

Sex and violence in half of a yellow sun by chimamanda ngozi adichie

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One of the key characteristics which are explored through this chapter, is the close correlation within the text between sex and violence. Throughout the course of the novel there seems to be a breakdown of the romantic association of sex, which distorts and alters it into a form of violence which is used to manipulate and coerce.

Emotional detachment is seen in the act of rape, evident from the way Ugwu is portrayed by Adichie during it. He avoids looking at the young bar girls face and experiences a "self-loathing release" after he climaxes, the use of the noun, 'self-loathing' shows us that Ugwu understands his actions were wrong and the immediate wave of guilt and self-hatred hits him as soon as he passes the point of pleasure; it is no longer a feeling of indulgence but instead of complete remorse and shame. The soldier's mock Ugwu when he backs away from the door saying, "Target Destroyer is Afraid" and "Target Destroyer, aren't you a man?", Adichie's use of this interrogative sentence makes the soldier sound condescending; manipulating Ugwu into the rape of this young girl, showing not only the other soldiers authority over Ugwu but the power they have to intimidate him into doing anything they ask.

At the start of the passage, the soldiers obnoxious attitude is seen in the way they greet the bar girl, "we destroyed the enemy" "give us beer" one of the soldier's commands as he enters the bar, Adichie shows by using these declarative sentences not only the authority they have over Ugwu but the immediate power they possess over the bar girl too, possibly because of their physical and consequently sexual dominance. This hierarchy and power structure is similar to other presentations of violence in the novel, for

example the power Mama holds over Amala when she forces her to seduce
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Odenigbo, thus leading to her falling pregnant with his child. Another theme which is characteristic of Adichie's presentation of violence within the novel is a clear personal disassociation with war and brutality, causing experiences which take place during the war to ultimately change people forever. For example, though his life in the army is not described in much detail, we can be certain by Ugwu's newly found nickname 'Target Destroyer', what his role possibly could've been, Adichie uses *antonomasia* to help fill the reader in on Ugwu's part in the war, giving the reader a hint at the brutality he has experienced. It is therefore clear that Ugwu has shot and most probably killed men, 'Target Destroyer' has strong connotations to danger and warfare just like much of the dialogue which is exchanged between the soldiers, even when discussing the rape of the bar girl, a soldier says 'High-Tech, enough! Discharge and retire', the verb 'discharge' is a strong command, echoing perhaps something that would be said on a battlefield, with the verb itself sometimes being used when discussing a soldier's dismissal from duty. Adichie, by making the soldiers speak using this mechanical vocabulary, shows the way war has influenced and changed every aspect of their lives indefinitely, including the way they speak.

This exposure to violence and war also effects other characters in the book, for example Richard after seeing Nnaemeka, a guard he meets at the airport, brutally shot, Richard experiences extreme guilt for not doing anything, he realizes his helplessness to protect the ones he loves and is so broken by this event that he "lowered his head to the sink and began to cry" however the way this guilt affects him is different. The guilt Ugwu feels is instant and directly his fault and hits him as soon as he reaches climax, this is different

to most other characters of the book like Richard, who tend to deal with secondary effects of war as observers as opposed to participants in the violence.

This passage breaks this typical characterization of violence within the novel by showing the immediate consequences and emotions felt by one inflicting an act of pain on another. Ugwu when experiencing violence caused trauma tries to separate himself from it, "Ugwu's fear sometimes overwhelmed him, froze him. He unwrapped his mind from his body, separated the two, while he lay in the trench. ... The ka-ka-ka of shooting, the cries of men, the smell of death ...were distant" however this mechanism of trying to suppress his memories doesn't last as when he returns to camp the memories flood his mind and the thoughts of the "man who placed both hands on his belly as though to hold his intestines in", no matter how much any of the characters try to forget and disassociate themselves from the violence around them it is always omnipresent, with Ugwu even experiencing nightmarish flashbacks to the day of the gang rape and his guilt still eating him away, Richard's thoughts being consumed by the thoughts of Nnaemeka

A final characteristic of Adichie's presentation of violence within the novel is how she presents the stark reality of war, not shying away from the graphic detail, which leads to the novel's great verisimilitude. Adichie does not shy away from describing the brutality and ruthlessness of this war, with many of Ugwu's experiences when on the battlefield depicted in a gory and in some cases distressing manner. For example, when he sees Captain Ohaeto's body and it is referred to as a "mangled mess". The use of the adjective "

mangled” shows how badly this body was mutilated to the point of almost dehumanizing it, a scene which is definitely not rare on battlefields today, the use of the constant alliteration of the ‘ m’ sound seems calm and ‘ hum-like’ which juxtaposes the situation of war which is going on around them, this could be Ugwu trying to disconnect himself from the trauma, which we know he often tries to do. This credible style of writing is also present when Olanna witnesses her murdered family after the raid “ The cuts on her naked body were slightly smaller dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips” the reference to the “ red lips” is oddly sensual and Adichie could possibly be hinting to the fact that Auntie Ifeka was raped just like the bar girl.

Another final example of this rawness of writing is when Kainene witnesses her servant Idjeke beheaded by a piece of shrapnel when retelling the story, she says “ and a piece of shrapnel cut off his head, completely beheaded him, and his body kept running. His body kept running and it didn’t have a head.” Adichie’s Kainene use of declarative sentences shine light on how matter of fact these events are however obscene and outrageous the events were, they are told in a very mundane way, showing how their ‘ normal life’ has changed and twisted due to the war and to show how numb the characters have become to these things.

Within this passage Adichie uses many characteristics to explore violence, some of which are common within the book like the brutish and gory language, however some are more isolated techniques used specifically for this passage for example the way in which the violence is experienced, and

the mechanical dialogue spoken between the soldiers. Adichie uses all these techniques to make her writing believable and add to the authenticity of the story, violence is a heavy part of war and I believe Adichie uses this scene specifically to show not all violence happens on a battlefield.