

# Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *half of a Yellow Sun*: A Postcolonial Study

Dr. Ajoy Batta & Aisha Mustapha Muhammad

Professor and Head , Department of English, School of Humanities, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

Master of Arts in English, School of Humanities, Lovely Professional University  
Punjab, India

## Abstract

*Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born much later after the Nigerian civil war of 1966-1969. Adichie had the interest to revive history of the Nigerian civil war; she used her imaginative talent in bringing what she hadn't experienced. The novel Half of a Yellow Sun is a literary work which uses the theory of post-colonialism or post-colonial studies, post-colonialism is a term that is used to analyze and explain the legacy of colonialism through the study of a particular book. Colonialism did not happen during the colonial era only but extended to after independence of the countries that were colonized. The novel Half of a Yellow Sun shows the effect of colonialism after independence of Nigeria. Adichie believes that by bringing back the issue of the war, the growing generation would understand more about the war. According to her in Nigeria the history taught in the primary and secondary schools is not complete, some parts were removed and nobody is allowed to talk about it. So through the novel, she tries to go through history to see what has happened, so that she can make the young generation understand history better. The paper explore and analyze the struggles in the novel based on loss of identity and human values, it focus on the fictional characters in the novel with constructive backings from related literatures.*

**Keywords:** Post colonialism, Identity, Politics, Human values, Violence.

## Introduction

Post-colonial literary movement is a movement that started after the Second World War. Many countries that were under colonization got independence, writers from sub-regions emerged, example of such countries are; India, Caribbean, South Africa, Nigeria etc. Franz Fanon in 1961

wrote a book called *The Wretched of the Earth in French*, the book examines the anti-colonial violence that was happening or happened after colonization all over the world, he acclaimed that the colonial rulers destroyed culture and exploit the resources of the colonized. Berry acclaimed that “For centuries the European colonizing power have devalued the nation’s past seeing its pre-colonial era as a pre-civilized limbo or even as a historical void” (86). He also ascertains that children should be taught history from the beginning before colonization, there shouldn’t be differences between the blacks and the whites.

Another post-colonial literary theorist who changed the world’s view is Edward Said, his greatest contribution to the world is the publication of his book “*Orientalism*” published in 1978. According to him the word “Orientalism” is a western conception about the eastern part of the world, as he wrote ““Orientalism” was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, US) and the strange (The Drier and East “Them”)” (38). Oriental is a person who is represented as feminine and weak, incomparable to the whites who are masculine and strong. Said, said the westerners divided the world into two parts, the “east” and the “west”, “orients” and the “occident”. They lay the basis of the concept of “them” and “us”. Orient applies to all that is eastern and occident applies to all that is western, these concepts are opposite to each other like male and female, master and slave, colonized and colonizer etc. According to Said, colonialism is a powerful instrument which differentiates between Europeans and non-Europeans. The purpose of orientalism is to enhance and to strengthen the interests of imperialism or strengthen the imperial practice. He used Michael Foucault’s notion of ‘discourse’ to define Orientalism, he said orientalism as a colonial discourse becomes a powerful instrument to give knowledge about culture and civilization, history and others. He also observed that colonial discourse can be understood by looking at the relationship between colonizers and colonized. Colonial discourse is a form of knowledge in which colonial people would be able to understand themselves, their identity and what made them subjective. The main aim of oriental discourse according to him is to create opposition or binary division in which Europe own their identity.

In Nigeria post-colonial literature are works that are written during colonialism or after independence of the country, example of postcolonial book is the *Things Fall Apart* by the literary genius Chinua Achebe, the book did not only brought recognition to Nigeria but to

Africa as a whole, it is the first book written by an African about the colonization, the book is a critique of the books written by the Europeans about Africa. Chimamanda as a third-generation Nigerian writer indulged in bringing out the postcolonial problems that arose after the country's independence. In the novel, the gathering at Odenigbo's house brings about the role of identity and politics in postcolonial Nigeria. In the house young people gather to discuss the political future of the country, in the meeting the importance of several kinds of African system of government is discussed amongst the educated people (Odenigbo and his friends). Odenigbo has always tried to defend the ideal unity for Africans, and his colleagues have always stressed upon the pan Africanism or nationalism. Odenigbo said the white people have always claimed that they are the ones that created what is called Nigeria, he used to say the real African man has existed since before the white man came, according to him they created what is called "black" as much as possible to differentiate themselves with the blacks. He also said he was an Igbo man since before the emergence of the white man. The role of identity can also be seen in the character of Kainene, she was given a name which was partial since her birth because she is not as beautiful as her sister, this makes her lose her identity in the family, and she always feels out-casted.

The Nigerian politics after independence of the country is said to be unstable because the Igbos think that the Northerners have occupied all the major parts in the governmental offices and have filled the country with corruption, this has resulted in the loss of identity of Igbos who feel that they are not a part of the country any more. In the novel *Half of Yellow Sun* Professor Ezeka said "It was mostly Northerners who were in government, Professor Ezeka whispered" (125). In trying to find their real identity Ojukwu fought against the government, he had no arms, no weapons to fight: only wooden sticks; he deceived and risked so many lives that depended on him, Kainene said that "Madu told me today that the army has nothing, absolutely nothing. They thought Ojukwu had arms piled up somewhere, given the way he has been talking" (183). The postcolonial Africa is in confusion since after independence, just like Edward Said has also stated the idea about 'identity'; the characters in the novel are in search of their identity which has been ruined by the 'Us' (Europeans) and led to so many deaths in the novel.

Even though the 'Us' (Europeans) are not in the country they indirectly control the people using their manipulative way. The westerners have a great influence on Biafran war but there is subtle

critique found in Richard's character. Richard's intention is clean; Adichie is trying to show that not all the westerners are bad. He tries very hard to be a part of Nigeria and later part of Biafra too. His interest with the culture is also something good, he speaks for Biafra and also tries to help them, he also wrote to the Western press. Adichie is showing her talent in creating a character that will make the 'Us' not feel bad. The westerners are not in the country but all that is being taught in schools are planned by them. When Odenigbo was relating to Ugwu what will happen in his school: this is a clear domination of the Europeans, what Ugwu will be taught in the school and what he must say to pass his examination, "They will teach you that a white man called Mango Park discovered River Niger, which is rubbish, our people fished in the Niger long before Mango Park's grandfather was born, Odenigbo" (11). Susan is the real representation of the westerners' conception of the orients. Through her Adichie drew the map of how they look at all the orients. The westerners are living in Nigeria like Susan, owning most of the wealth and still referring or calling them savages and uncivilized, "The people were bloody beggars, be prepared for their body odors and the way will stand and stare at you...never show weakness to domestic staff" (54).

Edward Said has said on cultural hegemony that the westerners have always been considered to be superior and the easterners as inferior. Major Madu asked Richard to write a letter to the British in order to voice out their sufferings for external support, he asked him to do that because according to him they will be listened to, if a Westerner is in support of them, the Europeans would help them. The Westerners are also seen as superiors because the Biafrans think that if they will support them, everything would be settled. Just because of Richard's letter two journalists were sent away from England to Nigeria. They considered one dead European man to be equal to one hundred black men. One of the journalists who were sent to Nigeria said that the African women are said to have sexual transmitted disease and it is through this instance Adichie shows how the Europeans look at the African women. Another European journalist also said the blacks don't have the sense of what to eat, just because he saw Biafran children eating roasted rats, he didn't think that they are in war and don't have food and meat to eat but only rats and lizards as substitute of meat.

The characters go through physical indisposition of cultural ebb of their society. African countries are the countries that have a lot of culture and tradition. Nigeria having more than 400

ethnic groups makes it possible to have different set of people, with different believes. Their cultures are governed by set of rules, which they always maintained before the coming of British colonizers to the country. The British colonizers bulldoze the southern part of the country, introducing so many things that didn't exist before to corrupt their minds. Adichie in the novel shows how the characters struggle because of the dying of their culture. The story opens with Ugwu's Auntie telling him how his master is; he has spent most of his time on reading books of overseas according to her, and hardly returns greetings, this is entirely something different in relation to the tradition of the Igbo society; they respect greetings and always return greetings. The idea of Ugwu's attraction to his cousin sister is totally different from Igbo culture, it can be said that going to the primary school in his village corrupted his mind. Ugwu's master asked him to call him with his first name which is totally absurd and unacceptable in his villages, he felt awkward because he never calls his elders with their first name. Ugwu never got the courage to call him with his first name till the end of the novel. Ugwu's aunt describes the women in the university; she says they are always with wigs and mini-skirts. The traditional village people don't put on mini-skirt, that's why she is telling him because it is something new he will see. Miss Adebayo a friend to Odenigbo who always comes to their meeting every Saturdays in his house together with other lecturers, has some manners which is also very different to the traditional African woman. Miss Adebayo's way of talking is different because she raises her voice above all the men present in the meeting which Ugwu finds inappropriate, but because she is an educated person, she feels what she is doing is right. This is a great loss to the people, women behavior of challenging men. Olanna's parents' meeting with the minister Chief Okonji is also something disgraceful, instead of the parents to look for a young and handsome man to marry their daughter to, but rather they want to push her to sleep with an old man, the age mate and partner of her father, Chief Okonji, is a man with big stomach and very short.

In the novel the characters suffer the issue of violence because of the war. Achebe has said that Adichie was 'fearless' (30) to uncover what has been hidden for a long time. Achebe said: "I do not agree I believe that in our situation, the greater danger lies not in remembering but in forgetting" (30). According to Ojinmah "Adichie refused to forget, one of the fundamental functions of the writers is like those of story tellers in traditional African society" (04). Also according to Dickson "Articulating in writing the horrors of the war as stored in her memory

through stories she was told by her parents and relatives, and written accounts of the war, serves a cathartic process” (86). Adichie uncovered the realities of war at the beginning of the novel before going into psychological and emotional face of the story. She presents the explosion of the North-South war as an important moment which does not just offer the history but also functions as a stepping stone into the psychological mind and emotions of the individuals on the effect of war, which also affected the relationships, ethnic groups and the nation. The psychology and emotions of the characters also intertwined with the moment when they realized how the war has affected them. The story is also considered as a melo-drama, using humor to pave the way. The novel is a presentation of the civil war deeply. The history travels through the deepest root of the war, the conflict, injustice, violence and the pain of war. Adichie uses the theme of humanity to voice out the issue of the civil war. The characters struggle with the issue of love, class, race, profession etc. “*Half of Yellow Sun* is a novel that two different things come together; fiction coexists with war. She presents the untruth which the historians hide from people” (Requel 1).

Olanna who was in Kano was rescued by her ex-boyfriend Muhammed. She visited Kano in order to bring her cousin sister Arize who was due to give birth, she wanted her to give birth in Nsukka, but unfortunately the war caught her there. Muhammed asked her to put on the Muslim Hijab, so that she would not be recognized, he took her immediately to the railway station so that she would be able to escape. On their way she insisted on going to Sabongari to check on her Uncle’s family, she saw her uncle and his wife’s body lying on the ground dead, blood was running all over the place, the entire street was covered with blood. Olanna in the train saw so many people injured, she met a woman carrying calabash. The woman later opened the calabash, Olanna saw the head of a baby still plaited new, the violence did not only affect adults, but children were also killed, “Olanna looked into the bowl; she saw the little girl’s head with ash grey skin and the rolled eyes and open mouth. The mother said “Do you know, she said, it took me long time to plait her hair! She has such thick hair” (149). Such were the great struggles of the characters which were caused by the war in the novel. People were killed innocently because of the so called ‘BIAFRAN WAR’, the war did not bring any good to the country; it only led to their suffering and so many killings. Another incident of violence was the one Richard encountered when he was coming back from London and he branched in Kano, he met a

young man called Nnameka, with whom he chatted with for some minutes, the man was full of dreams, he told him that his family depended on him, but before you knew it the soldiers come into the airplane and shot him, just because he was an Igbo man, they killed so many people in the plane at that time.

When the war was declared, Odenigbo and his family had to leave Nsukka for their safety, they moved to Abba his parental village. Odenigbo and Olanna had to leave everything in Nsukka, they only packed little that they needed. Olanna's parents also left Lagos to London. So many people started leaving the cities to the village because the Nigerian army had spread all over the town of Nsukka. Moreover, Odenigbo's family had to leave Abba because it was not safe anymore, he begged his mother to follow them to escape but she refused, they went to Umuhia where they stay for some time. Olanna and Odenigbo amid their suffering decided to marry, Odenigbo had always dreamt of a grand wedding, but because of the war they only invited few people. On the day of the wedding after the marriage in a "tiny church", there was bomb; people that gathered for the wedding ran for their lives, there was no reception because everything was ruined. Olanna was not happy because no one in her family attended the wedding. On page 258 the author of the book *The World was Silent when we Died*, explains to the readers how the Biafrans died. They died according to him because of the lack of support from other countries, they all supported the Nigerian government, which tried to eradicate the Biafrans, and even France which sold some weapons to the Biafrans did not support or recognize Biafra. This is the reason that led to the downfall of Biafra and violence.

Olanna grew up in a luxurious home with abundance of everything, Olanna had to cope with the situation because she intentionally refused to follow her parents, and instead she followed Odenigbo. Baby became sick and Olanna was disturbed thinking that the child will die, money became a problem to the Biafrans because of the new currency they had introduced which they called the 'Biafran pounds', Olanna had to follow a long queue for her to be able to get the money. Mrs Mukelu brought some egg yolk, which they gave to baby and it helped her to regain her health. Olanna had to follow a long queue to get those dried egg yolks. She met a man whom she knew, who collected the egg yolk for her and gave her some corn beef she thought of cooking it for her family, but some group of Biafran soldiers followed her and snatched the corn beef from her. The war ruined their lives, food became scarce, and rice was not available in the

market because not all people could afford to buy it. Hunger became rampant everywhere, the office that provided food for them didn't give them every day, so the day the food was not given; the children stayed with hunger. As mentioned earlier, the war did not only affect the adults but also teenagers and children. It corrupted the mind of the children with bad thoughts. Olanna in her class introduced the Biafran flag with its meaning, which had three colors, "red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the north, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have... (281). A girl in her class when submitting her drawing said she would kill the vandals. Olanna felt bad and guilty for teaching the girl all this, which she later complained to Odenigbo. This was misguiding and teaching violence to young children to hate the northerners; this would lead to another problem.

The violence had gone to the extent that Umuhia was also not safe and so many schools were closed and turned into refugee camp, there was no living school. This was bad, the children no longer could go to school; education became history in their cities. In the refugee camp Ugwu met so many people that made him feel sad. A woman narrated that she was in the market when the war started, she was only able to escape with the clothes on her body, the baby she backed and some money she had for selling pepper, she ran and left all her children because she was not allowed to go back home, she doesn't know what had happened to them, Ugwu pitied her. He also smelt something awful, he then realized that one woman had used water in a bowl for so many days to wash her cassava, this is true cruelty not only hunger is the problem but also hygiene, the water could cause so many harmful diseases, which may lead to their death. Port Harcourt was considered to be Biafra's support and strong army, Kainene and Richard lived there, rumor spread that it would also soon fall, they didn't believe at first, but one afternoon they were attacked and one of their houseboy was killed called Ikejide, Kainene was left in great shock because she saw the boy's head separated from his body, this was the reason why they left for Orlu, where she had bought a new house. There she met a man who could do carpentry work, without him asking her for money, he told her that he only needed food to survive. In the country of Biafra money was a waste, one wouldn't be able to buy anything even if had the money, "Why don't you want money? Kainene asked him "what will I buy with money" he asked" (317). Kainene and Richard also helped some people in one refugee camp; they gave them food and even called doctors for them. There was also a pastor in the camp who preached the people



to give them some hope. Inatimi was a man they met who appeared to be a foolish guy, he talked nonsense, this was because he had lost all his family members in the war, and he said he didn't have anybody to remind him of the past.

The war also started to take a new dimension; besides hunger people started to lose their manners. Odenigbo was asked to vacate his two-room apartment because the landlord had got a new tenant who would pay twice the money, accommodation started becoming problem for the people. They got a house which had nine rooms, one bathroom and toilet; almost all the people in the house were refugees. "There were too many people in the yard; a family of sixteen lived in the room next to Mama Oji, the bathroom floor was slimy with too much dirt washed off too many bodies" (326). There was over population in the compound which made the tenants aware of all what other people were doing, there was no privacy at all. Olanna's room was next to the toilet, it was unbearable for her at first because of the smell, she always wished there was a fan in their room, there was no electricity at all, unlike the house they left; she had never experienced such in her life. She also met uneducated and uncivilized people, first was Mama Oji, who thought that being a doctor meant medical doctor, until Olanna explained to her that Odenigbo was not a medical doctor but book doctor. Also because of overpopulation the compound became so noisy, whenever Mama Oji was fighting with her husband; she doesn't allow them to rest because of her shouting. Olanna also had to endure the Pastor's loud praying which he did all the time. There was also a girl who played piano every day, her name was Alice, she also disturbed Olanna because her room was next to hers, they also followed queue when they had to go to the toilet.

Kainene ran a refugee camp where she helped the people to get medicines, crayfish and some food stuffs which was serves as a great help to them. When Olanna visited her, she took her around some of the refugee camp, Olanna was shocked on seeing how people were dying, mothers dying living their children, she felt pity for them, according to Kainene countless people die every day. Kwashiorkor became everywhere, at the compound of Olanna, a girl Adanna had a fever and she realized it was kwashiorkor and gave her some milk. In the camp they visited, they also saw so many children with the disease; Kainene told her that it was lack of protein. Innocent young teenagers were dragged to the war field because in 1968 many of the Biafran men were killed. Ugwu is also dragged on the road, without asking for his opinion they forced

him inside the lorry. Ugwu is shocked when he met a young boy who was not more than thirteen years, the boy was drinking alcohol, this was very bad, the boy that was supposed to be in school under the care of his parents, but he drank alcohol and was exposed to danger of war. The name of the boy is 'high tech', the boy is so proud of himself, that he is a warrior, it is childishness because he thinks that everything is a game. The war has not brought any good but rather the fall of the Igbo society. The children do not only suffer separation from their parents but also they were also exposed to wrong doings, they do not know its disadvantages. Their schools were also turned into training centers for the Biafran soldiers. Ugwu was taken to the center; Ugwu's first experience shows the sign of brutality, which is the first part of his struggles.

The skinny soldier –with no boots, no uniform, no half of a yellow sun on their sleeves –kicked and slapped and mocked Ugwu during physical training. The parade left Ugwu's arm stiff. The obstacles training left his calves throbbing. The rope climbing left his palms bleeding (359).

Ugwu also realized what Professor Ekwenugo described about what the battalions have for the war, he was so happy at first to be among the battalions who would fight for Biafra, but was disappointed because they didn't have the weapons to fight the vandals, that is why so many of the Biafrans army were killed, "But when he went to the first training session, he stared at what was before him: a dull metal container full of scrap metal" (359). Ugwu then realized that they were just offering themselves to be killed because they didn't have guns. The boys together with Ugwu were bullied all the time. Eberechi Ugwu's friend, whom he secretly loves, is someone that was exposed to prostitution, she was sold to the soldier, in exchange of money because of poverty and also the commander helped her brother to join the army. This is the struggle the women in the novel suffered; they were exposed to men because of poverty, some of the girls take themselves willingly to the soldiers in the camp, the young girls that are supposed to be in school or married became prostitutes, this was the effect of war. Ugwu said "Sometimes younger women come and went in the commander's quarters and emerged with sheepish smiles" (360). The young boys are not only exposed to drinking alcohol, but also to smoking of weeds, marijuana and so on. The war spoilt the behavior of the young children, they smoke in front of the commander and he always felt happy and praised them, and the young soldiers are also exposed to robbery. They rob and maltreat the civilians; they even beat some and collect their

money. On their way to the bar Ugwu and his friends stopped a man in his car, even after showing them his Biafran identity movement card, they didn't listen, they slapped and collected his car keys and drove away, this is the struggle they must go through; they have to live in that way for them to survive. Ugwu said "He was not living life, but life was living him" (364). They were all not happy with their lives but had to endure it due to circumstances. They arrived in the bar, got drunk and gang raped the bar girl, together with the thirteen-year-old boy high tech, this is the effect of war. Ugwu never wanted to do it, but because he didn't want them to tease him and call him someone that is disabled that is why he joined.

Muhammed wrote to Olanna and sent her some gifts which she shared with some of her neighbors. The only person that eats thrice is Baby; they only eat once or twice a day. Olanna use to pity Odenigbo because he is man who likes fashion and also drinks the best beer, but he now only drinks the local gin, he smells bad and has only two shirts and a trouser. Alice the girl, who lived in the same compound with Olanna, told Olanna that all her family members were killed by the vandals. Her state had also fallen, she cried a lot when she was narrating the story. Even though Kainene tried her best but the situation becomes so bad, the children in the camp now eat only once in a day, and the food is 'garri'. The suppliers were not able to cross mobs to find some garri for the refugees. Hunger started becoming worst; they now eat lizards as meat. They also don't have water to use, talk less of taking bath. Kainene is so worried because the refugees now smell badly, she even asked them to use orange from the tree to drink and rub it on the back of their bodies, according to her the scent of the orange will reduce the smell of their bodies.

The Southeast of Nigeria, has the highest rainfall in the country, because of the heavy rainfall it becomes almost impossible for the people to do farming extensively, which makes them rely mostly on the North for grains of food such as rice, maize etc. So when the Nigerian government commanded all the roads of supplying of food for the Biafrans to be blocked, the food became scarce, they were not able to farm; this increased the rate of hunger during the war. Ugwu was luckily rescued by some thugs, he suffered a lot during the war and everyone had thought that he had died. After the thugs took him, they didn't give him water, which made him wish to have died than been denied water, he spent days without water. He has wounds all over his body that made it impossible for him to be able to move his body, he was taken to the hospital where he saw so many wounded people. The issue of adultery became rampant during the war, this is seen

in the refugee camp in Orlu, one girl was impregnated by an elderly person, who used to sleep with girls in exchange of stock fish. Ugwu who always poked nose in all that is going on around him became very quiet after coming back from the war, he no longer wants to hear people talking about the war, he usually sits alone and talks to himself.

## **Conclusion**

The present study analyzed how the characters' suffered the physic psychological struggles. Biafran war is a true war that happened in Nigeria forty years ago. Adichie through her literary voice tried to uncover the reality to restore the psychological and physical ailment the war had caused. The novel is not completely fictional because Adichie has gone back through history and presents what had happened forty years ago in Nigeria. She has shown how war has affected and destroyed the country's happiness. War can never be the final solution to any problem but will always remain a way to bring unhappiness in the society leading to violence and deaths of so many innocent people in the country.

## **Works Cited**

- [1]. Achebe, Chinua. *There was a Country*. London: Penguin, 2012.
- [2]. ---. *Morning yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann, 1975.
- [3]. Adichie, Ngozi Chimamanda. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. London: Harper Perennial, 2007. Print.
- [4]. Berry, Peter. *Beginning Theory*. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2017. Print.
- [5]. Dickson C, Bermard. "History, Memory and the Politics of National Unity in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Achebe's *There was a Country*." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature* 2 (2014): 81-9. Print.
- [6]. Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin UK, 2001. Print.
- [7]. Makokha, Gloria Ajami. "Portrayal of the African Women in *Half of a Yellow Sun*." *Journal Rsearch in Peace, Gender and Development* 4.6 (2014):111-20. Print.

- [8]. Nixon, Rob. “Biafran *Story*”. The New York Times. 1 October 2006. Web. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/books/review/Nixon.t.html>
- [9]. Ojinmah, Umelu. “*No Humanity in War: Chimamanda Adichie’s Half of a Yellow Sun.*” Journal of Nigerian Studies, 1.2 (2012): 1-11. Print.
- [10]. Requel, Sogovia. “*Half of a Yellow Sun is a Powerful Portrait of the Nigerian Civil War.*” Cultural trip, 25 October 2016. Web. 20 February 2017.
- [11]. Roshan K, Morve. “*Representation of History in Chimamnda Adichie’s Half of a Yellow Sun (2006).*” Asian Journal of Humanity, Arts and Literature, 1.3 (2014): 150-54. Print.
- [12]. Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. India: Penguin Press, 2001. Print