

Moaning and Murmuring: An Exploration of Sexual Imagery in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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Abstract

Studies have explored the depiction of sex and sexuality in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* but the deployment of sexual imageries as instruments for the conveyance of thematic preoccupations in the text has not been explored. This study, therefore, attempted a critical analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun* to unearth how topical are subsumed within eroticism and sexuality. A total of twelve (12) purposively extracted excerpts were analysed using the tenets of structuralism and stylistics. The analysis revealed the conveyance of four thematic concerns clothed in sexual imageries which are sexualising trauma, commodifying sex for socio-economic gain, depiction of nonconsensual marriage and uniformed rape and bodily violation. The analysis also showed binaries such as male hegemony and female complicity, the bourgeoisie-proletariat divide, the coloniser oppressor and the colonised oppressed, and the military-civilian asymmetrical relation. This study concludes that the preponderance of sexual imageries in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is not merely a show of artistic craftsmanship but a veritable tool for the representation of the thematic preoccupations in the text.

Keywords: *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, sexual imageries, Nigerian literature

Introduction

Although with varying levels of explicitness, sexuality and its expression are integral parts of every tradition. This is because sexuality is central to identities and roles that enable individuals to co-exist in society. This relationship between sexuality, identity, and role formation becomes a site of

cultural negotiation where reproduction, familial structures, power dynamics, social interactions and bonding are continuously redefined and contested. However, in many Nigerian and African tribes, especially before the 21st century, the topic of sex and sexuality were hardly made a public discourse. Dare

(2005) holds that not only is sex as a subject severely restricted in public discourse, lexical choices in direct reference to sex and sexual organs are allowed to feature only in periphrastic and euphemistic terms. Nonetheless, sex and sexuality sieve through some aspects of the Nigerian culture and gain expression. Fakoya (2007) for instance explores 'offensive' Yorùbá proverbs in conversation, focusing on the use of bawdy imagery in navigating conversations. The study foregrounds the primacy of sexuality discourse among the Yoruba, like most other tribes too, even though it was sacredly treated.

One of the areas of human existence where sex and sexuality seems to be gaining voice in Nigeria is in artistic fields such as music, movies and literary texts. Dare (2005) notes that the free expression of sexual matters exercised by Obesere (a Nigerian Fuji singer whose self-proclaimed sobriquet is "the master of lewd jokes") and many other Nigerian musicians in the popular entertainment has quite expectedly elicited opprobrium and disdain from a large section of the public. Similarly, in a research carried out on audience perception of sexual contents in Nigerian movies, Uwom, Chioma and Sodeinde (2013) report that audiences consider sexual contents as bad, unhealthy, excessive and irrelevant in most cases. Moreover, the portrayal of sexuality and

eroticism in Nigerian literature has also attracted opposing standpoints.

Among early Nigerian writers, the subject of sex and sexuality was also rather euphemistically depicted with primary focus on the reclamation of African identity against Western narratives (Mtenje 2016). However, the trend has changed in the 21st century. Okeke (2021:133) submits that before the dawn of the twenty-first century, sex was muted in Nigerian literature in line with the "rhetoric of reticence" (Balogun, 1981: 22). Reference to sex, sexual acts and sexual organs were more culturally acceptable in euphemistic terms. Moreover, the stylistic choices used in the representation of sex in early literature were closely linked to themes of fertility and couched in the language of nature and harvest. This, as observed by Mtenje (2016:12), is primarily to subvert imperial narratives that portray African men as "infantile and in thrall to rampant sexual desire". At the dawn of the 21st century, new Nigerian writers tend to depict erotic scenarios more comfortably in their writings. Osofisan (2008) argues that attitudes towards the overtly sexual have shifted remarkably in the twenty-first century, as a new generation of writers is now producing works that are less restrained when it comes to the portrayal of the erotic. This changes the position of sex and sexuality as a tool for the establishment of family

and society to “an ideological position that calls for personal freedom” (Okeke 2021:66).

One such Nigerian writer who weaves eroticism into her artistic works is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. How Adichie was able to carry on with sexual portrayal in *Half of a Yellow Sun* from start to end despite the somewhat emotionless subjects of war and violence is not only artistically commendable but has also made the novel attractive to scholarship. On the one hand, some studies have investigated the subjects of war, violence and struggle in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (Vidhya, Singh, Youveniya, Murugan 2021; Saiel 2023; Adhav 2024). On the other hand, other studies have explored sexuality in the text (Eromosele 2013; Okeke 2021). Despite the existence of these studies on the text, attention has not been given to how sexuality serves as a tool for driving the major thematic concerns in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This study, therefore, attempts a critical analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun* to unearth how topical issues bordering on trauma, corruption, nonconsensual marriage, and bodily violation are subsumed within eroticism and sexuality. The analysis will reveal that the portrayal of sexuality and eroticism does not stand aloof in the text but rather serves as a vehicle through which the major thematic concerns of the novel are presented. As its contribution

to knowledge, this study argues that despite the sacredness built around the subject of sex and the consideration of its open discussion as a taboo in many Nigerian and African societies, sexuality and eroticism can be tools in the hands of a writer to drive home the thematic concerns of their piece.

Literature Review

The representation of sex and sexuality has been explored from different perspectives by African writers and such fictional and sometimes factional representations have always received numerous forms of scholarly engagements. Some scholarly works on sexuality in literature have paid attention to sexes, which is the reality of LGBTQ in different national contexts (Souza 2020; Zabus 2021; Bello and Bishi 2025). Souza (2020) investigates characterisation and symbolism as narrative strategies used in challenging anti-LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) cultures in four short stories. The study essentially posits that the representation of gender in the selected works of fiction does not conform to the hegemonic social binaries which is dominant in Malawi and Uganda, which are the national contexts for these stories. The study reports that performative rather than fixed, and more fluid than hegemonic conceptions are rather more prominent. Zabus (2021) attempts a historical profiling of the

phases of developments regarding gender and sexuality with reference to the works of writers and critics. She identifies three stages; the first being from the mid-nineteenth century. She reports the second stage to be from the late-twentieth-century narratives of sexual emancipation to the turn of the millennium and to the contemporary moment leading to transgenderism while the last stage encompasses recent lexical items and new subjectivities created by means of the new media in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Bello and Bishi (2025) study transgenderism in Nigeria using an integrated theoretical approach. The study which uses textual and human data examine the linguistic behaviours and lived experiences of transgender individuals within their socio-cultural contexts in Nigeria and also analyses two African novels; *The Death of Vivek Orji* (Emezi, 2020) and *When We Speak of Nothing* (Popoola, 2017). The study reports the prevalence of internalised struggles such as repression, fear, depression and dissociative stupor in the discourses of transgender characters. The study concludes that Investigating the linguistic expressions and personal histories of members of this community enhances understanding and fosters emotional intelligence which is a crucial 21st-century competency.

Coming specifically to the works of Adichie, studies have explored her writings from different perspectives such as stylistics (Ajadi 2024), pragmatics (Aboh and Uduk 2016), power and hegemony (Harry and Vijayakumar 2023), war, conflict and violence (Saiel 2023), and especially sexuality (Eromosele 2013; Okeke 2021). Ajadi (2024) analyses specific linguistic elements in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, paying attention to their functional values in the text. Tools such as graphology, morphology, and syntactic and lexico-semantics were analysed to examine the inherent stylistic features in the text; revealing the use of a non-structural linguistic element to indicate plot movement through devices such as graphological elements of spacing and asterisks. The study concludes that the subject matter of a writer informs his choice of words and expressions. Aboh and Uduk (2016) attempt a pragmatic analysis of Nigerian English in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* to account for the pragmatic relation between utterances and meaning explication. The study reports the pragmatic orientation on the use of English which helps elucidate the peculiar use of English in the non-literary situation in Nigeria. The study shows that the contexts in which certain Nigerian English expressions occur are tied to the Nigerian sociocultural experiences which in turn serve as

common ground for such pragmatically-inclined usages among discourse participants.

Harry and Vijayakumar (2023) investigates Adichie's depiction of gender relations, cultural norms, and historical contexts, showing the systemic oppression experienced by women and the subsequent need for societal transformation. As a contribution, the paper proposes gender equality and advocate for societal transformation that recognises and respects the agency and rights of all individuals. Saiel (2023) attempts an investigation of conflicts between ethnic groups, war disputes, race contention, conflicts between cultures, historical disagreement, and decolonisation. The study accounts for how the Civil War profoundly impacted peoples' lives and how Adichie decolonizes the effect of colonizers through her historical writing. The author submits that Adichie brings up the subject of decolonisation narratives through war, conflict and violence in her historical book as a means of raising awareness about the issue so that people can deal with it in the future.

A good number of studies have focused on sexuality in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Okeke (2021) explores Adichie's aesthetics from a theory of African eroticism which is conceptualised as "osunality", and as found in Yoruba divinity. The Osunality

framework contends that African eroticism got eroded or reshaped by Christianity and Islam, colonial modernity, and capitalist ideology that resulted in Westernization and "adoption of a universal and uniform meaning of eroticism" based on Western intellectual tradition. The study submits that Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* in its unhidden, unrestrained sexuality finds correspondence in indigenous African sexual practices, especially as it pertains to her radical reconstruction of female sexuality. Eronmosele (2013) examines sexual activity in the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, beginning from *Purple Hibiscus* through *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Thing Around Your Neck*, noting how they reflect the author's attitude about sex and sexuality. The study submits that from a rather chastely portrayal of sex in *Purple Hibiscus*, the writer graduates to the explicit sexual episodes in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and finally, to the freedom of sexual preference in *The Thing around Your Neck*. The author submits that does not believe in succumbing to the restrictions placed by society on sexual expression, and thus homosexuality and lesbianism are portrayed as simply human characteristics, and not as "unAfrican" codes of behaviour.

The review shows the preponderance of works on Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* on the one hand and her

exploration of sexuality on the other hand. Despite the existence of these works, attention has not been given to how sex and sexuality are deployed as a foundation through which other thematic concerns are exposed in *Half of a Yellow Sun*; hence, the gap that this study sets out to fill.

Synopsis

Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) is a creative retelling of the Nigerian civil war. Set in 1960s Nsukka, during the period of the Biafra war, the novel depicts the lives of characters and the negotiations they make with the devastating effects of war. The story explores individuality in the face of national crisis and communal conflict, exploring themes such as love, war, betrayal, death, ethnicity and trauma. The novel follows a non-linear plot, structured on four parts. The first two parts touch on the early and the late sixties consecutively, while the other two follow in the same pattern. The story follows the lives of diverse characters who grapple with personal conflict as they struggle to survive against the negative transformation of war. The narrative is centered around three central characters: Olanna who is smart, educated and in love with Odenigbo, Ugwu, Odenigbo's houseboy and Richard, a British man who is in love with Olanna's sister, Kainene. The lives of these characters are intertwined as

they engage in dialogic and intimate interactions that solidify their emotions and reveal the broader politics behind the war.

The major conflict and tension arise with the declaration of independence as Biafra by the Southeastern region. What follows is a period marked by extreme brutality, political, social and economic crisis that plunges characters into a state of despondency, grief, starvation and displacement. By implication, they suffer from detachment, strained relationships and lost bonds, each of them weighed by grief and buried in the race for survival. Olanna loses her twin sister and hopelessly continues to find her, and Odenigbo's mother is killed and he becomes depressed. Meanwhile Ugwu loses his morals and comes home to learn that his sister was raped. This novel therefore portrays the strength and resilience of humans amidst chaos and conflict. By recounting the Biafran war through the personal lives of characters, Chimamanda Adichie adds depth and opens up a space for emotional reflection into the irredeemable and negative effect of war on both individuals and society.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study is guided by Structuralism complemented by levels of stylistic analysis. Structuralism is a critical theory that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. It

was introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss, and influenced by influential critical thinkers such as Tzvetan Todorov, Pierre Bourdieu, and Ferdinand de Saussure, amongst others. It is an approach to the study of literature that observes that a text is not an independent entity but rather influenced by structures, systems, and relationships underlying it. It emphasises literature as a signifier of cultural codes, conventions, and signs that shape how it is understood. In a structuralist analysis, meaning is not seen as located in signs themselves; instead, it becomes functional only in relation to other signs. A structuralist observes the universality of human narratives, asserting that “human actions and productions have meaning but there must be an underlying system of distinctions and conventions which makes this meaning possible” (Culler 1975:5). These systems of meaning and interpretation are influenced by larger cultural codes, archetypes, and conventions. Consequently, objects are seen as signifiers of constructed meaning by virtue of the rules and structures within which they exist. In the analysis of a text, structuralist criticism identifies elements underlying a linguistic object and attempts to put them in oppositional relationships in order to establish meaning.

Language is therefore considered as crucial to the theory of structuralism.

Notably, structuralism has been described as “the linguistic study of literature” (Taghizadeh 2013:288), although its scope extends beyond literature to other cultural systems. It observes language use in literature as symbolic of cultural construction explaining human behaviour. Put differently, language is seen as a tool for the transfer of cultural systems in a way that can be understood. Structuralists approach a text “to reveal the universal structure of language as a constructed system of rules” (Sanusi 2012:127). In order to uncover a text's inherent meaning, structuralism employs linguistic tools such as the sign (composed of the signifier and the signified), as well as the concepts of parole and langue. According to Craig Lundy, the objective of structuralist analysis is to understand the system embedded in language use “in order to ‘see’ what was hidden from view and ‘hear’ what was unspoken” (Lundy 2013:72). However, in employing linguistic tools, structuralists tie their interpretation to the literary consciousness of a text as opposed to other forms of discourse. As such, this theory examines how a literary text operates within the linguistic system it inherits to uncover the structures of cultural codes and meaning it produces.

Stylistics is an aspect of applied linguistics that deals with the analysis of

style in literary genres. It concerns itself with the explication of the linguistic features of a text and how the writers use such features to convey messages (Osoba 1998). Stylistics conceives of language as a system of choice available to language users from which options can be suitably made. This is in line with the submission of Spencer (1964) that a writer's style may be regarded as an individual and creative utilities of the resources of language which his period, his chosen dialect, his genre and his purpose offer him. These choices are made at the graphological, phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic and even pragmatic levels of language use. The analysis in this study will also account for how Adichie constructs meaning through her careful deployment of language at these different stylistic levels.

A descriptive and qualitative analysis was carried out after a thorough reading of the text. Attention was paid to sexually grounded scenarios in the text and their communicative and thematic import. A purposive sampling method was deployed to extract twelve excerpts that convey the identified thematic preoccupations. The excerpts were subject to a structural-stylistic analysis.

Analysis

This analysis attempts an exploration of specific sexual imagery in Chimamanda

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and how they intersect with broader discourses within the context of trauma, war and socio-cultural practices. By examining the stylistic devices and the structural systems embedded in the selected excerpts, the analysis discusses how these images present sexual interactions as contested sites for desire, agency, politics and trauma.

Sexualising Trauma

This section reveals that sexual imagery is employed in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* to exemplify the dialogic interaction between desire and memory, with sex serving as a pathway for the release of trauma and grief. It highlights how desire and intimacy are often overshadowed by the weight of trauma, presenting sexual behaviour as a response to psychological burden.

Excerpt 1

It was the first time she felt detached from him;
while he was murmuring in her ear,
she was mourning her money in the bank of Lagos (328).

This excerpt speaks to the theme of trauma in the text as occasioned by the devastating experience of the civil war. The moaning from Odenigbo which should solidify the sexual act with Olanna, instead comes to her as a mere murmur due to the traumatic effects of

losing access to her money in the bank. This signifies the harsh consequence of war which divorces pleasure from sexual intimacy. At the stylistic level of analysis, the lexical choice of "murmur" stands in contrast to the expected pleasure of sexual intercourse creating the image of trauma caused by the adverse effect of war. The similar rhyme pattern in "murmuring" and "mourning" highlights the absence of "moaning" which is conventionally regarded as a contextually appropriate word for sexual intimacy. Instead, it is replaced with parallel lexicons to reflect the traumatic state of the sexually involved persons. Although the lexical choices of mourning and murmuring create a parallel structure, they point towards a system of unequal realities. Structurally, the excerpt also presents a binary opposition between engagement and detachment. While Odenigbo is engaged in the sexual act, Olanna on the other hand is emotionally detached with her thoughts fixed on her financial loss. As such, Odenigbo's response to pleasure is misinterpreted and underappreciated as a mere murmur in contrast to Olanna's burden of loss. Therefore, while her body is present, her mind is distant. This emphasises how trauma cripples sexual autonomy. and reveals the connection between the state of the mind and emotional experiences.

Excerpt 2

She caressed his neck, buried her fingers
in his dense hair,
and when he slid into her,
she thought about Arinze's pregnant
belly,
how easily it must have been broken,
skin stretched that taut. She started to
cry" (173)

Excerpt 2 depicts how sexual intimacy overwhelmingly opens up an outburst of traumatic memory. The sexual acts between Olanna and Odenigbo start on a sensual note, with a parallel syntactic pattern shown through sequential verbs such as 'caressed', 'buried' and 'slid' which indicate intense desire and sexual interaction. However, the tenderness these verbs suggest is abruptly interrupted by Olanna's sudden cognitive shift to the mental image of Arinze's violated pregnant body. The subordinating conjunction, "when" creates a temporal-causal link between sex and trauma. In other words, the moment of penetration triggers a psychological response from Arinze. This also mirrors the emotional duality in the scene: an intimate and erotic engagement that is overshadowed by the violent rupture embedded in memory of loss. The word "slid" can also be a metaphor for Olanna's mental transition from the present activity to the memory of trauma. It therefore signifies a forceful detachment of her body from her mind due to the damage and loss caused by

war. This excerpt also creates a melancholic atmosphere in which trauma renders romance inadequate to provide comfort. As such, intimacy and detachment exist in contrast, with the former serving merely as a conduit to the memory of trauma. Instead of feeling pleasure, Olanna is so overwhelmed by the mental image of Arinze's brutal death that she begins to cry. From a structuralist view, the female body appears as a site for both pleasure and horror. Just as Arinze's pregnant body becomes vulnerable to the danger and tension during the civil war, Olanna's body is vulnerable to both pleasure and trauma. This excerpt therefore exemplifies how bodily and emotional expression is crippled by war-induced trauma, thereby eroding sexual autonomy.

Excerpt 3

Then he began to thrust and her pleasure multiplied,
sharpened on stone so that each tiny spark became a pleasure all its own.
She heard herself crying, her sobbing louder and louder
until Baby stirred and he placed his palm against her mouth.
He was crying too; she felt the tears drop on her body
before she saw them on his face (405).

While this excerpt is laced with eroticism, there is a contrastive system of

trauma and suppression embedded in lexical choices, metaphor and imagery. Although the sexual act elicits pleasure for Olanna, it is described as being “sharpened on stone”. The lexical item “stone” connotes burden and changes the clause into a metaphor for discomfort. This creates a binary opposition in which trauma and pain are being embedded within erotic sensation. The use of “sharpened” also disrupts the sensuality of pleasure depicting the harshness in traumatic memory. Sex, as portrayed here, therefore blurs the boundary between pleasure and pain, reinforcing sexual intimacy as a platform for the dialogic exchange between trauma and sensation. However the pain overweighs the pleasure resulting in an outburst of tears. Olanna's loud sobs contrast with Odenigbo silent weeping. His attempt to silence her so as not to wake Baby opens up a broader theme of the suppression of grief. In other words, it symbolises how emotions of trauma is repressed and contained in order to keep others strengthened and undisturbed by the tensions and conflicts around them. Odenigbo himself has mastered the act of internalising his emotions; thus while Olanna's grief is expressed in auditory imagery (“heard”, “louder”), Odenigbo's grief is depicted through tactile and visual imagery (“felt”, “drop”, “saw”). The polyptoton in “crying” and “sobbing” amplifies the emotional breakdown, while the repetition of

“louder” heightened the intensity of the grief that its gradual outburst disturbs the sleeping Baby. This symbolises how the violence of memory and trauma destabilises the calmness of the present. Moreover, the fact that neither of Odenigbo nor Olanna is startled by their individual outbursts suggest shared grief and vulnerability. This excerpt therefore reveal sex as a response to unspoken grief and trauma. Where sexual engagement becomes a conduit for the release of repressed trauma, and characters are connected not only through their bodies but through the memory of loss.

Commodifying sex for socio-economic gain

Sexual imagery in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* also presents sex as a commodity that can be exchanged for favours within a capitalist economy. In these instances, sex loses its sense of intimacy and desire and functions as an object of bargaining for financial, social or material gain. As a result, the body is objectified, stripped of its value, and exposed to the risk of victimisation. The excerpt below highlights the use of sexual imagery to depict these transactional values of sex:

Excerpt 4

She was almost asleep when Kainene knocked.

"So will you be spreading your legs for that elephant in exchange for Daddy's contract?" Kainene asked (43-44).

In excerpt 4, sex is depicted as transactional as opposed to the expected exploration of pleasure and desire. Kainene's question seems rhetorical, revealing the ease with which the subject of commodified sex is being discussed. Her remark carries a sarcastic tone that not only demoralises the act but also suggests the listener's consciousness of it; challenging any assumptions of Kainene's complicity on the subject. The phrase, “spreading your legs” is a euphemised expression which carries a pragmatic meaning that describes sex as functional and devoid of intimacy, spontaneity or emotional reciprocity. Moreover, the lexical item, “elephant” functions as an unpleasant metaphor for the man in the picture. It dehumanises him, creating a grotesque image of the woman's body being rammed into, depicting sexual commodification as oppressive and exploitative. “Elephant” is also symbolic of the man's robust wealth, power, and status. This exaggerates the imbalance of the sexual interaction where the woman's body becomes a site to be battered by the man merely for capitalist gain. It equally emphasises how the woman's body is commodified as a mere tradable asset in patriarchal structures. Sex becomes a means to manipulate favour that does not

even benefit the woman but the man—for instance, Kainene's father—who orchestrates the exchange. This excerpt therefore frames sex as a currency for exchange in a capitalist society. It reveals how gender, sexuality and power intersect, where the female sexual autonomy is manipulated for socio-economic privileges in male-dominated societies.

Excerpt 5

“The white men will poke and poke and poke the women in the dark but they will never marry them. How can!

They will never even take them out to a good place in public.

But the women will continue to disgrace themselves and struggle for the men so they will get chicken-feed money and nonsense tea in a fancy tin.

It's a new slavery, I'm telling you, a new slavery.

But you are a Big Man's daughter, so what are you doing with him?” (92).

Excerpt 5 illustrates the commodification of sex as systemic and exploitative in postcolonial Nigeria. It foregrounds binary oppositions across gender, class and race, such as African versus Western (white), man versus woman and rich versus poor. The white men are privileged in terms of economic capital which they use as a means to exploit

struggling Nigerian women. The rhythmic repetition of ‘poke and poke and poke’ dehumanises the women, presenting them as mechanical objects being drilled by the white men. The idea that these transactions occur in the ‘dark’ suggests immorality and secrecy, emphasising the cultural shame around sex outside marriage, since the men are neither committed nor willing to be publicly associated with the women. This idea is linked syntagmatically with the lexical choice “disgrace”. However, the motivation behind this transactional sex is tied to socio-economic survival rather than desire. The gains are described by the speaker, Major Udodi as “chicken-feed money and nonsense tea in a fancy tin”. The tone here is derisive suggesting the cheapness of the exchange. The phrase, “Chicken-feed money” points out the inadequacy of the money to meet their basic needs, while the rhythmic phrase, “tea in a fancy tin” is symbolic of the deceptive quality of the rewards. Although the item sounds nice and ‘fancy’, it is valueless and petty. The euphonics of the phrase emphasise the triviality of the transaction. Moreover, Major Udodi's reference to the sexual transaction as a “new slavery” recalls to memory how pre-colonial Africans engaged in slave trade in exchange for vain items from Western merchants. This highlights interracial transaction sex as a continuation of systemic exploitation. In this context, the women's body

represents a part of Africa while the White men wield economic and sexual power with which they exploit them. The repetition of “new slavery” adds emotional weight highlighting Major Udodi's disappointment and pity at how dignity and autonomy is eroded through interracial sexual transaction. Meanwhile, the Major's last sentence reveals a broader theme of class and economic inequality. Kainene's identity as a “big man's daughter” symbolises her status as a wealthy man's daughter. Hence, Major Udodi's reproach is centred on the opinion that women with reputable background are not expected to be engaged in transactional sex. This criticism lays bare the assumption that women from lower class are more expected to be involved in commodifying sex for socio-economic privileges. This excerpt therefore depicts how race, sex and class intersect in a post-colonial capitalist African society where women engage in the act of interracial transactional sex for financial and material benefits.

Excerpt 6

“Her eyes must have opened in the North.
You can't marry her, so you had better take what she is offering,
before she marries” (134).

Though depict sexual imagery is not explicit in this excerpt, relying instead on

the context of the conversation to imply sexual contents, sex is positioned as a commodity. The phrase, “her eyes must have opened” is a euphemism for the subject, Nnesinachi's sexual consciousness. It presupposes a loss of innocence, suggesting a shift in her sensual perception or experience. As a result, Nnesinachi is deprived of her value and her body is reduced to an object to be tested before it is ultimately possessed in marriage. The idea of “take what she is offering” presents sex as a commodity that highlights a bargain devoid of emotional ties or romantic connection. The realisation that Nnesinachi is no longer chaste prompts Anulika, the speaker, to regard her as unfit for marriage. Although the dialogue is personal, it reveals a broader social implication in which a woman's sexual value is diminished to the position of an object, once the interaction is performed outside marriage. Telling Ugwu that he “had better” make good use of the offer suggests how desire is policed into an opportunistic engagement before it is lost in marriage, which affects its final transfer of ownership. While it is not clear what Nnesinachi stands to gain from the exchange, sex as a ‘commodity’ is viewed as temporal against the prospect of marriage. This presents marriage as the final destination of the sexual transaction. That is, in possession of another, Nnesinachi would no longer be available in the sexual

market. This excerpt therefore reveals how sex is reduced to a fleeting commodity outside the confines of marriage in patriarchal societies.

Depiction of Nonconsensual Marriage

Sexual imagery in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* also depicts instances of nonconsensual marriage. Nonconsensual marriage refers to a union where one or both parties are deprived of choice and consent. Such engagements are often influenced by various factors including cultural practices and beliefs. This analysis shows how Chimamanda critiques this loss of agency while illustrating how sexual interactions are complicit in maintaining such dynamics as seen in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 7

"He feared though that one of those pot-bellied traders in the North
would make one look at her, and the
next thing he knew
somebody would bring palmwine to her
father
and he would never get to touch those
breasts (10).

This excerpt depicts marriage as a nonconsensual engagement, where the woman's voice and choice are excluded in the face of customary marriage and male desire. The male subject fears losing sexual access to the woman's body

through the restrictions imposed by traditional marriage practices. The phrase, "pot-bellied traders" operates as a derogatory symbol to describe wealthy men whose greed motivates them to possess any woman their status can afford. Their pot bellies signifies both their age and wealth. The causal shift ushered by "the next thing" ties the visual attraction to the process of marriage, critiquing the idea that there is often no intimate connections or developed relationships between the men and the women. As such, the decision to marry the women is often shallow and hasty based only on economic wherewithal. The idea of marriage is introduced through the lexical item, "palmwine". The word transcends its literal meaning and serves as a structural signifier of marriage in Igbo society where palmwine is traditionally presented to seek approval to marry a woman. As such, its use here points to the idea that this men's intentions would receive approval of woman's father, even without the woman's consent. The woman's validation is not often given much considerations, highlighting how traditional marriage practices often erode a woman's choice. Meanwhile, the man's concern is less about the woman's agency but more about losing access to her body— "he would never get to touch those breasts". His thoughts further alienate the woman's voice and bodily autonomy. The reference to "Breasts"

here functions as a synecdoche for the woman's entire body, reducing her to an object of the man's desire. The idea that marriage obstructs access to a woman's body as she becomes possessed by another man is further emphasised. Thus, this excerpt mirrors, through the consciousness of a man, how a woman's consent is often disregarded in traditional marriage practices and how her body is prioritised over her choice.

Excerpt 8

Onyeka must have touched her.

Ugwu could not bear to think of the man's ugly body thrusting into his sister's.

It had all happened too fast;
there had been talk of suitors the last time he visited,
but she had spoken of Onyeka in such an indifferent way
that he did not think she would accept his proposal so quickly (132).

The excerpt hints at a nonconsensual marriage arrangement rooted in unexpected or premature sexual engagements within a heteropatriarchal society. It critiques the pressure of marriage imposed upon teenage girls in some African societies which is often structured upon a binary opposition between choice and force. Ugwu expresses doubt about his sister, Anulika's willingness to marry Onyeka,

suspecting that the arrangement must have been precipitated by a possible incident where “Onyeka must have touched her”. The tactile imagery of touch, appears as a euphemistic or implied way of suggesting sexual interactions. This interpretation is reinforced by the subsequent description of “the man's ugly body is thrusting his sister's”. Touching Anulika expands beyond casual bodily contact into a sustained and deliberate sexual engagement defined by the lexical item, “thrusting”. Ugwu is further infuriated by the image of “the man's ugly body” upon his sister's body, believing him to be unattractive and thus unworthy of her. While this signals disgust and frustration, it also hints at the possibility of the interaction being forced or coerced. Meanwhile, the narrative confirms that there “had been talk of suitors the last time”, meaning the subject of Anulika's marriage is not unfamiliar. This exposes teenage marriage as culturally normalised and therefore considered a priority for Anulika. Ugwu is not surprised by his sister's early marriage but rather unimpressed with the chosen suitor whom she had initially spoken of “in such an indifferent way”. Her lack of enthusiasm contrasts with the haste in which she is being prepared to be Onyeka's bride. The implication of this is that marriage is not a question of love or choice but a matter of socio-cultural necessity. In a way, this subtly reflects

the erosion of a woman's agency and consent in matters of marriage, justified against pre-marital marriage and cultural demands.

Uniformed Rape and Bodily Violation

Set against the backdrop of the Nigerian Civil War, sexual imagery in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* offers a unique perspective on what this study terms, uniformed rape and bodily violence. Uniformed rape refers to forced sexual activities carried out by soldiers or members of the armed forces during wartime, often weaponised to terrorise opposing groups. On the other hand, bodily violence refers to the physical harms resulting from the rape or other forms of sexual violence, such as the mutilation of sexual organs. This section therefore examines how the novel employs sexual imagery to expose the inhumane practices and ideologies of war, which distort sexual intimacy and erode bodily agency. The excerpts below provides textual evidence to the claim:

Excerpt 9

She was sobbing, "Please, please, biko."
Her blouse was still on. Between her legs, High-Tech was moving.
His thrusts were jerky, his small buttocks darker-colored than his legs.
The soldiers were cheering (379).

This excerpt reveals sexual violation by men in uniform as a consequence of the

Nigerian civil war. From the parties involved, one can identify a binary opposition between the civilian and the military. While the bar girl—the victim and the civilian—sobs under the weight of violation, the soldiers—the perpetrators—cheer on. The contrasting emotions of the lexical choices, "sobbing" and "cheering", reveal a system of unequal desire involved in the sexual act. Although there is an indication of institutional complicity between High Tech and the cheering soldiers, who appear to commend his uncontrolled thrusts, the bar girl's repeated plea, in both English and Igbo, suggests resistance, discomfort, and lack of consent. This evokes an image of helplessness and desperation and reinforces another binary opposition between power and powerlessness. Moreover, the sexual interaction is devoid of mutual engagement, as the unrestrained physical movements come solely from High Tech. While the girl remains pinned to the floor by a soldier, High Tech moves violently. His uncontrolled "thrusts" reflect the nature of his desire, a state that causes him to disregard the plea of the bar girl despite her discomfort. This renders the girl helpless in the face of these armed men who wield armed authority, making her incapable of expressing bodily autonomy. Moreover, sex, which is morally and socially expected to be a close and intimate affair is being

performed in public in the presence of a number of soldiers. This breaks the moral boundaries and expectations of a proper Nigerian society. Therefore, the imagery presented here reflects how war leaves a society exposed to immorality and violation by those who are meant to keep it protected.

Excerpt 10

“You really must write about the horrible things the British did in Kenya,” Olanna said. “Didn't they cut off testicles?” (245).

While excerpt 9 presents a direct interrogation into uniformed rape, this excerpt invites an imagery of bodily violation. Firstly, Olanna's use of the noun phrase “horrible things” strikingly describes the inhumanity of the mutilation when considered against natural laws and social conducts. Her question— “didn't they cut off their testicles?”— is not just a query but an assertion that foregrounds a shared knowledge between Olanna and Richard. Olanna's casual remark to Richard about including a part of history in his book becomes a site for examining institutionalised bodily violation. It also opens up a broader discourse on sexual incapacitation and control. In many African patriarchal societies, a man's worth is often tied to his virility, often symbolised by his abled testicles. The term testicle is therefore not just a part of

his body but a symbol for desire, power, authority and reproduction. The text therefore reveals binary oppositions between terms such as erasure and identity; masculinity and emasculation; power and powerlessness. Moreover, it highlights the power relations between the colonised/oppressed and the coloniser/oppressor. Under the British colonial rule in Kenya, captured men were sometimes castrated for their involvement in uprisings such as the Mau Mau movement. Although this excerpt contains no erotic imagery, it invites readers to imagine how sexual expression has been violated through such acts. This bodily violation serves as a metaphor for the demasculinisation of the men. Without testicles, the men are deprived of the privilege to enjoy sexual activities and procreate. As such, this institutional torture is merely bodily violation that reinforces imperialism but a disempowerment that restricts desire and strips the affected Kenyan men of their productivity, masculinity and sexuality. This intersection of sexuality and power in this post-colonial remark therefore presents an image that challenges the use of a man's sexual mutilation as a weapon against resistance to colonial rule.

Excerpt 11

“They said the first one that climbed on top of her,
she bit him on the arm and drew blood.

They nearly beat her to death.
One of her eyes has refused to open well
since” (433).

This excerpt depicts imagery of rape and violence despite its euphemistic description of forced sexual activity. The speaker, Nnesinachi who briefly narrates the brutality to the victim's brother is a second hand carrier of the information. The use of the reported marker, “they said” suggests that the event is now a rumored subject while the other “they” refers to the perpetrators of the violence—the soldiers—as a collective voice signifying institutional complicity. The reported event follows a structural pattern of initiation-resistance-implication-trauma. The initiation process is marked by the clause “climbed on top of her”, an indirect way of describing the sexual activity. The euphemism and deliberate obscurity of details reflect the sensitivity of the sexual dialogue and the traumatic effect of rape. The speaker's deliberate use of such a linguistic strategy does not give vague imagery of the action she is recounting. Instead, it conveys an unpleasant discourse, where the body contact is unappreciated. It also reflects the social discomfort in narrating sexual violence during times of war. Moreover, the phrase, “first one” suggests the beginning of a gang rape process, implying that others were waiting their turn. The narrative also emphasises the

reaction of the victim towards her violation: biting her oppressor to the point of drawing blood. This signifies a form of resistance that interrupts the assault on her, signalling a clash in desire and the victim's fight towards agency. The act of resistance however results in more brutal violence against the woman. There's a striking observation in the rhyming causal link between the homophones, “bit” and “beat”. Although, consensual sexual intimacy often include playful bites or light touches, this violence portrayed in the excerpt contrasts sharply, presenting a binary opposition of resistance versus forced submission. The result of the violence leaves the victim semi-blind to one eye. This leaves her a memory of her trauma, her blind eye symbolising a part of herself lost to war. As her inability to recount the experience herself symbolises her voice being silenced by her trauma. In a structuralist reading of this excerpt, the body becomes a text; a contested site; for violence, resistance, force and trauma. This imagery therefore, contributes to the broader theme of rape and bodily violation as a consequence of the civil war in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Excerpt 12

“I was listening to Nigerian radio.

Lagos says Chinese soldiers are fighting
for us and Kaduna says

every Igbo woman deserves to be raped,” Kainene said. “Their imagination impresses me” (361).

This excerpt depicts rape as a systemic tool against opposing parties in times of war and positions the media as a channel for the dissemination of outrageous strategic ideologies. For instance, Kainene claims to have received this information from the Nigerian radio, an active media outlet during the civil war. This information is framed within a binary of “Us” vs “Them”, the former being the minority Igbo community, and the latter representing the dominant political forces in Lagos and Kaduna. Kainene's tone is calm and factual, yet her words edge towards irony. The reported style she adopts is distant and indirect, indicating that she does not share the same views expressed. In fact, her final statement—“their imagination impresses me”— carries a note of absurdity and disdain for the propaganda. The term “imagination” contradicts the factual reports with which media outlets such as the Nigerian radio are expected to convey. Kainene appears to liken the information to a fictional concoction towards a strategic end. Furthermore, Kainene's identity as an Igbo woman makes her a potential victim of the proposed rape and reveals the irony in her use of “impresses” when she is expected to be horrified. Meanwhile, from a structuralist perspective, rape

operates not just as an act but as a tool against the Igbo community through the humiliation and violation of their women. Moreover, the role of the media in perpetuating ideologies through the use of language is emphasised. Although sexual imagery is not explicit in this excerpt, the justified idea of raping the Igbo women reinforces the theme of sexual violation as a weapon towards the erasure and humiliation of an opposing ethnic group during the civil war.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper explores the inherent thematic foci in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* through the lens of sex and sexuality. While perspectives abound on the preponderance of sexual scenarios in the text, sufficient attention has not been given to how sexuality functions beyond mere artistic craftsmanship to how it helps reveal series of acts and construct different agencies and identities in the text. Working within the theoretical framework of structuralism and stylistics, purposively extracted excerpts reveal the conveyance of four thematic concerns clothed in sexual imageries. These thematic issues are sexualising trauma, commodifying sex for socio-economic gain, depiction of nonconsensual marriage and uniformed rape and bodily violation.

The analysis foregrounds different kinds of binaries which x-ray the Nigerian reality. First, the text makes an exposition of gender representation in the country which essentially revolves round male hegemony and female complicity (Bamgbose and Ladele 2023) as exemplified with acts such as forceful marriage where the female characters are compelled to marry the man from whom the father chooses to accept wine. There is also the bourgeoisie-proletariat divide where affluence becomes the determinant of dignity as seen with the women who are sexual commodities in the hands of the Europeans with the exception of characters like Kainene whose father's wealth becomes a shield against the tendency of sexual exploitation. The coloniser oppressor and the colonised oppressed, and the military-civilian asymmetrical relationship are other evident binaries which are foregrounded through sexual imagery in the text. This study concludes that the deployment sexual imageries in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a vehicle through which the thematic preoccupations in the text are conveyed.

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