

Half Of The Yellow Sun By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Introduction

The novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “Half of the Yellow Sun”, is based on the war between Nigeria and Biafra. The central theme of the novel revolves around the attitudes and personalities of the characters, particularly the main lead of the story, Olanna. The story is told from the perspectives of the Nigerian people, which sheds light on the class discrimination and racial abuse existing in times of war. The story talks about the difficult times that the characters have to go through and how they react to situations that endanger their morality and code of ethics.

The times of war and the challenges it brings with time drive people to an extent where they are forced to be selfish and work towards their own interests. This led them to betray their original personalities. *Betrayal in the book is directly tied to the expansion of the character’s perspectives, which come from the major life changes they each face. Considering the different forms it takes on—self-betrayal, cultural betrayal, and betrayal of family and loved ones.*

Body

In her book “Half of the Yellow Sun,” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie includes several themes: war, romance, family, survival, love, and betrayal in difficult times. Adichie introduces her characters, such as Olanna and her husband Odenigbo, as people of morality and integrity who are selfless and always try to please others. However, Adichie shows that the challenges created by the war make the characters betray themselves and their initial desires and moral codes.

One of the themes discussed in the novel is betrayal in love and the desires that emerge during desperate times. The consequences of the war made Olanna disappoint herself and go against her usual choices and religious ethics. While she is initially attracted to Odenigbo for his strong character and genuine opinions, she is influenced by Richard for entirely different reasons. Odenigbo belonged to another class, which was against the wishes of her parents, and they did not approve of Olanna’s attraction to a lower-class professor.

“I know you will marry Odenigbo, Sister, but honestly, I am not sure I want you to marry a man from Abba. Men from Abba are so ugly, kail. If only Mohammed was an Igbo man, I would eat my hair if you did not marry him. I have never seen a more handsome man.”

"Odenigbo is not ugly. Good looks come in different ways," Olanna said. (Adichie 39)

Here, the writer shows how the social classes controlled the thinking process of the people of Nigeria, including Olanna's twin sister, who had an entirely different personality. On the other hand, Olanna didn't value materialistic things and preferred intelligence character over class and race. She chose Odenigbo despite his indifference and loved him loyally. Nevertheless, she faced betrayal in love when her husband impregnated another woman. Olanna accepted his child as her own, but she was internally broken. Adichie here tells the reader how a person might fall weak to sexual desires and turn to alcohol or other distractions during tough times when their character is tested.

While Adichie shows Olanna as a selfless woman who does everything to please others, she is not perfect and has to be relatable to the reader. Olanna commits a similar mistake when she falls for her sister's love interest. The consequence of the war leads her to make wrong decisions and compromise her integrity and morality.

"Oh! Well done, madam. I will ask the porter to take you to the VIP lounge."

The ticket seller turned around. "Ikenna! Where is that foolish boy? Ikenna!"

Olanna shook her head and smiled. "No, no need for that." She smiled again, reassuringly, to make it clear it was not his fault that she did not want to be in the VIP lounge." (Adichie 26)

This was one of the occasions when Olanna showed how she didn't believe in the concept of social class, privilege, and special treatment. She wanted to be a part of the general public and appreciate their way of living. However, when the times hit her, she used her privilege and status to get special treatment during war times and protect her family. She indulged with a corrupt officer to favour herself over others. This is when her moral codes are neglected, and she sets her family and survival as a priority. Olanna's betrayal of her morality and personal ethics is another theme discussed in the book, which demonstrates the nature of humankind and how they fall weak during tough times.

"You're the good one and the favorite and the beauty and the Africanist revolutionary who doesn't like white men" (Adichie 242)

This is when Kainene confronts Olanna about her intimate relationship with Richard, showing that Olanna doesn't behave like she usually would, betrays her love, personality, and her own sister and is loyal to her newly explored desires. When someone betrays, they directly become loyal to something else, whether it is their inner conflicts, personal desires, or even something more concrete, like another culture or family.

Cultural betrayal is another aspect highlighted in the book. Richard, who has a British background, visits Nigeria during the times of war, attracted by the culture and art of the country. Richard thinks that he can understand the suffering of the Biafran people and gets himself involved with them while falling for Olanna's twin sister. He helps their voices to be heard and uses his journalism career to

spread awareness about the war and its consequences that the people face. He betrays his culture and English identity to speak up for the Biafrans. He later realizes that he will always be an outsider and never truly relate or understand their pain.

The cultural betrayal in the book for Richard's case is portrayed by going against his former country's belief in African people and becoming loyal to Biafran roots. This shows multiple levels of betrayal. The positive side to it is that by betraying his country's belief in these people, he now sees them as equals, which is, of course, the right way to see everybody in the world.

Conclusion

Half of the Yellow Sun addresses several themes that primarily revolve around war times and the changing attitudes of the people who are challenged by the terrible situation and their lives are put in danger. Adichie has specifically highlighted the theme of betrayal, which includes betrayal of love partners, cultural betrayal and neglecting moral codes during times when survival is the primary priority. She gives her characters the face of average humans who commit mistakes and intend to do well but fall for forbidden things, which makes these characters relatable to the readers.

While these prominent betrayals by the characters cause pain to others and impact their lives, it is not shown as something entirely negative. Some of these challenge the negative connotation that betrayal has by showing the possibility of a partly positive outcome. Moreover, Adichie has emphasized the power of forgiveness and the way it brings the characters even closer.

Works Cited

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. 1st North American ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006