a modern counterpart to initiation rites and has a potentially regenerative effect on both individual and society (Dardzinski 2011).

The Bildungsroman became popular among African writers during the twentieth century when writers started using the model, with modifications. Earlier African novels like Camara Laye’s *African Child* (1955), Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965), Ferdinand Oyono’s *Houseboy* (1966) and Mongo Beti’s *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1971) focused on the development of the youth into adulthood and most of these child protagonists undergo traditional initiation rites to confirm their acceptance into adulthood. The genre, even though originally European, male and bourgeois, has undergone transformations with radical changes in human society and writers who use the form in different socio-political eras and geographical spaces, manipulate and modify the Bildungsroman so as to draw attention to the specific experiences of a particular culture and historical period. This is noted in the case of the postcolonial African child within the child’s particular historical

and socio-cultural background (Okuyade, 2009). These novels, therefore boldly reveal the complexities of identity formation in postcolonial contexts.

Other characteristics of the African Bildungsroman include alienation from an embedded identity, nostalgia in exile, and an ironic distance from the process which transforms the person into the individual, for example Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. In these novels of formation, children's development is linked to the political spirit of that time. In Camara Laye's and Soyinka's final episodes of childhood in *L'enfant noir* and *Aké* for instance, there is a strong sense of political exigency and urgency because of the political situation at the time (Sow, 2010). All the qualities of the African Bildungsroman are found in *Half of a Yellow Sun* as discussed below.

4. Half of a yellow sun as an African Bildungsroman

In this section, we trace the growth and development of Ugwu, one of the main character-focalisers in *Half of a Yellow Sun* in relation to the African Bildungsroman genre discussed above. When the novel begins, we see Ugwu who is sent by his aunt from his hometown Opi to Nsukka to work as a houseboy to Odenigbo. Though a village boy of thirteen, he is not initiated before he leaves Opi, his hometown. Ugwu's journey to Nsukka as an adolescent is symptomatic of the African Bildungsroman. However, unlike most African Bildungsromane protagonists, Ugwu does not undergo traditional initiation before he leaves Opi. He is portrayed as a school drop-out and naïve, especially in the first chapter which is focalised from his point of view. For instance, "Ugwu did not believe that anybody, not even his master he was going to live with, ate meat every day ... He had never seen anything like the streets that appeared after they went past the university gates, streets so smooth and tarred that he itched to lay his cheek down on them" (page 1). He is surprised at what he sees in Odenigbo's house because he "had never seen a room so wide. Despite the brown sofas arranged in a semicircle, the side tables between them, the shelves crammed with books, and the centre table with a vase of red and white plastic flowers, the room still seemed to have too much space" (2-3). Though a school dropout, he is able to read some of the titles of the books he finds on Odenigbo's shelves but finds some of them too difficult. He is so excited to see bread and breaks "a chunk that he would have been excited to share with his siblings if a relative had visited and brought it as a gift. He ate quickly before Master could come and change his mind" (7). He is so overwhelmed by Master's house that he "walked on tiptoe from room to room, because he felt dirty and as he did so he grew increasingly determined to please Master, to stay in this house of meat and cool flowers" (7 – 8). When he saw meat in the fridge, he "slipped pieces into his shorts pockets before going into the bedroom. He would keep them until his aunty visited and he would ask her to give them to Anulika" (9). Daria Tunca has argued that "Ugwu's compulsion to secure the chicken in case it should disappear from the fridge is a revealing comment on the scarcity of such luxury item as meat in his own home" (74). While we concur with Tunca's interpretation of this action of Ugwu, we read this as a way Adichie portrays how immature and naïve Ugwu is when he comes to stay with the university lecturer. He is also uncertain whether he would get those delicacies always.

Ugwu's stay with Odenigbo begins his coming of age since Odenigbo teaches him the politics of Nigeria and Africa while Ugwu also learns a lot of things himself through the conversation of the members of Odenigbo's salon. Odenigbo tells Ugwu that it was the Americans who killed Lumumba and not Katanga and tells him that Lumumba was the prime minister of Congo and shows him where Congo is on the African map. When he decides to send Ugwu to school, he tells Ugwu that there are two answers to the things they will teach him at school about Nigeria; the real answer and the answer he gives in school to pass examinations. "They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Niger. That is rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born. But in your exam, write that it was Mungo Park" (14). Ugwu's stay with Odenigbo and Olanna makes him grow to become politically conscious. He rejoices over the first coup "that had changed the order of things and throbbed with possibility of newness" (160) and during the pogroms in Kano, he joins with others to care for the refugees and survivors. At the declaration of an independent state of Biafra, he supports it and takes part in the rally at freedom square with lecturers and students. "His placard read GOD BLESS BIAFRA" (204). Thus his stay with Odenigbo then begins his political development. This is in line with Alioune Sow's argument that in most African novels of formation, "children's development is linked to the political spirit of that time (503).

Ugwu develops other skills in Odenigbo's house, one of which is cooking. Even though Ugwu as a houseboy has cooking as part of his duties, he did not even know how to prepare tea when he first came but he is confident that he learns fast. However, he can cook the local dishes, a skill he had acquired through helping his mother in the kitchen. Later Olanna teaches him how "to cook fried rice with green peppers and diced carrots and asked him to not cook beans until they became pudding, not to douse things in oil, not to be too sparing with salt" (59). He later becomes an expert in cooking jollof rice and when he is happy about his master and Olanna's reunion, he cooks "a perfect jollof rice for their reconciliation meal" (303). Later he is even able to make cakes which Special Julius enjoys and asks him to teach the people in his house: "Very good, very good. Ugwu, you must teach my people" at which request Olanna remarks, "Ugwu is a wonder at everything" (357), thus confirming Ugwu's earlier claim that he learns fast.

As a boy whose education had ended initially in standard two long before he becomes a houseboy, he is determined to work hard at school when his master enrolls him. He is disgraced when he is not able to sign a form and one man had said dismissively that he is "one of those village houseboys" (16). This comment annoys him so much that "he promised himself, ... that he would learn how to sign forms" (16 my ellipsis). This incident is one of the things that triggered his eagerness to work hard at school and in a way, the incident becomes one of the steps to his coming of age. According to Tunca (2014), "the event is to be regarded as one of the many steps to Ugwu's coming of age". Ugwu is so determined to learn and so even though he did not understand the sentences in the books his master gave him, he made a show of reading them and listened to the conversation of Odenigbo and his friends even though he did not understand them entirely. Very soon, Ugwu knew the regular guests; the drinks each of them took and even brought them before he is asked to: "Even if he hadn't peeked through the kitchen door as they ate, he would still know who sat where" (105). This shows how smart Ugwu is and how these meetings of intellectuals in Odenigbo and Olanna's house become a perfect setting for him to develop. Even his class teacher, Mrs Oguike noticed how fast he learnt the very first day when she gave him oral and written tests: "The boy will surely skip a class at some point, he has such an innate intelligence" she had told Master (107). Ugwu's development buttresses John Marx's argument that, "Half of a Yellow Sun marshals the usual diachronic logic of *Bildung*, ... but in its revised domestic setting, what might otherwise appear as personal experiences of growing up seem more like aspects of professional training" (Marx, 2008).

Ugwu's interest in formal education is seen in his joy when he learns that Olanna and Odenigbo had promised they would send him to the university when he finished the secondary school and he "would not marry until he had become like Master, until he had spent many years reading books" (221). This love for formal education is also a characteristic of the Africa Bildungsroman since in most African Bildungsromane, the protagonists seek formal education as has been discussed in the section above. The motivation to learn and be like Odenigbo can be said to be another step to Ugwu's coming of age. This is seen in the way he is able to judge correctly and argue soundly. When Olanna says everyone was capable of killing another, he says, "we are not like the Hausa people. The reprisal killing happened because they pushed us" (222 – 223). He is independent enough to tell Olanna that the house they live in Omuahia is not a good house. He is able to openly disclose his disagreement with Olanna when she says there is nothing like reincarnation and that people just look alike. "But they do mah. All of us, we will come back again" (316). He is also able to challenge Olanna when she says they were going to stay in the bunker all day. "But we cannot stay in the bunker, mah" (347). With this independent thinking and making his own argument even if it was in disagreement with his boss together with other privileges he enjoyed, Ugwu realised that he was not a normal houseboy because "Dr. Okeke's houseboy next door did not sleep on a bed in a room, he slept on the kitchen floor. The houseboy at the end of the street with whom Ugwu went to the market did not decide what would be cooked, he cooked whatever he was ordered to. And they did not have masters or madams who gave them books, saying "[t]his one is excellent, just excellent"" (21).

Another landmark of Ugwu's development in the novel is his sexual consciousness. He develops from having fantasies of Nnesinachi, a girl from his village, to having sex without love with Chinyere, a house girl at his neighbourhood in Nsukka, to finally developing love and intimacy with Eberechi, a girl he meets in Umuahia. At Umuahia, the girl he notices first is Eberechi "because of how perfectly

rounded her buttocks were, how they rolled rhythmically, from side to side, as she walked” (250) and is happy to see her in a tight skirt that molded her buttocks to a perfect roundness: “Ugwu waited for her to turn so that he could stare at her retreating backside” (361). When he is walking with Eberechi, he would ache “to press his body against hers... and Ugwu looked back to make sure that everyone had noticed that they were together” (365). He tries to impress her so he steals “some of the milk and sugar master brought from the directorate and put them in old tins and gave them to her” (368). He is annoyed at Eberechi’s parents offering her as a sex object to an army officer for putting her brother in essential services in the army. “He thought, the following days about him and Eberechi in bed, how different it would be from her experience with the colonel. He would treat her with the respect she deserves and do only what she liked, only what she wanted him to do. He would show her the positions he had seen in Master’s Concise Couples Handbook in Nsukka” (369). Ugwu fantasises Eberechi coming out to greet him. “He would wave back a hello and imagine himself grasping those buttocks. It surprised him, how happy he was when she greeted him” (356). According to Ehijele Femi Eromosele, “[t]he sexual content in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a deliberate attempt to underscore the humanity of the characters” (Eromosele, 2013). However, we argue that for Ugwu, sex is a way of proving his development. He is so interested in Odenigbo and Olanna’s sexual affair that he mostly tiptoes on the corridor and pressed his ear against their door. He even knew the regular noise Olanna made when she and Odenigbo were making love. After their reconciliation, Ugwu finds Olanna’s love-making noise different, “what he heard now was an outward, gasping ah-ah-ah, as if Master was pleasing and angering her at the same time and she was waiting to see how much pleasure she could take before she let out the rage” (303). This shows how Ugwu has developed to even recognise different love making sounds.

Ugwu grows to be wise and caring in Odenigbo and Olanna’s house. In Olanna’s disturbed moments, he asks “[d]o you want me to get you water to drink?” (242). Once he saw her walk over to the guava tree and caress its trunk, and he told himself he would go and pull her away, after a minute before the neighbours said she was mad” (243). He is so disturbed when Odenigbo and Olanna quarrel and “felt a buoyant relief that they were speaking normally again” (246) and “felt not just involved in but responsible for Olanna’s happiness” (253). His sense of responsibility in protecting Olanna and Odenigbo and their marriage makes him question Odenigbo’s mother when he suspects she has consulted a dibia. “What is that, Mama? That thing you put in my master’s food?” (267). Ugwu is disturbed that “Amala, common quiet ordinary Amala, had slept in Master’s bedroom” (270) and felt he too had betrayed Olanna by not telling her. And when Odenigbo and Olanna’s relationship become estranged, Ugwu feels it “was wrong that such an ordinary person in a nondescript dress and cotton scarf around her forehead was in the middle of this... she was like the many young women he used to watch going to the stream in his village every morning” (299). This makes him become angry at Olanna whose absence created the chance for Amala to sleep with Odenigbo. Ugwu thought that Olanna “should not have run away from her own house because Mama’s medicine had pushed Master into the arms of this common slip of a girl. She should have stayed and showed Amala and Mama who was truly the mistress here” (299). In his bid to protect his master and Olanna’s marriage, he tries to do all he can to stop his master from having a sexual affair with Alice, a neighbour he suspects his master is in love with. “Ugwu walked to the banana trees and back and then went to the door and knocked loudly. He was determined to stop them, to stop it” (443). This intermediary role Ugwu plays between Olanna and Odenigbo shows his maturity and contributes to his further development. Thus, a boy who puts bones in his shorts pocket and iron shocks till they are burnt has developed to understand why he needs to protect his employers’ relationship in order to secure his job. Even at the battlefield, he thought of Odenigbo and his family and when he hears of the fall of Umuahia, they are his only worry. He “was not interested in His Excellency, because he did not care for the commander. He did not care for any of the officers, with their superior sneer and the way they treated their soldiers like sheep” (459). This signifies that he has lost faith in the war he so desired to contribute to.

Even though Ugwu’s formal education is cut short once again with the outbreak of war, he is knowledgeable enough to be a resourceful teacher. When Akwakuma Primary School, where Olanna was teaching is turned into a refugee camp, Olanna organises classes in her yard and Ugwu becomes one of the teachers. After the first week of teaching, Ugwu became convinced that one of the teachers, “Mrs Muokelu knew very little. She calculated simple divisions with uncertainty, spoke in a low mumble

when she read, as though she was afraid of the sentences, and scolded her pupils for getting something wrong without telling them what the correct thing was” (367). He therefore learns from Olanna and teaches his class of seven-year-olds to recite simple words aloud. He is proud to call himself a teacher when a soldier asks whether he was an idle civilian. “We organise classes in this neighborhood and teach the young ones the ideals of the Biafran cause ... We focus on civics and mathematics and English. The Director of Mobilization has sponsored our efforts” (372 my ellipsis). Ugwu’s speech together with his role as a teacher indicates a significant growth from the village boy who put bones in his pocket.

Although Ugwu is not like Birahima Ahmadou Kourouma’s Allah is Not Obligated who was wishing and having fantasies of joining the war, he is also not like Agwu in Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* who did not like to fight at all. This means part of him enjoyed the war. This is seen in the way in his effort to support the Biafran cause, “he sang along and wished, that he could join the Civil Defense League or the Militia, who went combing for Nigerians hiding in the bush” (248). “The war reports had become the highlights of his day, the fast-paced drumming, the magnificent voice” (248) and sometimes he “would fantasize about joining the army. He would be like those recruits who went into training camp – while their relatives and well-wishers stood by the sidelines and cheered – and who emerged bright-eyed, in brave uniforms stiff with starch, half of a yellow sun gleaming on their sleeves” (249). However, his hope that Biafra would triumph was gone when he hears of Professor Ekwenu’s death (444). Unfortunately, it is after this lost hope that he is forcefully conscripted into the Biafran army after escaping a first conscription. But he does not complain too much about it because “a part of him wanted to be there” (453). At the military camp, Ugwu looks for bits of paper on which he could write down what he did from day to day. He also finds the book *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself*, which he finished reading in two days. This book, itself a story of education, contributes to Ugwu’s coming of age as it informs his writing project after his experience at the battle front. Emmanuel Mzomera Ngwira argues that Ugwu’s “struggle for literacy resembles African-American slave narrative authors like Frederick Douglass, whose autobiographical narrative inspires Ugwu to authorship. In fact, the title of Ugwu’s initial narrative about the Biafran war, “*Narrative of the Life of a Country*”, echoes Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*” (58). This struggle for literacy is also a feature of the African Bildungsroman as discussed above. At the battle front, Ugwu “had proved himself to the other men by how well he did at training, how he scaled the obstacles and shimmied up the rough rope, but he had made no friends. He said very little. He did not want to know their stories. It was better to leave each man’s load unopened, disturbed in his own mind” (453). During his first operation at the battle field, he performs so excellently that the “others thumbed him on the back and called him “*Target Destroyer*” (455).

However, he learns other negative practices at the battle field. Ugwu who has been trained so perfectly at the house of Odenigbo and Olanna, smoked wee-wee at the battle front even though “the wee-wee made him feel disjointed, created in him a thin slice of space between his legs and hips” (455). He takes part in looting. He and his fellow child soldiers beat a man until he became unconscious “as the soldiers squashed into [his] car and drove away” (456). Worst of all, he takes part in the gang rape of a bar girl who “stared back at him with a calm hate” (458). He takes part in this gang rape just to prove to his fellow soldiers that he was a man. This is because, in his reluctance, the other soldiers had teased, “*Target Destroyer is afraid*” and “*Target Destroyer, aren’t you a man?*” (458). Ugwu’s involvement in this gang rape to prove his masculinity confirms that Ugwu is not in charge of his own development and like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, he does the wrong thing for fear of being called “a woman”. “He was not living his life; life was living him” (364). Sex here is pictured as empowering, a haven and space for joy in the midst of tragedy (Norridge, 2012). “As an authorial strategy to present an anti-heroic dimension of Ugwu, the rape scene potentially throws into doubt the identification of the reader with Ugwu, presenting him as part of an already structured patriarchal war economy and vitiating his erstwhile stature as an evolving authoritative and moral voice in the novel” (Ouma, 2011). We argue that Ugwu’s involvement in this gang rape is a way Adichie portrays to what extent human beings can be corrupted in war situations as the gang rape evokes Ugwu’s changed behaviour under the stress of the ongoing conflict.

Like Olanna and Keinene's grandpa, the difficulties Ugwu went through during the war did not kill him, it made him knowledgeable. Ugwu's experiences through the war again echoes the same man's saying "that it gets worse before it gets better" (489). Ugwu's life becomes worse at the battle front but this experience does not destroy him like Birahima in *Allah is Not Obligated* and Agu in *Beasts of No Nation* but rather makes him wiser. Thus, as has been discussed above as characteristic of the African Bildungsroman, in which the hero develops through rational assessment of his own experiences, Ugwu also develops through his own experiences. When Ugwu hears the title of Richard's book and what it is about, "Ugwu murmured the title to himself: *The World Was Silent When We Died*. It haunted him with shame. It made him think about that girl in the bar, her pinched face and the hate in her eyes as she lay on her back on the dirty floor" (496). When he is finally rescued and brought home, he develops hatred for the war. He does not want to hear anything about it and nothing more about people who are dying. "During the day he helped at the refugee camp, and in the evenings he wrote. He sat under the flame tree and wrote in small careful letters on the sides of old newspapers, on some paper Keinene had done supply calculations on, on the back of an old calendar" (498).

Finally, he started to write about Auntie Arinze's anonymous death in Kano and about Olanna losing the use of her legs, about Okeoma's smart-fitting army uniform and Professor Ekwenu's bandaged hands. He wrote about the children of the refugee camp, how diligently they chased after lizards, how four boys had chased a quick lizard up a mango tree and one of them climbed up after it and the lizard leaped off the tree and into the outstretched hand of the other three surrounding the tree. ... He would never be able to depict the very bleakness of bombing hungry people. But he tried and the more he wrote the less he dreamed (498 My ellipsis).

Ugwu's experience of the war makes him emerge as a chronicler of his people which he does wholeheartedly. He listens "to conversations in the evenings, writing in his mind what he would later transfer to paper" (499). His experience at the battle field wins him the respect of people like Harrison who thought "Ugwu was no longer Ugwu, he was now one of 'our boys'; he had fought for the cause" (499). He loses interest completely in the war and stops listening to Radio Biafra: "The shabby theatrics of the war reports, the voice that forced morsels of invented hope down people's throat did not interest him" (500). Thus, Ugwu also turns away from knowledge he does not want to enable him focus on his writing which is his form of healing from the trauma of the war. When one afternoon Harrison urges him to listen to His Excellency's speech on the radio and that it would be a great speech, Ugwu replies, "[T]here is no such thing as greatness" (500). He has developed to be a great thinker and to realise the uselessness of war. War does not make any one great. Richard comes to admire Ugwu in the way he is always seen under the flame tree writing on a piece of paper: "Once he had tried to find where Ugwu had left some of them so he could take a look, but he had found none. They were probably all tucked into his shorts" (508) just the way he had packed chicken bones in his pocket and found it necessary to keep even useless things like old sugar cartons, bottle corks and even yam peels (59). And just like the time Ugwu slowly learns to read at school, when he began hoarding Odenigbo's discarded magazines and journals. According to (Ryan, 2013), those "who survive such violent periods of history can continue to demand the return of what remains of the deceased and disappeared, thus refusing the finality of forgetting and the foreclosure of the past's impress on the present and future". Thus Ugwu's attempt to keep everything foreshadows his experience in the war and later his role as narrator of the Biafran war history.

Ugwu takes so much interest in his writing he does not want to leave any information out. As a result, he becomes so interested in Olanna's story about the plaited hair in a calabash to the amazement of Olanna. Ugwu "was writing as she spoke, and his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, so she told him all she remembered about the train full of people who had shouted and urinated on themselves" (512). He says it will be "part of a big book. It will take me many years to finish it and I will call it 'Narrative of the Life of a Country'" (530). When Richard finally finds some of Ugwu's writings on the counter top, he is surprised. He tells Ugwu, "The war is not my story to tell, really" and Ugwu nods in agreement because he had never thought that it was: "Ugwu took the sheets of paper from Mr Richard and, as he turned to make Baby's dinner, he sang under his breath" (531). Brenda Cooper sees Ugwu's inheritance of Richard's role as the writer of the history of Biafra as a way Ugwu atones for his involvement in the gang rape of the bar girl (Cooper, 2013). It is this involvement of gang rape that makes Chris Ouma see Ugwu "as a problematic hero who is physically

scathed and morally tainted by his involvement in rape. However, he is also redeemed, at the end of the text, through a very significant act of writing as a process of his expiation and healing. While he is a hero, he is also an anti-hero” (17). Cooper also posits that by allowing Ugwu to atone for his involvement through writing, Adichie compromises “the novel’s gender politics” (Cooper, 2013). However, Ngwira believes that “Ugwu’s reluctance to participate in the rape and his subsequent remorse are not taken into proper account by Cooper who considers these only as Adichie’s defence for her ‘problematic role model for post-war Nigeria’” (Cooper, 2013). De Mey also observes that “the rape shows that in times of war, the line between perpetrator and victim is never clear as an outsider would believe it to be” (De Mey, 2011). While we agree with Ngwira, we argue further that Ugwu’s experience of the war including his involvement in the gang rape is the climax of his *Bildung* and therefore, instead of the war destroying him, it makes him learn good lessons which he finds obligated to write about for future generations to learn from. He is therefore a hero since he does not allow himself to be totally corrupted by the war but rather learns good lessons from it. As Uwasomba Chijioke has rightly argued, war “brings out the worst and the best in the individuals in their efforts to negotiate meaning in their struggles for survival in the heat of the war” (Uwasomba, 2014). His writing after the war can be said to be his warning for a future generation against war and a way of saying “never again”. “Ugwu’s *Bildung* puts the experience of warfare on the novel’s interdisciplinary curriculum. More than a participant observer, he is an expert whose authority derives from an intimate relation to his object of study, a relation that social science must disavow to preserve objectivity and analytic distance” (Marx, 2008). Thus, fiction can be said to portray “life in the failed state as an education, the sort of education, in fact, that might make one more expert than the experts. Just so, Adichie delegates the authority to compose the definitive book on Biafra to a home-schooled refugee. Half of a Yellow Sun goes even further when it stipulates that serving time in the army helps prepare one to do the work of writing” (Marx, 2008).

Ugwu is arguably the most rounded character in the narrative and is endowed with self-determination, survival and hope, qualities which dominate Half of a Yellow Sun. This is seen in the way he has been an admirable character before the war as a loyal houseboy to his master and mistress, as a teacher during the war and as a soldier of the Biafran army. However, he dents his image by taking part in a gang rape. The fact that Ugwu emerges as a post-war hope for the Biafran nation despite his involvement in gang rape suggests that Adichie views such abnormalities in war situations as forgivable. This is in line with Umelo Ojinmah’s postulation that “it is the war that is stripping our humanity from us” (Ojinmah, 2012). Ugwu’s claim at the beginning of the novel that he learns fast is justified in the novel in the way he transforms rapidly from a naïve village boy to a steward, teacher, soldier, historian and writer. Ugwu is even able to cope with and deal with the horrors of his war experiences by finding his voice through writing unlike his master, Odenigbo who becomes more disillusioned and withdrawn. The novel can be said to be about Ugwu’s *Bildung* since it shows how he develops from the clumsy little village boy who is not sure of himself and who sleeps with pieces of chicken in his pocket, to a resourceful teacher and child soldier during the war who is able to distinguish himself at the battle field. Chris Ouma sees Ugwu’s transformation as a servant, then a pupil who becomes a teacher during the war, a child soldier and eventually an authorial voice, as an “epistemological evolution” (Ouma, 2011) while we argue that Ugwu’s rise from “target-destroyer” to the writer of Biafran war history is Adichie’s way of saying that being a child soldier does not only corrupt a person. For some, it is a lesson which changes their world view. The war experience then becomes the climax of Ugwu’s rite of passage as it makes him become mature to understand the uselessness of war and owes it a duty to write a book about the war as a way of keeping its memory for future generation to learn lessons from.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that Adichie’s Half of a Yellow Sun conforms to the standard of the African Bildungsroman when viewed from the novel’s representation of Ugwu, one of the central character/focalisers of the novel. We have also established that unlike most West African child-soldier novels who represent child soldiers as people who have developed abnormally by their war experience, Ugwu’s experience of war does not destroy him but rather makes him learn important lessons which he

is obliged to record as a form of history for future generations of his people. The novel is thus a Bildungsroman and not the anti-Bildungsroman like we see in most West African novels that represent child soldiers.

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