

**The Historical Roots of Fragmented Nationhood And The Politics Of Identity: An Analytical Insight in *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of***

***A Yellow Sun***

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**Abstract**

Adichie's novel uncovers the protagonists, who are battling based on the divided nationhood, loss of identity, and human values, which are basically the product of the Civil War in Nigeria. The characters strive to bring back what they have lost as a result of the war. Adichie uses her own imagination to bring out what she hasn't experienced and writes it in the novel. The novel can be glanced through the theory of post-colonial studies, which analyzes and clarifies the legacy of colonialism while reading a particular book.

*Half of a Yellow Sun* is a typical example of such a situation concerning colonialism after independence. The author believes that stories that helps visualize about the real experiences of past, can educate the younger generation about the history.

**Keywords:** Adichie, Half of a Yellow Sun, Fragmented, Nationhood, Identity.

**Introduction**

Adichie's novel uncovers the protagonists, who are battling based on the divided nationhood, loss of identity, and human values, which are basically the product of the Civil War in Nigeria. The characters strive to bring back what they have lost as a result of the war. Although the author was born after the Nigerian Civil War of 1966-69, she has a keen interest to revive the history of war. Along with the experience of her parents, Adichie uses her own imagination to bring out what she hasn't experienced and writes it in the novel. The novel can be glanced through the theory of post-colonial studies, which analyzes and clarifies the legacy of colonialism while reading a particular book. Some of the countries who experienced colonialism are still under the guidance of their colonial masters even after the so-called independence. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a typical example of such a situation concerning colonialism after independence. The author believes that stories that help visualize about the real experiences of past, can educate the younger generation about the history. She thinks that there is something missing in the history books taught in the schools. Everyone recognizes this gap and inconsistency but chooses to remain restrained. Through the novel, she tries to fill in this space of silence, although it came from the effected part of story, younger generation may be educated by the situation and the agony of the people.

The very opening of the book starts with a poem about the Nigerian Civil War by Chinua Achebe. Nigeria is a country, with over 300 different ethnic groups. Moreover, the part of the Nigerian politics and culture explored through the book, which shows the incredible diversity within the country ("one nation") even within those who belong to the same ethnic groups, there is huge cultural discrepancy and diversity. Ugwu and Odenigbo, both, are Igbo, where Ugwu is an illiterate and poor boy, Odenigbo is a wealthy, educative and modern man.

The conversation in Odenigbo's house with his friends brings about the role of fragmented nationhood and politics in postcolonial Nigeria as a country, with different ethnic group. Odenigbo, apart from being a professor of mathematics, has interests in the politics. Odenigbo is a tribalist, favoring to be identified as an Igbo than to be called as a Nigerian, as regard Nigeria as a country created and "unified" by British colonist. He always tries to be influenced by the ideal unit for Africans. He regards his tribe as his

identity, and his friends mostly about the nationalism and pan Africanism. Miss Adebayo was not an Igbo woman; she often argues flirtatiously with Odenigbo and he always tells her that she was a Yoruba, which is why she considers nationalism better than a tribe as for her identity. “I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity” (20). He always felt that the white men created the word “black”, to make a clear difference between them and the blacks as they are referred. But, Odenigbo is totally against this notion. Throughout the novel, Adichie uses the character of Odenigbo as a typical example for loss of identity. He always claims that “he is Igbo” (20). rather than Nigerian, then from where he gets the idea of the Nation and Nationhood. He always claims that he is a typical Igbo, but his behaviors and thinking is that of a white man” (13).

The Nigerian politics of governance after the independence were full of confusion and several parentheses. The situation of the country is believed to be unstable as each geographical zone blames the other. The Igbos thinks that northerners have occupied all the most important parts in the governmental office. They say that the northerners are not wise and educative; they corrupt the whole policies, which make the Igbos be like outcast, who lost their culture and identity. The political unrest in the country is beyond limit, as a result of the amalgamation, each side wants to have the highest rank in the government of the country. Each character is regarded according to his own identity; she was an Ijaw and could not understand Arize’s Igbo (41). Odenigbo accuses white men of changing and snatching his identity, but he is in full support of that, as he accepts the new way thinking, which is entirely different from his cultural background. In the Igbo culture, it is not accepted for a man and women to stay together without getting married, but Odenigbo and Olanna are in live-in relation. A special woman is coming for the weekend” (21). Adichie brings about a blend of culture in the novel, which shows that each and every character is in a state of search of identity (20). Edward Said, in the idea of ‘identity’, shows the postcolonial Nigeria and Africa in a state of confusion and dilemma.

One more significant arc to the novel is the less-confident characters like Olanna, who lack confidence. With such characters, Adichie portrays South West part of the country.

Although, Nigeria got her independence from the British, the English indirectly does control the country, and its people. They have a great influence in the Nigerian Civil War. Adichie presents the character of Richard as a different from the 'Us' (meaning the westerners). As a result of his natural sympathy with Nigerian culture, the author shows that not there are some who are different. She created such kinds of characters because most of her readers are 'Us', she doesn't want them to feel bad, and she is also living with them. Adichie creates the character of Odenigbo, who is similar to her own self as, in the novel, Odenigbo tries to run away from the reality, disregards the western culture, but mobilizes it by his behavior, he tells Ugwu the very first time that education is priority" (11). and also addresses him like an English man 'my good man' (7). To some extent, like Adichie herself, she is always proud to be Nigerian and, more especially, to be regarded as an Igbo, but the aspect of modernity is built in within her personality. The educational setting of Nigeria was set by the westerner, as it is regarded as to be a system of western education. Odenigbo was relating with Ugwu about what has been taught in school, which clearly shows that how people have been dominated in the entire aspect of life, more especially, in the educational aspect, and also are been derived from their cultural teachings. Odenigbo told Ugwu that they will teach that a white man Mango Park discovered River Niger, which Odenigbo called 'rubbish', people living in that area fishes in the river long time before Mango Park, he said (Adichie 11). Adichie also shows the character as to be the real representative of the African domination and their perceptions of the Orient, the character of Susan, who is living under the country's shelter, but always named Nigerian as uncivilized and unrestrained. "What are you doing with that monkey? And the African answered, it's a dog, not a monkey" (Adichie 54). the English always see the Africans as monkeys who know nothing. Edward Said ideas on 'Cultural Hegemony' clearly indicate the idea of the westerners who always considered as superior and Easterners is the inferior.

Racism is one of the major conflicts that lead to the Civil War and the conflicts between the characters of *Half of a Yellow Sun* and also the political crises in Nigeria. The colonization worsened cultural conflicts between the characters and Nigerians at a whole. "The amalgamation created by England among the region, which comprises of different

people with different cultural and religious background, is the main cause of the tension in the novel” (51). “The main problem is between Hausa people, who are mostly Muslims, and the Igbos, mostly Christians, and traditional religion. According to the author, the British gave the control of the government to the Hausa so that they can easily manipulate, because the Igbos and Yoruba developed middle-class people and are educative, they might be hard to handle” (43).

The novel is from the view of largely Igbo characters, Ugwu, Odenigbo, Olanna and her twin sister, Kainene. “They all have an anxious hope for their new established nation Biafra, but their dreams shattered because of the Biafran Civil War” (50). The novel also gives the view of an outsider, Richard, about the Nigerian war. Although he is an English man, but he finds himself at the middle, because of his love for Kainene he finds love and sympathy for the Biafrans, and he cannot deny the fact that he belongs to the colonials physically not emotionally.

The ethnic tensions created by the white man are the main problems for Nigeria, as a nation, the characters suffered because of that. The novel starts in a comic way, that will make the readers think that it might be a happy ending. Gradually, the real tension starts after the coup, which leads to the killing of the most prominent among the Hausas. “Two week later, the Hausas retaliated, so many Igbos were killed in the northern part of the country, Kaduna, Zaria and Kano. Most of the characters are worried because they have relatives and friends” (125). Kainene is worried for her friend Colonel Udochi Ekechi, who have been killed, and Major Madu who escaped with the help of a Hausa friend (Ibrahim) through a water tank. “As he narrates his sufferings during the massacre, he told that hoe people have been killed including those who were leaving with the Hausas, and can speak the language fluently” (139). Again, they also heard the news that over five hundred Igbos were killed in the Northern Eastern part of Maiduguri, the characters are worried and they became devastated. The novel gives the complete details of war through the eyes of the majority Igbo characters. “When the war started, Olanna was in Kano, she went there to bring her cousin, Arize, who was due. She wants to take care of her, but unfortunately the whole family, including the heavy pregnant Arize, was killed. Olanna was rescued by Mohammad her ex-boyfriend. “She wears a Muslim girl dress to cover

herself from the mob” (147). In the train, “she came across many injured people and the most horrible is the head of a girl carried by her mother inside a calabash” (149). She thinks of her own daughter baby, when she got a minor scratch, her heart burns from inside with the feelings of humanity. Adichie uses the theme of humanity in the novel, in other to express, what happened in the name of war, is literary inhuman. “Example of such activity is what Richard came across at Kano Airport, Nnameka, and a bread winner of the family was killed. His family had dreams on him, but he was killed in cold blood” (154). “Richard makes sure he finds Nnameka’s family, to make them aware that their son was killed, but they expect him to bring something for them, but he has a clear intention of going to them, he thinks he brought the last minutes of their son” (165). The author here is exasperating to show clearly Nigerians as orientates.

War was declared by the Nigerian Government against Biafra. Most of the characters relocate their families, Odenigbo and family including Ugwu moves to Abba, Odenigbo’s village, where his mother reside, they only pack little of their belongings. There are lots of migrations from the main cities to the village as people felt that the villages are safer than cities. Olanna’s parents moves to London. The author shows how the high-class people explode the war but they left the poor suffering and killed because of the war. War spread to the extent that Abba is not safe, Odenigbos move to Umuahia. “They left his mother as she refuses to follow them” (193). “They got married at Umuahia without their family, not as grand as they always dreamt of” (201). The wedding was destructed with bomb, people are running for their lives, and no reception followed, nothing at all.

The British started all the woes by taking possession of and dominating Nigeria, rousing up tribal worries, they supply arms to Nigerian army throughout the war; The Nigerian army killed innocent lives with starvation and annihilation as weaponries of war. The Biafran soldiers also committed their own killings beside the Nigerians and equal to their peculiar societies. “The soldiers became like rubbers, they rob the Biafrans indigene with their belongings, Ugwu became one of them” (364). “When Olanna met a person she knows and render her help, the Biafran soldiers snatched all the gains from her” (267). The novel shows different human expressions in different phases of this war, and to reveal different heartbreaks and defeats that bring to the life of the people and some

events that even most of the Westerners are not aware of. The unknown author of the book, “The world are silence when we died”, said the Biafrans died because of the lack of aid from other countries, though France sold weapons to them, but it failed to render a military support and organization that will help Biafra to win the war, these leads to the end of Biafra” (258).

The characters present in the novel show clearly the suffering of people throughout the story because of the Civil War. “Olanna, who was born and grew up in a lavish home, has to survive with the situation she found herself in, as she refuse to follow her parents to their hidden place” (189). They really suffered when their daughter, Baby, got sick; to earn money is really hard as Biafra introduced their own currency ‘Biafran pounds’. Hunger is everywhere in the Biafran states, no food, no aid rendered to them, Biafrans are dying. Schools were closed, no food, no access to proper medical care, they were blocked from any kind of help. The children minds were tainted with the hunger of revenge. The war goes to the extent that even Umuahia is falling, schools were converted into a refugee camps. Behaviors of the people are changing along with the situation they find themselves in. Adichie gives a particular picture of such event, where Odenigbo and family were sent out of their house because of money, and they had to live in an overcrowded house with a lot of tenants. They find it very hard to cope with the situation, the pastor always disturbed them with his prayers, their room is near a toilet, the smell is unbearable and no electricity connected to their room, they have to interact with uneducated people and the house is noisy as it was overcrowded.

Port Harcourt, which is the strength of Biafran, is also falling, Kainene and Richard leave, with no other option than to leaving. They left for Orlu, where she runs a refugee camp and also renders help to refugees. She gave them food and medicines with the help of doctors. People are dying every day, mothers are crying because they lost their children, so many children without parents. When Olanna visits her sister, she was shocked with situation, which left her with tears. Innocent youngsters were dragged into the army; “Ugwu is one of them, as without any consent he just finds himself in the army. There he meets young boys doing so many bad behaviors; he thinks that what is happening there is not at all helping the matter” (361). The war is destroying the Igbo

community rather what they want, which is to build a country with their own identity. “The people, who are trained to protect the nation, are in a situation that they cannot take care of themselves, not to think of others, that is Ugwu’s first expressions about the soldiers” (359). The author also talks about the young women who are supposed to be either married or in schools were taking jobs as prostitutes, among which are Ugwu’s girlfriend.

Adichie, throughout the novel, shows how love makes the characters suffer, the love is always related to the identity, Olanna and Mohammad’s love, and he sends her some gifts during the war knowing that they are suffering there. Olanna’s love for Odenigbo and is the strongest one that Adichie presents in the novel, because she endured a lot because of him. His behavior changes to the extent that he never smiles at her, he always shouts at her. Odenigbo’s behavior towards the love for his culture and identity as an Igbo is very rear situation. Kainene and Richard also sacrifice a lot for their love.

Kainene tries a lot to get food for the refugees, even cassava they called “garri” is very hard to get, the southern part in Nigeria has a very high rainfall, and they don’t have lands like the Northern part, farming became very hard for them, they mostly rely on the north for other kind of food like grains. It reaches the situation that they start eating sand, grass and even lizards as a meat.

In conclusion, *Half of a Yellow Sun* story was divided into three phases, the first, second and the last phase. In the first, the characters struggle for their identities and building their relationships, the war starts there. The second part is more about the twin sisters, how their relationships take different dimension unlike in the first part. The real love between Kainene and Richard is special. Ugwu also suffered in the novel, because his identity is not regarded as he is a poor and uneducated man. He nurtures a dream that he wants to study, but his dream is a still born (Alkali). The war did lots of damage to the characters; they experienced the loss of identity in search of identity. Separation between the characters also makes them suffer more especially the twins (Kainene and Olanna), Kainene disappeared, and she gets lost while trying to help the refugees. Mohammad also experienced such a situation because of his identity as a Muslim; he was separated with the love of his life because of identity, his family denied him to married her because of

their discrepancies. Odenigbo suffered in the forfeiture of identity, he was lost between his culture and modernity. He always claims that he is Igbo since before the coming of the white man; the enigmatic surrounding Kainene is an exclusively touching and exceptional tactic to finish the story. The Biafran currency is now essentially unusable. It only helps as a recap of vanished expectation, and is even unsafe to have it with, because Nigerian soldiers would consider anybody with the currency were stagnant disobedient. Characters' lives began to change gradually, they started moving forward, but the characters almost lost everything, their house, money and job were seized during the war, it will definitely take time before things go back to its normal self. The novel ends with a little expectation within the wreck of greatly suffering of the characters.

Adichie, in the novel, shows that even if problems cannot be solved in this life time, there is still the opportunity that we can hear from the past and avoid the recurrence of same mistakes. The character of Ugwu now turn out to be a confident and investing character, as he has full-grown man, who had past his deficiency, misery, and became the narrator and writer of the history of the Biafran War. Ugwu is no far-reaching the level of houseboy admiring Odenigbo and his high-level grammatical English– he is now the “Master,” governing his personal uniqueness and identity, he is also occupied for the worthy of his clan and values, he still use the phrase he was addressed by Odenigbo “my good man” used for his personal commitments, overthrowing the invader’s implements to support Nigeria, the way the author Adichie is also doing in promoting the norms of cultural values of Nigeria, writing in English about the past history.

## Conclusion

The study analyzes the fragmented nationhood and loss of identity of the characters in the post-colonial Nigeria. *Half of a Yellow Sun* focused on the suffering and the struggles of the characters in search for their identity. Nigeria has been under the control of the westerners for many decades. The people living have different ethnic culture, religious backgrounds and different languages.

The westerners, in order to have easy in controlling them, merged them together, and made a one nation Nigeria, the 1902 amalgamation. After the independence of 1960, the people from the three main region of Nigeria, Northern, Southern and Eastern parts fight

for power, that the intensions of the colonial masters, so that they will be the ones controlling the country. The main reason of the sufferings of the characters has to do with what mentioned above.

The Civil War of 1967-70 record a highest number of casualties, which Adichie showed some portion of in the novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The characters suffering in search of identity, in relation to love, and the displacement of the characters that leads to the loss of their identity instated. Adichie uses LOVE as the main tool in relation to IDENTITY, the love of power by the westerners, the love power by the three Nigerian regions which leads to the Civil War and the destruction of properties, loss of life, and, above all, loss of identity itself.

The love between Olanna and Odenigbo displayed its certainty because of the war, she accepted him whole heartedly without considering the change from him, and she accepted his daughter from another woman also. Olanna, in the novel, is the strongest sign of sacrifice, which her to be a strong African woman. The love between her and twin sister Kainene became strong because of the war as they are not like that in their early life. Also, her mother in-law accepted her because she found her as a kind of loyal woman who sacrifices for her love and identity.

The love between Olanna and Mohammad signifies that even if the northerners and southerners intended to stay together their culture and religion will became a barrier between them, but still, Adichie shows it might be a hope of living in peace and harmony between them. In the love between Ugwu and his girlfriend Adichie signified that not everything you wish could happen.

The characters suffered a lot of psychological misery as a result of war, it first starts with the coup, the southerners are happy because they think that now they will rule the country because they have the most educative youth, but the matter turn out to be serious not at the aspect. There is a riot in every part the north because of the coup, they killed innocent people and destroyed their properties.

In South also, the Nigerian government declared war against them. The war lasted for more than three years, people suffered because of the total blockage by the Nigerian soldiers, some flee left their family behind while others were leaving oversees. Other are

lost nowhere to be found, Kainene for example. The hunger leads the characters to suffer with diseases like malnutrition and Kwashiorkor, many people died. After the war, it takes time before the Biafrans get back to their normal self.

The novel tries to bring about the 42-years real history that changes Nigeria to a certain extent. Like the partition of India, the problem still hunts the people in one way or the other. Adichie tries to show the war in such a way that the reader will feel the pain of the victims, and she also shows that she did justice to all side the story affect.

The research findings includes that how violence leads to the death of many people, because of the war, till now northerners are still grieving the death of their pioneers because of the Igbo leads coup, and the southerners still have not forgotten the destruction caused by the war, war in any situation is not the final solution to the problem because it destroyed the country's economy and the its structure. War leads to the loss of identity, and the "nationhood" in general.

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