

**From Narrative to Images: Interrogating the Interactions of Visual Sentences and Verbal Narrativisation in Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun***

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**Abstract**

Narrative is a general term indicating the construction, development and telling of a story. Film as a narrative genre presents a story. Some scholars hold that we are all storytellers because we tell stories everyday of our lives, and that our lives are stories, unfolding in layers. However, not all of us can tell a good story, hence, the recourse to adaptation: of an epic narrative, drama, prose, or a film narrative created out of an original idea. Adaptation, therefore, presupposes the ability to make something suitable for a new use, situation, etc. In Biyi Bandele's screen adaptation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel of the same title, *Half of a Yellow Sun*(2013), one can see the manifestations of the verbal narrativisation which makes the fictional work flexible for re-make, re-use or adaptation- whichever side of the spectrum one looks at these two forms of communication. Since film as a medium is intensely decision-based, using the narrative theory and relying on the intertextuality/intermediality theory simultaneously, this paper argues that each shot lined up by the filmmaker has resulted from a dozen of choices about the elements and conventions such as camera placement, lighting, focalization (focus), casting and framing. It draws the conclusion that not only do things on the screen (i.e. images) appear at the expense of others not shown, but that the manner in which they appear depends on a selection of one perspective that eliminates, at least temporarily, all others in what this writer sees as subordination of story to style.

**Keywords:** *Narrative, Images, Visual Sentences, Interrogation.*

**Introduction**

Of all the things that distinguish us, humans from other animals, storytelling is the most unique. And we do it to help make sense of our lives, to make

our lives more meaningful than just a simple sequence of events, ending in extinction. Story-telling, therefore, provides answers to the “Why?” of our existence. To the extent that we understand how stories work, we can construct them with greater clarity and deeper meaning. This is what we are primarily concerned with and interested in in this paper. In the same vein, this is the crux of narratology, the science that seeks greater clarity and deeper understanding of meaning as expressed in stories (Felluga: 2000). It is also a humanities discipline dedicated to the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation (Meister: 2013). Peters (2010) contends that films not only strive to entertain but as well educate about the times, practices and social codes deemed appropriate by society at any given moment. Films from a certain time period have the ability to mirror society and truly provide a historically accurate account of what events unfolded and how they tended to alter society in many crucial ways.

It suffices to state that films are just mere stories from some people's imagination, which help the consumer/spectator have a better understanding of the past, perhaps in order to shape the future. The emotional connection films invoke through the visual and moving image make the medium hold fond and special memories for individuals, and it has done that, entertaining generations for more than a century. One can therefore read Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a history book or historical narrativisation of the Nigerian thirty-month civil war. But the words she used in the novel can never truly capture that moment in time as much as the film version by Biyi Bandele, but merely as passive representations of the past. The manifestations of the verbal narrativisation which makes the fictional work flexible for re-make, re-use or adaption- whichever side of the spectrum one looks at the two forms of communication, is better felt in the film, based on the novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This is because film has now been classified as the most important historical document in existence today.

*Half of a Yellow Sun* is read as a British Nigerian historical fiction of the tragedy of a love story involving two sisters that are caught in the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war. The film was shot, using the 35mm camera. It was produced by Andrea Calderwood and directed by Biyi Bandele. The running time is a hundred and eleven minutes in duration, starring:

- i. Chiwetel Ejiofo as Odenigbo
- ii. Thandie Newton as Olanna
- iii. Onyeka Onwenu as Odenigbo's Mother
- iv. Genevieve Nnaji as Ms Adebayo
- v. OC Ukeje as Aniekwena
- vi. Anika Noni Rose as Kainene
- vii. Joseph Mawle as Richard

- viii. John Boyega as Ugwu
- ix. Susan Wokoma as Amara
- x. Hakeem Kae-Kazim as Capital DUTSE
- xi. Rob David as Redhead Charles
- xii. Babou Ceesay as Okeoma
- xiii. Gloria Young as Auntie Ifeka
- xiv. Wale Ojo as Chief Okonji
- xv. Tina Mba as Mrs Ozobia
- xvi. Zach Orji as Chief Ozobia

### **Synopsis of *Half of a Yellow Sun***

A brief synopsis: during the mid- to late sixties, the glamorous twin sisters Olanna and Kainene return to Nigeria after their university education in England, they made decisions that shock their family. Olanna moves in with her lover, the revolutionary professor Odenigbo, in the university at Nsukka, while Kainene takes over the family interests and pursues a career as a business woman, falling in love with Richard, an English writer in the process. As the Igbos struggled to establish Biafra as an independent republic, the sisters are enveloped in the choking violence of the war and a series of betrayal that threaten their family forever. In spite of the betrayal by Odenigbo, even though inadvertently, Olanna is in love with him and is willing to tolerate and do anything to be with him, despite his mother's deliberate set-up to have sex with a new house girl, Amara whom she brought from the village for him. This goes for Kainene as well, who does not mind her sister's betrayal when she sleeps with Richard.

### **Theoretical Framework**

From the late 1960s when Julia Kristeva (1941-) first introduced the term "intertextuality" in literary linguistics, through Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) to Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), the theory of intertextuality assumes that meaning and intelligibility in discourse and texts is based on a network prior and concurrent discourse and texts. Every text is a mosaic of references to other texts, genres, and discourses. Every text or set of signs presupposes a network of relationships to other signs like strings of quotations that have lost their exact references. The principle of intertextuality is a ground or precondition for meaning beyond "texts" in the strict sense of things written, and includes units of meaning in any media. Expanding the theory for cross-media symbolic activity, we could call this "intermediality" or "intersemiality" (the structures of meaning presupposed or embedded in any set of signs like nodes in a network). The notion of "intersemic" describes the interdependence and implied relation of any unit of signs (like a movie) to a network of other texts, genres, artifacts, documents, and symbolic works (images, artworks) in a culture.

Narratology, on the other hand, is the study of the forms, structures,

media, functions, and evolution of narrative, with a special emphasis on Story. On one end of the narrative spectrum lies a mere representational sequence of events that may or may not have a beginning, middle, and end (an Arc). At the opposite end lies Story, with an Arc, an indivisible and universal structural pattern called a Narreme, and meaning over and beyond the mere representational (a Theme). Narration, on the other hand, has more than one meaning. In its broadest sense, narration encompasses all forms of story-telling, fictional or not: personal anecdotes, "true crime", and historical narratives all fit here, along with many other non-fiction forms. More narrowly, however, the term, narration refers to all written fiction. In its most restricted sense, narration is the fiction-writing mode whereby the narrator communicates directly to the reader. This being the theoretical plank on which this paper stands, for no other reason than the fact that it captures both the literary and filmic evolution of narrative, at the centre of which is the Story. As a human science, narratology is historically defined and reflects ongoing changes in research agendas and methodologies in the humanities.

Scholars have argued that narratology is no longer a single theory, but rather comprises a group of related theories (cf. Herman ed. 1999). This has motivated some to conclude that narratology is in fact a textual theory whose scope extends beyond narratives and to claim that "none of the distinctions introduced by narratology to text theory is specific to any genre" (Titzmann 2003: 201). However, contemporary "postclassical" narratology cannot be reduced to a text theory, either. Over the past twenty years, narratologists have paid increasing attention to the historicity and contextuality of modes of narrative representation as well as to its pragmatic function across various media, while research into narrative universals has been extended to cover narrative's cognitive and epistemological functions. Against this background, two questions deserve particular attention: (a) How does narratology relate to other disciplines that include the study of narrative? (b) How can its status as a methodology be characterized? Five observations can be made in response to these questions which at the same time substantiate the above definition of narratology: (i) Narratology is not *the* theory of narrative (Bal 1985), but rather *a* theory of narrative (Prince 1995: 110; Nünning 2003: 227-28). Other theories of narrative coexist with narratological ones. The relation between narrative theory and narratology is thus not symmetrical, but hierarchical and inclusive (Nünning & Nünning 2002: 19). (ii) At the same time, narratology is *more* than a theory, as it may not have lived up to the scientific pretension expressed in its invocation as a new "science of narrative" (Todorov 1969: 10).

In *The Republic*, Plato differentiated literary genres on the basis of the genre-specific constellation of two fundamental modes of speech termed *mimesis*, the direct imitation of speech in the form of the characters' verbatim dialogues and monologues, and *diegesis*, which comprises all utterances attributable to the author. According to Plato, the lyric genre is restricted to the

use of *diegesis* and the dramatic genre to the use of *mimesis*, with only the epic genre combining both. This fundamental distinction of the two principal modes of narrating not only anticipated the 20th-century opposition *showing* vs. *telling*, but it also prefigured one of the three analytical dimensions adopted by Genette (1972), namely voice.

Aristotle's *Poetics* presented a second criterion that has remained fundamental for the understanding of narrative: the distinction between the totality of events taking place in a depicted world and the *de facto* narrated plot or *muthos*. He pointed out that the latter is always a construct presenting a subset of events, chosen and arranged according to aesthetic considerations. According to Meister (2013), this resulted in the *Poetics'* functional approach to fictional protagonists and their actions, the latter explained as governed by the aesthetic and logical requirements of the overall *muthos*.

### **Visual Sentences and the Four Basic Levels of Meaning in *Half of a Yellow Sun***

A narrative can be constructed using a variety of combinations of components that serve to “advance” it. Any or all of these components can accomplish the following in a narrative: create scenes, reveal character, establish time and place, express mood, explore theme, or develop a style. There are also four levels of meaning—the Physical, Grammatical, Active, and Archetypal—and their varied components provide the foundation and building blocks of our narratives. These four levels and their components are the basic elements of a Narrative. If you want to make your stories move swiftly, smoothly, effectively, and clearly, with the most meaning, a knowledge of these elements is essential. This is amply demonstrated in the novel by Adichie.

At the most granular (first) level, the *physical*, a narrative uses the following five components to create meaning: Symbols, Spaces, Gestures, Sensations, and Words. A critical look at the first, Symbols, for example, reveals that the question mark? can, within a particular written narrative context, by itself, ask a question. In fact, the question mark by itself, within a narrative context, is the most basic form of a question. For instance, in the following excerpts:

“'Good afternoon, sah – Odenigbo,' he said, even before Master had come into the kitchen.

'Yes, yes,' Master said. He was holding books to his chest with one hand and his briefcase with the other. Ugwu rushed over to help with the books. 'Sah? You will eat?' he asked in English.

'Eat what?'

Ugwu's stomach got tighter. He feared it might snap as he bent to place the books on the dining table. 'Stew, sah.'

'Stew?'

'Yes, sah. Very good stew, sah.'

'I'll try some, then.'

'Yes, sah!' “(*Half of a Yellow Sun* pp.16-17).

The other three components - Spaces, Gestures, and Sensations, are very economical ways to express meaning that might otherwise have to be expressed in entire phrases, clauses, sentences, complete paragraphs, or even an entire Chapter, through various means, including images, sounds, odors, tastes, and touch! While Words, the last but not the least, are the primary building blocks of spoken and written communication and thus also of narrative, they can be used to characterize, advance the action of a narrative, to set the scene, to express the mood, establish the style, and/or reveal the theme.

Transition is the means by which we get from one event to another event. In a written narrative, this might be a simple conjunction, “and” for instance. In a movie, it might be a cut, or a dissolve. In a song, it might be a drumbeat or a guitar solo. While sequence is a series of events that may or may not be causally related and which may or may not have a beginning, middle, and/or end. Exposition, the descriptive or explanatory statements that serve to “advance the action” to “set the scene,” that is, to place scenes into their setting (time and/or place), to reveal mood, theme, character, and/or style, and to increase our understanding of events through explanation takes us to the next beat. Scenes encapsulate a sequence of events that are causally related and intended to be a component of a narrative. A scene may be expressed by means of dialogue, events, and/or exposition. Although scenes normally function as components within a narrative, a scene may be complete enough to be a narrative in, and of itself.

The third level of narrative, the *Active*, contains five components: Event—something that happens. Although in popular parlance, we make a distinction between an event and a thing (object), physics tells us that the train and its action of hurtling down the tracks are both events. Movies and television do the same thing, in a much more sophisticated way, of course. Brown also contends that “Words are potentially just as seductive as images, and so inherently in just as much danger ... as any visual image” (110).

### **Intertextuality/intermediality and Rhetorical viewpoints in *Half of a Yellow Sun***

The author's viewpoints in the novel definitely depart from the camera viewpoints in the film version. This is hinged on the accepted discourse that along with exposition, argumentation, and description, narration (broadly defined) is one of four rhetorical modes of discourse. In the context of rhetorical modes, the purpose of narration is to tell a story or to narrate an event or series of events. Narrative may exist in a variety of forms: biographies, anecdotes, short stories, or novels. In this context, all written fiction may be viewed as narration. Narrowly defined, narration is the fiction-writing mode whereby the narrator is

communicating directly to the reader. But if the broad definition of narration includes all written fiction, and the narrow definition is limited merely to that which is directly communicated to the reader, then what comprises the rest of written fiction?

In literature, *person* is used to describe the viewpoint from which the narrative is presented. Although second-person perspectives are occasionally used, the most commonly encountered are first and third person. *Third person omniscient* specifies a viewpoint in which readers are provided with information not available to characters within the story; without this qualifier, readers may or may not have such information. In movies and video games, first- and third-person describe camera viewpoints. The first-person is from a character's own perspective, and the third-person is the more familiar, "general" camera showing a scene. A so-called second-person may also be used to show a main character from a secondary character's perspective.

For example, in a horror film, the first-person perspective of an antagonist could become a second-person perspective on a potential victim's actions. A third-person shot of the two characters could be used to show the narrowing distance between them. A curious but critical mention needs to be made of Laura Mulvey's now-classic essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" [Mulvey, 1975], was the feminist claim that men and women are differentially positioned by cinema: men as subjects identifying with agents who drive the film's narrative forward, women as objects for masculine desire and fetishistic gazing. This much we read in the novel and see in the film version. Odenigbo did not stop at mere gazing at the objectification of his masculine desire, in Amara, but goes ahead to have an intercourse with her, even though unconsciously, as he achieves this under the influence of 'fresh, special' palmwine. The wine is 'special' because his mother's hidden and not-too-hidden intention is to make him fall for the robust *girl* from the village in order to have at least a grandchild by her, rather than the skinny Olanna.

In the contention of Tom Sherak, film is a reflection of society, both present and past, and serves as a medium of escape.

I think the film and its innovations sometimes has to catch up to society but sometimes it leads society too. Movies are stories, movies are people who come out with ideas about something they want to say, something they want to tell someone. Movies are a form of communication and that communication, those stories, come from societies- not just where society is presently and what it's doing now- but where society has been. It's been that way for as long as movies have been around! Movies are different things to different people, that's what is so incredible about them. To me personally, movies are about escapism. Movies are about sitting in a theatre, watching something- watching a story unfold with people I don't know- watching that happen and emoting an emotion knowing that for those two hours, when I walk into that theatre, I don't have to worry about what is going on outside. I lose myself in what I'm watching. Movies can educate too.

They tell us things we never could have known. They tell us things we might not know, and they give us a way to explore the past, the present and the future.

In a 2005 paper by S C Noah Uhrig (*University of Essex, UK*) entitled, "*Cinema is Good for You: The Effects of Cinema Attendance on Self-Reported Anxiety or Depression and 'Happiness'*" the author describes how contemporary research has also revealed more profound aspects of the impact of film on society. He enthused, "The narrative and representational aspects of film make it a wholly unique form of art. Moreover, the collective experience of film as art renders it a wholly distinct leisure activity. The unique properties of attending the cinema can have decisively positive effects on mental health. Cinema attendance can have independent and robust effects on mental wellbeing because visual stimulation can queue a range of emotions and the collective experience of these emotions through the cinema provides a safe environment in which to experience roles and emotions we might not otherwise be free to experience. The collective nature of the narrative and visual stimulation makes the experience enjoyable and controlled, thereby offering benefits beyond mere visual stimulation. Moreover, the cinema is unique in that it is a highly accessible social art form, the participation in which generally cuts across economic lines."

### **Interrogating the Narrative Ideology in the Adaptation of *Half of a Yellow Sun***

Conversely, the adaptation of one of the most famous novels about the Nigerian civil war got vetoed by the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board, NFVCB as liable to incite insurrections and only finally got made and released in 2013. The story, though, interesting, got a twist with the message that such conditions would not be tolerated since after the war, coupled with the raging insurgency in the North East geo-political zone of the country at the time of its release, which the ruling party and government failed to manage properly. This later became a campaign agenda and some propaganda for the main opposition political party about the depiction of social conditions of the period covered by the story and the screen adaptation. For instance, the visit by Olanna to her uncle Mbaezi in Kano. In the film, an attack by the rebel forces on a popular market in the ancient city vividly represents some of the scenes of carnage witnessed as part of the insurgent attacks by the dissident group, *Boko Haram*, based in the region which has lasted for almost a decade now.

The younger generation of Nigerians who were born about two decades after the end of the war may not understand the social conditions that led to the secessionist attempt and the eventual outbreak of the war, which many critics have termed 'senseless'. The urge and wish never to witness such scenario again in a lifetime must have informed the Nigerian Censors Board's gavel on the film release. The film still got into the hands of Nigerians, anyway. It is on this premise that we note that the ideology of the author, Adichie, differs from that professed by



the filmmaker, Bandele, against the backdrop of an understanding of ideology as that reference to the values/viewpoints and meanings/messages that a media text such as film might be able to communicate to the viewer. Explicitly, this can be read as what a character or the director/producer/writer declares to be the subject of the film and implicitly, the more debatable meanings of a film, possibly beyond the conscious intentions of the filmmaker, requiring analysis and a reasoned argument, such as what this paper attempts to do.

Dudley Andrew (2004, p. 461-469) theoretically divides adaptation into three modes: borrowing, intersection and fidelity of transformation. Borrowing implies that the narrative has its roots in some earlier archetypal or mythic source material, one that has probably appeared throughout our cultural history in multiple forms. Intersection, according to Andrew in effect is the opposite of borrowing: "Here the uniqueness of the original text is preserved to such an extent that it is intentionally left unassimilated in adaptation." Fidelity, Andrew writes: "Unquestionably the most frequent and most tiresome discussion of adaptation (and of film and literature relations as well) concerns fidelity and transformation. Here it is assumed that the task of adaptation is the reproduction in cinema of something essential about the original text" (Braudy & Marshal, p. 461). In contrast to Andrew's standpoint, however, this filmmaker has taken the skeleton of the original text, and has made it the skeleton of the film. He has shown fidelity to the tone, imagery, and rhythm of the text and narrative, and at the same time, transformed these intangibles into their filmic equivalents.

Film however, is a visual medium in which dialogue cannot be judged or experienced on its own (Parker, 1999:176 qtd. in Ajayi, 2014:215). Van Sijjl (2005:1) is also instructive here, talking about the exploration of the cinematic tools of storytelling. This uniquely powerful instrument with its close-ups, fast cutting, sophisticated modern make-up and special effects and the heightened use of music and sound effects can combine to produce an impact no other medium can create (<http://www.filmeducation.org/secondary/concept/film-ideol/docs/frameset.html>). We agree with the observation made by Eshiet (2014, p. 65) that historians and scholars of translation take a negative view of adaptation, dismissing the phenomenon as distortion, falsification or censorship (aaboori.mshdiau.ac.ir/FavouriteSubjects/adaptation.htm, qtd. in Eshiet). We equally share the contention of Gbemisola Adeoti (2010 p. 8, qtd. in Eshiet) when ( he or she???) says that adaptation is...."the art of deliberate re-rendering of an already existing work of art in a new form or shape"; adding that it involves the transposition of the work of another creative artist into a different medium within specific socio-historical and cultural context. What Bandele as a filmmaker, has done with the film, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is to call attention to the emotional trauma inherent in the story of Olanna and Odenigbo, using the cinematic narrative of hubris, the Aristotelean concept of weakness or fault in the tragic hero or heroine. Is Odenigbo a hero? Is Olanna a heroine? These questions become pertinent when

one looks at the twist in the characterisation of both lovers from the perspective of their personal concerns and values.

While "The Revolutionary" is concerned about the rationale for the war yet keeps running at the slightest information, his lover is concerned about revenge when she discovers he has slept with Amara. She does not even pause to weigh the options open to her but goes right ahead to seduce her sister, Kainene's boyfriend or lover, out of blind urge to revenge. When she returns home, she allowed Odenigbo to make love to her and breaks the news of her mission to him in bed. He left to go to Richard and warned him to stay away from his house. One then begins to wonder what the conscious intention of Bandele is, in pitching these two sisters and these two lovers against each other in this sexual intrigue or triangle. Even when Kainene gets to know about what has transpired, she takes it in her stride and remains in the relationships. This brings us to the main point of focus: the ideological departure of the film from the novel in terms of the narrative or the narrativisation. According to theorists such as Jameson and Hayden White, narrativisation has traditionally functioned as a way of endowing events with coherence, meaning and a sense of the real (Murphy, 2007). Perhaps Bandele wanted us to see the aforementioned characters as spineless cheats, who profess something and do entirely a different thing in their "realness". There is a rare emotional truth in the sexual scenes, from Ugwu's adolescent forays and the mature couples' passions, to the ugliness of rape, Maya Jaggi (2006) opines.

This twist perhaps has been subtly hinted in the scenes at the opening of the film involving Olanna, while applying make-up in her room, and her sister, where Kainene alleges her sister is being offered by their father as sex bait for his bid to win a contract from the minister:

'So will you be spreading your legs for that elephant in exchange for daddy's contract?' Kainene asked.

Olanna sat up, surprised. She did not remember the last time that Kainene had come into her room.

'Daddy literally pulled me away from the veranda, so we could leave you alone with the good cabinet minister', Kainene said. 'Will he give Daddy the contract then?'

'He didn't say. But it's not as if he will get nothing. Daddy will still give him ten per cent, after all.'

'The ten per cent is standard, so extras will always help. The other bidders probably don't have a *beautiful* daughter.' Kainene dragged the word out until it sounded cloying, sticky: *beau-ti-ful*....'The benefit of being the ugly daughter is that nobody uses you as sex bait.'

'They are not using me as sex bait.' (*Half*... pp. 35-36)

One is rather at a loss as to the rationale behind Kainene's probing questions to her sister: is it envy, curiosity, or sheer sniggering? Olanna was to turn

over in her mind, after this encounter, how distant the two of them had become, how they had simply drifted apart. We are to learn from the novel and see on screen, from the sexual adventure with Odenigbo and Richard, and several other scenes, such as the group discussions on campus among the lecturers and Odenigbo's mother and her clandestine agenda, the level of debasement and individualism that characterizes the society that gave impetus to the narratives. Visually, the filmmaker's choice sentences and the author's verbal narrativisation meet and collide. Olanna describes the discussions in Odenigbo's house in the following visual sentences:

'I think Richard will like Odenigbo's house,' Olanna said.  
 'It's like a political club in the evenings. He only invited Africans at the first because the university is so full of foreigners, and he wanted Africans to have a chance to socialize with one another.' (*Half...* p. 36)

Odenigbo thus appears like a rallying point for other intellectuals on campus and this is amply captured in the novel on pages 49 – 51 and also in the film in more than one scene. The atmosphere in the film was quickly established to tie with the subject of discussion: the Jewish Holocaust and the World War and other connected issues. Olanna's first encounter with Odenigbo's friends who she began to get used to gradually, clearly demonstrated the author's narrative imperative. The fact that their first discourse centres on the Holocaust and eventually the World War for me is hinged on the intention of both the author and the filmmaker to introduce the reader and viewer to the core thematic pre-occupation of the two works. This actually reinforces the visual dimensions of the form, subject-matter, characterization and themes of Adichie's and Bandele's works of fiction and the contemporary interest in the Nigerian civil war. In a sentence, attempting to interrogate the stupidity and arrogance that led to the debacle in the first place, considering the huge and monumental losses the world suffered after the two World Wars.

### **From Narrative to Images: Bandele's Interpretation of *Half of a Yellow Sun***

In the first twenty-five minutes of the film, Bandele covered one hundred and seven pages of the novel, almost all of the Part One of the novel. His interpretation of the narrative, leaf after leaf of these pages into the visuals we see is electrifying as images eat up the sentences and paragraphs and progression of the story into verbal and visual narrativisation of experiences of the characters that we meet in Adichie's world and the filmmaker's new world. He achieves this through a whole lot of techniques, including but not limited to camera angles, movement, shots deliberately selected, sound and editing, by jumping pages, taking us forward into the author's mind, and bringing us back again, as if in a flash forward-flashback interface that knits the story cleverly together into a single, fresh conversation with the reality of the moment. The story is laid out from the

beginning through the middle to the resolution, full of ambience sound, with a visible reaching for a realistic representation of the novel's world. The settings of the film oscillate between Lagos, Kano, Nsukka, Aba, Port Harcourt, and London with seamless transition. The use of props such as the period vehicles, telephone, radio set, picture frames, food items and dishes, among many others, is professionally handled and in no way obtrudes the flow of the story.

By the start of the second part of the novel, titled 'The Late Sixties', we hear the news of the military coup through Odenigbo, who heard it over the radio:

*'Nkem!'* Master called out. *'Omege!'* It has happened!

Olanna hurried to the living room, Ugwu close behind.

Master was standing by the radio.... 'There's been a coup,' Master said, and gestured to the radio. 'Major Nzeogwu is speaking from Kaduna.'

But on screen, we however see Odenigbo sitting by the radio set, trying to tune it for clearer reception of the speech that followed the announcement of the coup, and Olanna at the telephone, trying to dial, but without success. The assurance from Odenigbo that her parents are fine, (because) civilians are safe. 'I'm sure they are fine. The lines will come back up soon. It's just for security', did little to calm her down.

The narratives from this point moves between the intersection of film and literature and indigenous activism on the part of Odenigbo, his heartthrob, Olanna, his houseboy, Ugwu, and other characters in the theatre of war which was raging. Olanna travels back to Kano, only to witness the murder of her aunt in the pogrom that followed the counter-coup allegedly led by soldiers of Northern extraction. She narrowly escapes becoming a victim herself. We are thereafter taken through their tenuous journey of survival as they have to leave Nsukka, and bracing the war and the consequences of war. Odenigbo and Olanna had to consummate their relationship through a 'white' wedding ceremony in the middle of the carnage, disrupted by an air raid as they are about to cut their wedding cake. This scene brings to mind the images of the wedding ceremony between the sitting Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon and his heartthrob, Victoria, while he was prosecuting the war himself. They end up in refugee camp(s) and help out in humanitarian exigencies. The narrative and images throw up the peculiar emotions which arise out of the layers of betrayal that the plot of the film is noted for, a peculiarity that marks the film's departure from the source-novel.

Jaggi aptly contends that "As Biafran secession "for security" brings a refugee crisis, a retaliatory Nigerian blockade and all-out war, and the world (bar Tanzania) refuses to recognise the fledgling state, the focus is on the characters' grief, resilience and fragmenting relationships. Tending her adopted daughter, Olanna endures the descent into one-room squalor, food-aid queues and air raids without self-pity. But there is anger at the "bleakness of bombing hungry people", and the deadly kwashiorkor, malnutrition that afflicts children, dubbed "Harold

Wilson syndrome" for the former colonial power's complicity. While Ugwu's forced conscription involves him in an atrocity whose legacy is lasting shame, the issue of forgiveness between the twin sisters subtly echoes that of warring political groups",.

Tied to all this is the level of violence and brigandage of the war playing out at the airport lobby, while Richard was waiting to board the Lagos flight on his way from London, for instance, where the soldier killed a number of people just because they are not Igbo.

Nnaemeka turned to go back to his desk. Richard picked up his briefcase. The side entrance burst open and three men ran in holding up long rifles. They were wearing green army uniforms, and Richard wondered why soldiers would make such a spectacle of themselves, dashing in like that, until he saw how red and wildly glassy their eyes were.

The first soldier waved his gun around. '*Ina nyamiri!* Where are the Igbo people? Who is Igbo here? Where are the infidels?

A woman screamed.

'You are Igbo,' the second soldier said to Nnaemeka.

'No, I come from Katsina!Katsina!'

The soldier walked over to him. 'Say Allahu Akbar!'

The lounge was silent. Richard felt cold sweat weighing on his eyelashes.

'Say Allahu Akbar!' the soldier repeated....

Richard willed him to say those words, anyway, to try; he willed something, anything, to happen in the stifling silence and as if in answer to his thoughts, the rifle went off and Nnaemeka's chest blew open, a splattering red mass, and Richard dropped the note in his hand.

According to Jaggi, "Ethnic differences are signaled between the mainly Igbo protagonists - whose persistent switching between English and Igbo languages is wonderfully conveyed - and those such as Odenigbo's Yoruba colleague, Miss Adebayo, and Olanna's ex-boyfriend from the north, the Hausa prince Mohammed. These differences assume lethal significance after the ostensibly Igbo-led 1966 military coup, which becomes a pretext for anti-Igbo pogroms after the counter-coup six months later. As Olanna and others become caught up in the violence, the novel captures horror in the details of "vaguely familiar clothes on headless bodies", or corpses' "odd skin tone - a flat, sallow grey, like a poorly wiped blackboard".

## Conclusion

Cinema might be the "dream factory" or a culture industry of mere entertainment. It might be our rational, conscious, objective stories we tell ourselves, or our dreams and nightmares - but we always need these representations to help construct our identities, past and present, and to understand them.

The filmmaker usually lines up things to appear on the screen (i.e. images) at the expense of others not shown, but that the manner in which they appear depends on a selection of one perspective that eliminates, at least temporarily, all others in what this writer sees as subordination of story to style. Biyi Bandele has done justice to the story in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, choosing to tow his own line of thoughts and preferences. This we have seen through the dozen of choices about the elements and conventions such as camera placement, lighting, focalization (focus), casting and framing which only he has the right to oversee.

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