

Historiography and Verisimilitude in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Onyeka Ike

Department of English and Communication Studies
Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Otuoke,
Bayelsa State, Nigeria
Email: onyeka_ike@yahoo.com

Abstract

Chimamanda Adichie is a Nigerian literary artist that taps and weaves quite a variety of historical resources into her artistic creations. This research investigates the strategies and purposes of such deliberate infusions in Adichie's two novels: *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). Using New Historicism as a theoretical template, the study reveals that there are solid relationships between the characters, settings, incidents, conflicts and even certain discourses created and represented in the fictions with notable historical figures, issues and occurrences. This implies that Adichie models a number of her fictional characters, settings and incidents after diverse memorable historical realities. Indeed, New Historicism as a critical template brings literature and history closer to each other in that it breaks down the barriers between artistic production and other kinds of social production by situating a work of art in its historical context. The study posits that the author purposefully and effectively utilized a myriad of historical materials drawn from her society to foreground meanings in her works. This clearly demonstrates that as works of art, the novels are products as well as producers of discourse in society and are neither derived from nor exist in a vacuum. Adichie's fictions are, therefore, strongly connected to their historical and socio-political backgrounds and thus simultaneously reflect and alter the societies from which they emerge. The fictions, then, are part and parcel of a much wider political, cultural and socio-economic discourse. Far from being unconnected to the historical moments of their creation, the texts are directly involved in history.

Keywords: Historiography, History, Verisimilitude, Resources, New Historicism

Introduction

Historiography is not just a body of historical literature, it is also the study of patterns of historical documentation or history writing, and how historical perception alters over time. It deals with the method of analysing and interpreting historical sources. Historiography covering particular issues and topics involves how such issues have been studied using specific techniques, sources and theoretical methods. Furay and Salevouris (2015, p.1) perceive historiography as "...the study of the way history has been and is written - the history of historical writing. When you study 'historiography' you do not study the events of the past directly, but the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians." This perception implies that the study of historiography acknowledges, analyses and discusses the process of alteration in historical presentations and interpretations. Therefore, to comprehend historiography, one should first accept that historical issues evolve over time and are not cast in stone. In other words, while the past itself does not alter, the portrayals, comprehension and interpretations of the past constantly evolves.

Every literary text can be described as a creative writing of identifiable artistic value and usually has a link with the socio-historical background of its creation. Wellek and Warren (1949, p.94) in their attempt to define the nature of literature state that literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation....Literature represents life; and life is in large measure a social reality, even though natural world and inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary imitation. Also, according to Hudson (2008, p.10), literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language. In explicating how a work of literature or more specifically a literary text effectively conveys meaning to a target audience, Lowenthal (2015) notes that creative literature conveys various degrees of meaning, some intended by the author, some quite unintentional. A literary artist sets out to invest a plot, to describe action, to depict the interrelationship of characters, and places them in situations involving interactions with others and

with the society in which they live. This is similar to the position of *Wikipedia* (2020) when it states that,

The plot is for more than just entertainment purposes; within it lies information about economics, psychology, science, religion, politics, cultures and social depth. Studying and analyzing literature becomes very important in terms of learning about human history. Literature provides insight about how society has evolved and about the societal norms during each of the different periods all through history. For instance, postmodern authors argue that history and fiction both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past. It is asserted that both of these are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. Literature provides views of life which are crucial in obtaining truth and in understanding human life throughout history and its periods. (“Literature”)

The relationship between literature and History has been widely studied in literary scholarship. Literature is intricately connected to history as it is also connected to society and culture. This implies that literary texts are neither derived from nor exist in a vacuum. As an art form which largely depends on the instrumentality of language as a veritable medium of expression, literature serves both as a vehicle of the culture of a particular society as well as a mirror of their historical experiences as perceived and interpreted in the mind of an artist. The content, nature and quality of the perception, and reflection of such experiences are largely a function of the artist's attitude of mind, orientation and idiosyncrasy. It is in view of this that Bertens (2008, p.15) states that “the literary text is a time and place bound verbal construction that is always in one way or another political...literature is not simply a product of history, it also actively makes history.” Apart from Adichie's novels under evaluation, African and indeed world literature is replete with vivid historical events documented in artistic manner as can be found in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Alex Laguma's *A Walk in the Night*, Isidore Okpewo's *The Last Duty*, Helon Habila's *Waiting For an Angel*, Richard Wright's *The Black Boy*, Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*, Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn*, Onyeka Ike's *Shackles of Freedom* to mention but just a few.

Although literary artists and historians utilize historical materials in their compositions, documentations and interpretations, their

approaches certainly differ. Adimora-Ezeigbo (1996, p.11) attempts to draw a clear dividing line between the two approaches when she states: the duty of the historian is to record and interpret as objectively as humanly possible the events of the past. But the historical novelist cannot be for he is at liberty to interpret history to suit his purpose; he could dramatise and reconstruct moments in history which he considers important to the reshaping of his people's destiny. Above all, his interpretation of history is creative and does not have to comply strictly with historical reality.

The incorporation of historical materials into the artistic creations of a novelist therefore implies that the writer must acquaint and arm himself with the historical developments and experiences of the society he writes about. A historical novelist who, for instance, desires to effectively fictionalize a significant historical development in Nigeria such as the Nigerian Civil War, just as Adichie has done in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, needs not to be a stranger to the actual historical accounts - dates, places historical characters; their actions, inactions and utterances, even statistics. Without a proper understanding of all these factors, the representations and interpretations of the novelist may be shallow, surreal, unrealistic and can hardly connect to the roots, experiences and sensibilities of the people. Such a work may likely receive a myriad of negative criticisms. At this juncture, it is vital to note that one of the major factors that made Adichie's first and second fictions (*Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*) instant successes on publication was the author's demonstration of in-depth knowledge, articulate portrayals and interpretations of certain Nigerian historical realities which continue to affect the collective sensibilities of the people. This helps in crystallizing the messages she earnestly wishes to convey to the audience thereby making the works to be more aesthetically endearing. In the acknowledgments section of *Half of a Yellow Sun* for instance, Adichie (2006, p.433) lists thirty-one historical texts which she studied before writing the novel, some of which she states: were indispensable in creating the mood of middle-class Biafra; Christopher Okigbo's own life and *Labyrinths* inspired the character of Okeoma; while Alexander Madiebo's *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War* was central to the character of Colonel Madu.

Furthermore, in their explication and analysis of historical fiction, McGarry and White (1963, p.150) clearly point out that: one of the charms of historical fiction is that it seeks verisimilitude

and clothes itself in the semblance of truth. Historical fiction adds the realistic details and trappings of actuality that belong to a past, often remote time. The task of the author of historical fiction is thus the more difficult and more exacting, since he must familiarize himself with the facts and features of life in the past as well as the present. True to Adichie's statement, anyone who has read the biography of the poet Christopher Okigbo and his *Labyrinths*, as well as the aforementioned General Alexander Madiebo's historical account will certainly know that she really modeled the characters of Okeoma and Colonel Madu after these two outstanding historical figures. Okigbo's poetic rendition such as "Hurray for Thunder" casts him in the mould of a social prophet and watchman.

Although the poem was written before the 15th January, 1966 coup in Nigeria, it is like a graphic portrayal of the unfortunate collapse of Nigeria's First Republic. Little wonder a number of people began to suspect that Okigbo knew about the coup plot, just as Achebe was suspected for his portrayals and prognosis in *A Man of the People*. Madiebo was the pioneer commander of Nigerian Army Artillery Corps based in Kaduna before the January coup which eventually snowballed into a full scale civil war. Again, anyone who has read Madiebo's historical text as cited by Adichie will know that she achieved a great deal of verisimilitude with the character of Colonel Madu vis-à-vis Madiebo himself. Nwahunanya (2012, p.263) believes that whenever a fiction writer decides to employ the techniques of the two forms of writing - fiction and history - he commits himself to a kind of literary syncretism. In stressing the need for the fiction writer to possess a thorough understanding of his historical materials before venturing into such a tasking and meticulous syncretisation, he states:

The historical novelist who does not acquaint himself with the historical material he incorporates into his fiction is likely to encounter problems. It was partly to avoid such problems that the American novelist, Stephen Crane, for instance, carried out extensive archival research on the American Civil War before he wrote his classic, *The Red Badge of Courage*, a novel most commentators agree is an accurate recreation of that important crisis period in American history. Similarly, Sol Plaatje and Thomas Mofolo... had to read the records about and listen to stories from the oral tradition of the people whose experiences are central to the stories in *Mhudi* (1930) and *Chaka* (1931) respectively.

In acquainting himself with historical realities and trying to embody them in his artistic creations in one form or the other he, however, enjoins the historical novelist to be constantly mindful of the dividing line between the pattern of utilization of the historical materials by a historian and as a literary artist. Just as Adimora-Ezeigbo has earlier stated, Nwahunanya (2012, p.264) concurs that “the creative writer does not need to become engaged in the historian’s debate about the veracity of oral tradition, because he has freedom to reconstruct a broader picture of the past based on his imaginative response to historical accounts whether written or oral.” This emphasis on imaginative recreations and interpretations of historical materials prompts Lively (1973, p.72) to state: in clothing the skeleton of historical fact with the flesh of human purpose, a successful artist must cross beyond the limits of documentary sources and draw from the primary sources of imagination the selective litter of detail that alone warms fictions with the breath of reality. The result of this sort of fusion is the surfacing of historical occurrences in a refashioned outlook that gives room for broader and flexible analysis and deduction of meanings as, again, Nwahunanya (2012, p.264) observes that: the main implication of this blend of fact and imagination in historical fiction is that history emerges as a reconstruction and reinterpretation of certain significant events within an epoch in the life of people, something akin to what a creative historian does with miscellaneous information gathered from oral history.

This perception is in conformity with the assertion of McGarry and White (1963, p.4) when they stated that a fictional work is historical if it includes references to customs, conditions, identifiable persons or notable events in the past. Indeed, Adichie’s three novels under investigation appropriately fit into this definition since all of them actually include “references to customs, conditions, identifiable persons or events in the past.” This also justifies the application of New Historicism as the theoretical template of the research. When a creative writer of Adichie’s standing, in her creative endeavour, includes references to customs, conditions, identifiable persons or conditions traceable to the past, it is certainly not just for mere entertainment as it is usually or traditionally conceived as the primary function of literature. A literary artist is not a mere entertainer; one who makes people to laugh or have some pleasurable experiences. Beyond that, the literary artist reminds

people of history - positive or negative, and ensures that they are rightly informed. He is also a counselor, an educator, a teacher, a social prophet as well as a watchman constantly keeping vigil on the watchtower of the society to which he belongs.

Whether these roles are acknowledged by the society or not is not his concern. Thus he is morally obligated to do so, as long as he is alive. Even at his demise, his artistic legacies will still continue to echo and re-echo in different societies as it is still the case with the classical and timeless artistic landmarks of people like William Shakespeare, Chinua Achebe, Richard Wright, Christopher Okigbo and many others. Little wonder P. B. Shelley (1821) has referred to poets and by extension creative writers as “the unacknowledged legislators of society.” In other words, artistic creativity, particularly in the field of literature, is a serious humanistic endeavour which goes beyond mere entertainment, ornamentation and pleasure motive. The literary artist is more importantly a visionary, a social prophet and a “legislator” of society. Thus he does not just use the instrumentality of his art to entertain but also to educate, to warn and forewarn as he is duty-bound and morally obligated. By so doing, he ultimately aims to contribute his quota in the moulding and making, shaping and reshaping of society as part of his corporate social responsibility.

This is so and necessary because a literary artist, in most cases, is not usually economically comparable to the philanthropic entrepreneur or owners of corporations who could deploy part of their vast financial resources to build schools, hospitals or roads as part of their social responsibilities to the society that contributed in making them whom they are, or a soldier who courageously puts his life on the line in defense of his country's territorial integrity, or even like the politician with a governmental provision for constituency project. Rather, the artist's pen and his noble mind are undoubtedly his great assets which he uses from time to time to contribute in building a better and harmonious society. A creative writer worth the name, therefore, ought to be the conscience and light of his society; a watchman who is innately endowed with the ability to view from his watchtower and send back to society, through his writing, the appropriate signals that could serve as reminders of the errors of the past as well as contemporary pitfalls, with the ultimate intention to rescue, build, rebuild and ameliorate.

In the process of playing these noble roles, especially in pointing out the ills of society and charting the course for a social redirection, the literary artist may incur the wrath of the powers that be or any section of the society that might not be amused by his posture and postulations. Wole Soyinka, for instance, was at various times imprisoned and oppressed by despotic regimes in Nigeria, just as Ngugi wa Thiongo was molested severally by the governments of Kenya at different periods in the history of that East African nation, etc. In most of Ngugi's works, as it is the case with most historical novelists like Adichie, history is used as an explanation of the contemporary as well a tool for appropriate prognosis. It is in light of these that, again, Nwahunanya (2012) posits that like most of their counterparts on other continents, many African novelists recognise the importance and relevance of history to novelistic art, especially as the African novel tends to centre on the immediate challenges of contemporary African Society. Such novelists often fall back on historical developments to explain the problems of the present.

Apart from being an outstanding feminist, some of the immediate problems which an African historical novelist like Adichie tends to focus on in her artistic enterprise include colonialism, neocolonialism, leadership failure, dictatorship and its associated consequences, sit-tight syndrome of African leaders, brain-drain, disillusionment, corruption, commodification and abuse of public offices and many more. Whichever way the historical novelist chooses to manipulate the resources of history in order to suit his artistic enterprise and demonstrate the predicaments of his nation or the continent at large, Lukacs (1962, p.42) argues that, what matters...in the historical novel is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, for instance, gives expression to the tumult, despotism, agony, cruelty, disillusionment and hopelessness which characterized the political terrain of the military regimes of the past, particularly of the 1980's and 1990's in Nigeria. It is a well-known and established fact that Nigeria as a nation suffered untold hardship, torture and retrogression of all kinds in the hands of iron-fisted and self-anointed military overlords who mismanaged

the common wealth of the nation with impunity at that period. It is also an indisputable fact that the dictatorship, corruption, squandermania, avarice and mediocrity that characterized those inglorious regimes, particularly that of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha nearly grounded the wheels of the nation to a complete halt. Being a Nigerian both by birth and by heritage, Adichie has in her novel succeeded in giving a vivid portrayal of certain historical circumstances of a nation she grew up in before she eventually emigrated to the United States of America at the age of 19 in search of greener pastures.

Even while in the U.S, Adichie continues to observe a militarised, oppressed, suffocating and tottering nation. In the character of The Head of State or Big Oga in *Purple Hibiscus*, for instance, Adichie vividly historicises the various dastardly events that surrounded the administrations of the two aforementioned generals who ruled the nation with iron fists while the nation languished forlornly. In the afterword of his award-winning novel, *Waiting For An Angel*, Habila (2002, p. 227-228) paints a sad and pathetic picture of the military regimes and dictatorships of those dark periods in the nation's chequered political history: although General Sani Abacha's rule lasted only five years, compared to Gowon's nine and IBB's eight, today when people refer to the military years in Nigeria what they mean are the Abacha years. Whereas Babangida used bribery and corruption to rule, Abacha used plain, old-fashioned terror. There were more "official" killings and arrests and kidnappings in those five years put together. Traditional rulers were deposed, newspapers were shut down and editors arrested... It was a terrible time to be alive... but with the killing of Saro-wiwa, the world was scandalized.

In the midst of these chaotic situations, the nation was gradually breaking down and turning into a pariah state as a result of several sanctions and embargo slammed on it by the international community. There was a general sense of perplexity among the citizenry as the standard of living nosedived and the state of infrastructural decay increased. Such historical portrayals prompts Williams (2010) to state that *Purple Hibiscus* narrates of a teenager observing her family breakdown in a country that is equally doing the same. The impetus for the research stem mainly from my observation of certain socio-political developments in Nigeria under the present civilian administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, developments which have prompted many citizens to begin to

question whether the nation is actually progressing or retrogressing, and whether the country's political leaders have really learnt any lessons from certain ugly experiences and costly errors of the past as a nation. Indeed, many are of the opinion that the current Buhari administration has taken the country several steps backwards in comparison to where it took over the mantle of leadership on 29 May, 2015, particularly with respect to issues relating to human rights abuses, insecurity, contempt for rule of law, nepotism, tribalism, poverty perception indices, heating up the polity with unpatriotic, winner-takes-it-all and all kinds of inflammatory remarks by politicians of the ruling party and their cohorts, and so on.

Also, many are of the view that the nation is now more polarised along ethnic and religious divides than ever before, even in comparison to the civil war era. In addition, there is a conspicuous perception that the present style of governance in the country is as draconian and autocratic as any known military regime in the nation's chequered political history, hence some journalists and citizens alike have resorted to re-invoking the president's military title and consequently addressing him as Major General Muhammadu Buhari as he was addressed in the early nineteen-eighties as a military Head of State. With all these developments, it is glaring that the country is sitting on a key of gunpowder which will certainly explode in a matter of time should the unfortunate and forlorn situations persist. This is because the same and similar situations in the past contributed in no small measure in plunging the nation into certain avoidable catastrophes as history reveals.

Despite the president's long-standing posture as an anti-corruption champion, the recent corruption perception rating of the country by the globally acclaimed Transparency International reveals that no meaningful progress is actually being made by the government in the much needed fight against the malaise and canker-worm called corruption, rather, the country further decaying by the day. All these developments give reasons for sober reflection and consequently prompt the researchers to decide to re-evaluate certain historical developments in the country in view of a myriad of contemporary occurrences. This is primarily done from the perspective of Chimamanda Adichie's literary lenses in order to assess and ascertain whether or not the nation has really learnt from some grave errors of the past which have inflicted so many injuries on

her, with the scars yet to heal. The study, therefore, focuses on the various historical resources which Adichie has enormously tapped from in the process of weaving her globally acclaimed novels: *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The representations of these historical occurrences in the novels justify the notion that art is both a product and a producer of discourse in society. In other words, artistic productions should not be conceived as being really distinct from their historical and socio-political backgrounds; art simultaneously reflects and alters the society from which it emerges. According to Scott (1978, p.23), "Art is not created in a vacuum; it is the work not simply of a person but of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community of which he is an important and articulate part."

Theoretical Framework

New Historicism Theoretical framework is to literary criticism what foundation and pillars are to a building project or what a builder's plumbline is to the builder. The foundation of a building undoubtedly carries its weight and also ensures that the desired and expected shape of the structure is maintained, while its pillars in addition to enabling the foundation to carry the weight equally ensures that the desired and expected shape of the structure is strictly maintained in accordance with the laid down designs of the architect or structural engineer. As earlier stated, New Historicism is the theoretical framework on which this research is based. According to Barry (2002, p.172), the terminology New historicism was coined by the American critic Stephen Greenblatt whose book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) is usually widely regarded as its origin. Barry goes on to say that,

A simple definition of the new historicism is that it is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts usually of the same historical period. That is to say, new historicism refuses (at least ostensibly) to 'privilege' the literary text: instead of a literary 'foreground' and a historical 'background' it envisages and practices a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other.

It is a post-structuralist theory which aligns literary texts to their associated sociopolitical, historical, economic and cultural contexts.

New Historicism evaluates literary texts and their related non-literary texts on equal basis thereby placing the literary text within the frame of a non-literary text. This approach of evaluating literary and non-literary materials on equal basis is actually the main distinction between the new and old historicism. The old historicism upholds the mimetic view of history and believes that historical documentations portray an objective and accurate view of the things that really occurred in the past. It is this kind of assumption that New Historicism arises to strongly challenge and dismantle. New Historicism evolved in the 1980s primarily through the work of Greenblatt and gained a widespread influence in the 1990s. The theory aims simultaneously to understand a work of art through its historical context, and also to comprehend cultural and intellectual history through literary works which document the new disciple of the history of ideas.

Issues and Discussion

Chimamanda Adichie's emergence on the global literary space in October 2003 with her debut *Purple Hibiscus*, as well as *Half of a Yellow Sun* which followed in 2006 attracted and continue to attract a myriad of critical attention from scholars across the globe. The translation of these novels into over thirty languages of the world is a testament to the global critical reception and attention the works have been enjoying over time. One of the oaks of modern African literature, Chinua Achebe testifies of Adichie's ingenuity and creativity at the blurb of *Half of a Yellow Sun* when he states that "...Adichie came almost fully made." Such a critical acclaim from no less a legendary literary figure like Achebe is a pointer to the fact that Adichie is a voice that deserves attention in global literary discourses. Achebe's perception is corroborated by Copnal (2011, p.20) when he describes Adichie as "...the most prominent of a procession of critically acclaimed young Anglophone authors who is succeeding in attracting a new generation of readers to African literature." For Udumukwu (2006, p.115), "...Adichie has distinguished herself as one of Nigeria's more prominent new generation of female writers."

No doubt, Adichie is one of the notable young African novelists whose works have contributed significantly to the development of African literature. Her remarkable prose style and maturity in the

articulation and organization of materials showcase her immense literary talents. Literature, a product as well as a conveyor of culture and experiences of a people is often shaped by the society and time which produce it. Thus, in both content and form, literary outputs are usually influenced by prevailing attitudes, conventions and events in a particular society within a specific historical period. Being an expression of perceptions, sensibilities and ideas, as well as a portrayal and representation of the author's vision of the world, literature, without doubt, responds to certain values and situations which in themselves become the subjects of artistic creation. For the purpose of orderliness in the synthesis and evaluation of materials, the novels will be evaluated in the order of the dates in which they were published.

In his critical essay, "Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Issues of ideology in the Constitution of the Nigerian Novel," Udumukwu (2006, p.161) again states: the action of *Purple Hibiscus*...moves between...Enugu and Nsukka in South Eastern Nigeria, in the dying months of the military rule of Sani Abacha ...these events form an intersection with the general milieu of military dictatorship in the nation. Kambili's father's authoritarian dominance in the family (domestic sphere) becomes a shadow of the dictatorial regime of the military at the national level. Indeed, one of the major historical issues which Adichie sets out to interrogate in *Purple Hibiscus* is military dictatorship and its pervasive and retrogressive influences on the citizens of a nation. Nigeria is one of the numerous nations in the continent of Africa and the world whose political history cannot be complete without the exploration of the devastating consequences of military incursions. For several nations in Africa, it can be said that soon after gaining their political independence, mainly from British and French imperialism in the 1950s and 60s, military men posing as political messiahs began to topple the civil leaderships in whose hands the imperialists handed over the mantle of leadership.

The reasons mostly given by the soldiers at the announcement of any military coup border primarily on corruption, tribalism, nepotism and incompetence of civilian leaders. Regrettably, most military regimes which seized power from civilians at one time or the other in the continent of Africa ended up being as guilty as, or even more guilty than the civilian governments they toppled, often with the accompaniment of bloodshed and distortions of the

structures and institutions of society. It is for the same reasons that Nigeria had her baptism of fire when Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu suddenly announced to a bewildered nation that the civilian administration of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa had come to an end on 15th January, 1966. The partial success of that coup can be regarded as the mother of certain cataclysmic events in the nation which climaxed in a thirty-month bloody civil war. And since then, one coup continued to give birth to another with each successive regime accusing the other of the crimes of corruption, nepotism, etc, until 29th May, 1999 when General Abdulsalam Abubakar restored democratic governance by handing over power to the civilian-elected government of President Olusegun Obasanjo who happened to be Major Nzeogwu's colleague, close friend and roommate in Kaduna, just before the execution of the January coup. Although Nzeogwu's motive can be said to be altruistic as evidenced in his coup speech, its lopsided execution as well as the series of unpalatable events that followed it leave a sour taste in the mouths of many citizens. In Ghana, barely five weeks after the Nigerian experience (24th February, 1966) Lieutenant General Ankra's National Liberation Council emerged after successfully overthrowing the civilian government of President Kwame Nkrumah. Concerning Ghana's coup, *Wikipedia* (2020) documents that leaders of the established 1966 military coup, including army officers Colonel E.K. Kotoka, Major A.A Afrifa, Lieutenant General (retired) J.A. Ankra and Police Inspector General J.W.K Harley, justified their takeover by charging that the CPP administration was abusive and corrupt. ("National Liberation Council")

In Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), another West African nation, soldiers also forced President Maurice Yameogo to resign, and replaced him on 3rd January, 1966 with Lieutenant Colonel Sangoule Lamizana. Lamizana would rule the country until 1980 when yet another successful military coup overthrew him for the same reasons of corruption and unrest for which he overthrew Yameogo in 1966. The same story can be told of other nations like Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Benin Republic and so on. In all those coups and counter coups at different periods in the history of these nations, it can not really be said that those military overlords who hitherto posed as political messiahs actually left those nations better in any way. In the Nigerian situation, as demonstrated by Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and even *Americanah*, the incursions of soldiers

on Nigeria's political terrain is like an evil wind. In *Purple Hibiscus* in particular, Adichie specifically x-rays and interrogates the heavy rain that beat Nigeria as a nation under the military regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha which lasted between 27 August, 1985 and June 8, 1998 - a total of twelve years and ten months. Events and occurrences of those periods remain unforgettable even as the injuries and scars they inflicted in the hearts of many citizens remain indelible. All historical events portrayed in the novel are in one way or the other traceable to the occurrences in the regimes of those two aforementioned Generals. Oha (2007, p.199) emphasizes this when he avers that "In *Purple Hibiscus*...there is a critical presentation of the oddities in Nigeria as well as Africa in general, as the continent trudges in the biting tyrannical trauma of the military and anarchical leaderships." Like Udumukwu (2006, p.161) who uses the words "dictatorship" and "authoritarianism" to describe the "...regime of the military at the national level" at that period, Oha equally agrees that it was an era of military "oddities" characterised by "biting tyrannical trauma" which were orchestrated by politicians in military regalia in their determined efforts to hold on to power and continue to foster their hegemonic agenda. Through the voice of Kambili -Eugene Achike's traumatized teenage daughter, Adichie consciously romances between history and art in an effort to expose the multidimensional ordeals of a society plagued with power-hungry despots as exemplified in the character of "Big Oga" or "The Head of State" (*PH*, p.38). Adichie believes that although "...politicians were corrupt... stashed money in foreign bank accounts, money meant for paying teachers' salaries and building roads" (*PH*, p.24), it is not a sufficient justification for violent military takeover of the government. Through the character of Papa, she consistently asserts that "...what we Nigerians needed was not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy. Renewed Democracy" (*PH*, p.25).

Her assertion is largely predicated on the various "oddities" being perpetrated by the Head of State and his accomplices while they hold sway and unleash unmitigated violence on the citizenry. Apart from arresting, detaining and torturing Ade Coker - an outstanding journalist and a vociferous critic of the military regime, Kambili ironically observes that the first direct "benefit" of the citizens from the military government soon after the coup was announced is

nothing but humiliation, dispossession, subjugation and even ridicule as she states:

As we left the markets with our sandals and some fabric Mama had bought, we saw a small crowd gathered around the vegetable stalls we had passed earlier, the ones lining the road. Soldiers were milling around. Market women were shouting, and many had both hands placed on their heads, in the way that people do to show despair or shock. A woman lay in the dirt, wailing, tearing at her short afro. Her wrapper had come undone and her white underwear showed... The whip was long. It curled in the air before it landed on the woman's shoulder. Another soldier was kicking down trays of fruits, squashing papayas with his boots and laughing... I thought about the woman lying in the dirt as we drove home. (*PH*, p.46)

From the above excerpt, Adichie summarizes the “dividends” of military dictatorship of the 80s and 90s in Nigeria with the following expressions: “shouting,” “shock,” “lying in the dirt,” “despair,” “tearing,” “wrapper had come undone...her white underwear showed,” suggesting humiliation, “kicking” “squashing” and, above all “laughing” which in this context signifies mockery. These obviously are not the kind of things the citizens of any nation would want or expect from any responsible government, and are part of the reasons for Adichie’s condemnation of military coups and regimes. Her portrayal of a woman’s wrapper coming undone and the consequent exposure of her nakedness as a result of the unkind treatments being meted to her by soldiers upon forcefully taking over power is as touching as it is revealing. For a woman, particularly in Africa, wrapper symbolizes protection and coverage from nakedness, adverse weather conditions and circumstances, as well as an adornment of glory. It symbolizes honour and womanhood. The wrapper shields the body of a woman from the prying eyes of men who are not her husband, thereby enabling her to retain her honour, dignity and beauty as a mother or a potential mother. And it should be borne in mind that a woman is largely, by her natural role in procreation and upbringing of children, the mother and nurturer of a nation. Therefore when Adichie intimates that upon seizing political power in the nation, soldiers in the process of flogging one of the women in the marketplace, make her wrapper come undone (the very symbol of her protection, beauty and dignity) it speaks an endless volume. It is symptomatic of what soldiers are capable of

doing, and indeed have done to Nigeria and other nations in Africa where they ruled at one time or the other in history. This is why Oni (2013, p.11) posits:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* creativity examines the realities and challenges of the fundamental human rights in a quite contemporary African society ...violations of human rights no doubt outrageously characterised the latter military administrations from the 1980s to the 90s, up till the transitional government of General Abdulsalam which ushered in the now over a decade-old new democratic dispensation in the country, Nigeria.

Indeed, *Purple Hibiscus* sensitively touches on human rights concerns of men and women as well as the political disenfranchisement and general abuse of the nation's teeming populace under military government. This is one of the reasons why the novel can be regarded as a historical fiction that deals with national, institutional, family and personal issues. Oni's position is in conformity with that of Gaines (2012, p.13) who states: this powerful, yet subtle novel is striking on two levels; one is the subjection of society to the tyranny of the chaos that results from a political coup. ...The political unrest and subsequent difficulties of daily survival are the canvass against which the author defines her young characters, especially significant because of the helplessness of a population ruled by intimidation.

Washaly (2018, p.2045) re-echoes this view when he concurs that in *Purple Hibiscus* "...Adichie gives a real picture of the Nigerian society during a very difficult situation marked by military coup." It was really a time of high-handed intimidation and suppression that Nigerians faced in those days as the citizenry walloped in utmost squalor in a nation so blessed with both human and material resources. The hope for redemption waned daily as the country sank steadily in the ocean of human rights abuses and injustices which still exist today in one form or the other hence the justification and significance of this study. It is pathetic to observe that after two decades of uninterrupted civil administration, Nigeria is still being governed by "intimidation" of different kinds, mindlessly perpetrated by politicians in *agbada* and well-tailored suits. A typical instance is the recent unjustifiable arrest, prolonged detention and arraignment of Omoyele Sowore, the convener of #RevolutionNow Movement for treasonable felony on what merely borders on

freedom of speech and expression as a civilized and truly democratic society would have termed it. The ignoble treatments meted on Sowore even inside the premises of a court of justice (hallowed chamber) by the operatives of the Department of State Security is a clear reminder of the intimidation, oppression and subjugation Nigerians experienced during the historical era of the two aforementioned military dictators whose activities while in power Adichie fictionalizes in *Purple Hibiscus*. A popular Igbo adage says that a man who does not know where the rain started beating him will not know where it stops. Needless to say that some of the rains that beat us as a nation in the past are still beating us till today as a result of bad governance at various levels. Specific identification of these “bad rains” that are beating us may help in preventing future occurrences.

At the height of the military dictatorship of Big Oga or the Head of State, Kambili informs that Ade Coker, a quintessential journalist and irrepressible critic of the junta is killed with a letter bomb said to have been sent to him from the State House (*PH*, p.202). Yet another character -Nwankiti Ogechi - has earlier been “wasted” at a bush in Minna and had concentrated acid poured on his dead body (p.198). By these portrayals, Adichie reminisces on the gruesome killings of Dele Giwa - the founding editor-in-chief of Newswatch magazine and Ken Saro-Wiwa - the renowned Ogoni environmental activist between 1986 and 1995, a period covering the regimes of the two Heads of State. This clearly demonstrates that *Purple Hibiscus* is a fiction with both artistic and historical merits. The novel portrays the avarice, oppression, killings and dehumanization that pervaded the Nigerian political landscape during the military era, especially during the inglorious regimes of Generals Babangida and Abacha in the 80's and 90's. The times of these two generals marked the very peak of military dictatorship in Nigeria. There was an unparalleled corruption and squander-mania by the military overlords and their civilian collaborators. Infrastructural decay was prevalent even as the educational system nearly collapsed; extrajudicial killings, assassinations and detention of journalists were also common- place. These are the socio-historical circumstances that informed Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie again critically evaluates and interrogates some landmark historical developments right from immediate post-independence Nigeria (the early sixties) till around

January 15, 1970 when Major General Philip Effiong (Ojukwu's Second-in-Command) officially announced that the secessionist Biafra had surrendered unconditionally to the Federal Government of Nigeria led by General Yakubu Gowon. Effiong's historic announcement as represented in *Half of a Yellow Sun* signals the end of the bloody thirty-months fratricidal Nigerian Civil War. Although events captured and portrayed in *Half of a Yellow Sun* can be said to have spanned only for a period of ten years in terms of historical time and social circumstances as compared to over twelve years for *Purple Hibiscus*, they can be said to be more profound and vivid. Adichie models and delineates a myriad of her fictional characters after quite a number of traceable or actual historical figures. For instance, the characters of Major Nzeogwu, Ojukwu, Gowon, Adekunle, Danjuma, Sardauna, Prime Minister Balewa and so on are assigned roles that in several ways depicted in actuality the roles traceable to such names in Nigeria's tumultuous political history, soon after the British colonial administration handed over power to indigenous rulers on 1st October, 1960 until 1970 when the war ended with the mantra of "No Victor, no Vanquished."

The same thing can be said about some of the novel's settings such as Nsukka, Umuahia, Port Harcourt, Kaduna, Enugu and so on. Ezeonu and Korieh (2010, p.1) observe that "Nigeria's post-colonial history has been characterised by significant violence and ethnic crisis." Quite a number of occurrences in these notable Nigerian cities as demonstrated in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are incidents that took place there in historical reality, although the novelist, expectedly brought a lot of literary embellishments to bear since her concern is not mere historical documentation and, of course, she is at liberty to manipulate the resources of history in any way that suits her artistic enterprise. Nweke (2010, p.64) believes that "the presence of such historical personages like Odumegwu Ojukwu, General Gowon, Adekunle, Nzeogwu and the Sardauna of Sokoto validate the novel's historicity." It must, however, be stated that these are also means through which the novelist achieves verisimilitude in a novel which was published thirty-six years after the events she documented occurred. Adichie herself was born seven years after those incidents and neither witnessed nor experienced them. Yet relying on both fictional and non-fictional resources as she profoundly acknowledges in the novel, Adichie presents and interrogates a number of notable, thought-provoking, chilling and

insightful accounts of Nigeria's immediate post-independence experiences until 1970; events which Chinua Achebe himself describes as "...intimidating horror..." particularly with regards to issues surrounding the civil war. When she was questioned in an interview on why she decided to delve into such grave historical issues that took place long before she was conceived, Adichie (2008) responds:

I wrote this novel because I wanted to write about love and war, because I grew up in the shadow of Biafra, because I lost both grandfathers in the Nigeria-Biafra war, because I wanted to engage with my history in order to make sense of my present, many of the issues that led to the war remain unresolved in Nigeria today, because my father has tears in his eyes when he speaks of losing his father, because the brutal bequests of colonialism make me angry, because the thought of the egos and indifference of men leading to the unnecessary deaths of men and women and children enrages me, because I don't ever want to forget.

Adichie's statement that she "...wanted to engage with my history in order to make sense of my present..." as one of the reasons why she wrote *Half of a Yellow Sun* is quite revealing and at the same time justifies the application of New Historicism as the theoretical template for this study. The statement obviously portrays that literary artists often intentionally use the instrumentality of literature or artistic creativity as a veritable tool for historical inquiry, interrogation and interpretation. Thus relying on certain historical evidence, the literary artist through the effective deployment of the literary tools of plot, character, characterisation, setting, point of view and so on is indeed at liberty to beam their creative, analytical, evaluative and insightful search light to any historical condition and bring out meanings that can "make sense" to the "present" circumstances of an individual, a family, an ethnic group, a people, a nation, a continent or even the entire world. The statement also goes a long way to demonstrate that the past always reflects in the present and that, as Stephen Lynn puts it, "...history is a story, a construct necessarily written and rewritten" (1994, p.120). In view of the foregoing, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* can be aptly described as a one-woman panel of inquiry, interrogation and interpretation into the diverse ugly rains that beat Nigeria as a nation from the early sixties - just after the nation gained her independence from

British colonial rule - to 15 January, 1970 when the Nigerian Civil War ended. Nwajiaku (2010, p.47) concurs to this in stating that: Adichie's text is a lengthy narrative that is divided into parts and chapters. The parts move back and forth in time between the early and late sixties...the first part of *Half of a Yellow Sun* considerably performs an introductory role. It enables the author to present adverse events which generated the tension that gradually led to the climatic outbreak of the war. The reader also gets to meet in this part the central figures around whom the incidents and events in the story develop and revolve.

To achieve her objective of engaging "with my history in order to make sense of my present," Adichie, as Nwajiaku states, divides the narrative into four parts. Part one is captioned "The Early Sixties." One of the major historical events shaping this part is the destructive and cantankerous ethnic acrimony and suspicion which pervaded the Nigerian political space soon after the colonial masters departed. Although before independence there had been a certain degree of distrust among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria from the North to the South, the attainment of independence on October 1, 1960 intensified such an ugly situation to a worrisome dimension. The first opportunity which portrayed this high level of ethnic acrimony and suspicion was the disputed National Census issues of 1962-1963. It is concerning this that Odenigbo tells Ugwu: "The census was a mess, everybody forged figures. Not that Balewa will do anything about it, because he is as complicit as they are. But we must speak out" (*Half*, p.89).

Adichie further captures the ugly scenario of acrimony that pervaded the nation in the sixties in *Half of a Yellow Sun* through the visit of Olanna to the family of her maternal uncle, Mbaezi in Kano. The situation is to the extent that Northern schools denied Igbo children admission, even at the primary and secondary levels of education, thereby prompting Easterners living in Northern Nigeria to build their own school and employ their own teachers as a solution to the nagging problem. In reference to some of Olanna's usual discussions with her uncle, the narrator states: Or he would tell her about politics: What the Igbo Union was organising, protesting, discussing. They held meetings in his yard - she had sat in a few times, and she still remembered the meeting where irritated men and women talked about the Northern schools not admitting Igbo children. Uncle Mbaezi had stood up and stamped his foot. "Ndi be

anyi! My people! We will build our own school! We will raise money and build our own school!" After he spoke, Olanna had joined in clapping her approval, in chanting, "Well Spoken! That is how it shall be!" But she had worried that it would be difficult to build a school. Perhaps it was more practical to try and persuade the Northerners to admit Igbo children. Yet only a few years later, her taxi was on Airport Road, driving past the Igbo Union Grammar School. It was break time and the schoolyard was full of children (*Half*, p.38-39).

Indeed, Nigeria's political experience of the early sixties as demonstrated by some First Republic politicians was as toxic as it was dangerous and retrogressive for a young nation that just shook off the shackles of colonialism. It was politics laced with so much suspicion, hatred and tribalism. Gbulie (1991, p.7-9) affirms this when he states: for far too long the country has been at crossroads tottering dangerously on the brink of disaster. The political situation was gradually but surely getting out of hand... peace and stability had ceased to exist, while the economic life of the people had practically grounded to a halt. A bold red sign; a clear warning of an imminent national disaster had long loomed large on the horizon. The Federation had floundered through a widely boycotted general election and the census crisis which had preceded it. The country's politicians not only appeared to be above the law, they seemed to be actively engaged in breaking it... the politicians and public officers had indeed let the nation down. In any case, I told myself, a coup d'etat would change all that.

Achebe (1972) confirmed Gbulie's observations in an interview when he states that "...things had got to such a point politically that there was no other answer... the political machine had been so abused that whichever way you pressed it, it produced the same results, and therefore you wanted another force (*African Writer's Talking*, p.13-14). Adichie believes that the chaotic political situation of the early sixties as orchestrated by the high-wire and reckless political maneuverings of Nigeria's First Republic politicians was the major precursor of the military coup of 15th January 1966. Such maneuverings gave birth to brazen corruption and nepotism. Those who ought to have seen themselves as national leaders to move the entire nation forward shrank from such patriotic expectations and transformed into ethnic champions who constantly and purposely fanned the embers of violence and hatred among tribes that ought

to have been united for a prosperous Nigeria. By portraying the messy political conditions of the era as precursors for the military intervention, Adichie brings a monumental indictment on the First Republic's politicians for their inability to effectively and patriotically steer the ship of state. If reverse is the case, there would have been no reason for the character of Major Nzeogwu and his "Revolutionary Council" (*Half*, p.123) to plot any coup let alone executing it. Onyema (2010, p.21) is of the same view when he avers:

The military intervened because there was overt corruption among politicians, ethnicity was dominating national politics, and because there was injustice, marginalization and a breakdown of law and order. This bloody coup executed by Chukwuma Nzeogwu and other young officers such as Emmanuel Ifeajuna, was misconstrued as an Igbo coup. This was especially true as Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo, emerged as the Head of State.

Nzeogwu's coup and its immediate consequences on the tottering nation constitutes the historical background of the conflicts and occurrences in "Part Two" of *Half of a Yellow Sun* which Adichie captions "The late sixties." In historical reality, Major Nzeogwu's coup of January 15, 1966 was a landmark development which catalysed the rest of other notable national occurrences in Nigeria thenceforth until the end of the Civil War. The coup was like a detonated atomic bomb which triggered off quite a number of other unpalatable chain reactions in the country largely because in the words of Onyema (2010), it was "misconstrued as an Igbo coup." For a nation that was already almost torn apart by tribal sentiments, such interpretation and tag on the coup cannot be said to be totally strange and unexpected. Adichie mimics history or tries to follow a path of historical accuracy when the character of Odenigbo also called Master states that "Major Nzeogwu is speaking from Kaduna" (*Half*, p.123). Then she goes on to reproduce the actual coup speech delivered by the historical Major Nzeogwu in the early hours of 15th January 1966 when the coup was announced: "The constitution is suspended and the regional government and elected assemblies are hereby dissolved..." (*Half*, p.123)

Events that followed Nzeogwu's announcement are creativity represented by Adichie almost in the chronological order they happened in historical reality. *Wikipedia* (2020) documents that soon

after the coup which was largely unsuccessful in Lagos due to the inability of Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna to effectively cage the then General Officer Commanding the Nigerian Army, Major General Johnson Thomas Umunnakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi, Acting President Nwafor Orizu made a nationwide broadcast, after he had briefed President Nnamdi Azikiwe on the phone about the decision of the cabinet, announcing the cabinet's "voluntary" decision to transfer power to the armed forces. Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi then made his own broadcast, accepting the "invitation." On 17 January, Major General Ironsi established the Supreme Military Council in Lagos and effectively suspended the constitution. ("Nwafor Orizu")

Adichie makes reference to Nwafor Orizu's historic national broadcast of January 16, 1966 when she states that "...the deputy president spoke briefly on the radio, the voice understated, as if he were exhausted from the effort of saying, 'The government is handing over to the military'" (*Half*, p.124). Senator Nwafor Orizu was Nigeria's Senate President who constitutionally acted as president on behalf of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe when the latter traveled to Europe in late 1965. Orizu's Senate presidency came to an abrupt end when the military struck and halted the First Republic. Adichie, again alludes to history when she narrates that "There were more announcements later – the Prime Minister was missing, Nigeria was now a federal military government, the premiers of the North and West were missing...The BBC is calling it an Igbo coup" (*Half*, p.124-125). In historically reality, Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Sir Ahmadu Bello – Premier of Northern Nigeria and Samuel Ladoke Akintola – Premier of Western Nigeria, and others were "missing" after the January coup. Then there is the issue of "... a second coup" (*Half*, p.136) which takes place in "...the moist July heat" (*Half*, p.137).

By stating that this second coup takes place in the month of July, Adichie, again, toes the path of historical accuracy for in reality Nigeria's second military coup occurred on 29th July, 1966 - six months after the first one. And if the first was tagged an "Igbo coup" because the planners and executors were mainly officers of Igbo extraction, the second was equally appropriately tagged "Northern coup" since its perpetrators were entirely officers and men of Northern extraction. The second coup was actually a reactionary or counter coup which resulted to the assassination of

the first military Head of State, Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi and the installation of a middle rank Northern officer, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon as successor. Regarding this occurrence, Iheka (2010, p.75) states: ...the Northern military officers responded with the counter coup that was targeted at the Igbos. General Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo, who foiled the first coup and assumed the leadership of the country, was brutally killed in the reprisal attack alongside other Igbo officers. The counter-coup that brought Yakubu Gowon to power was followed by successive pogroms in the North. The pogroms ...left no fewer than thirty thousand Igbos dead and another two million returning to the East for safety.

Adichie alludes to this ugly historical development when Olanna's twin sister Kainene informs that "Northern officers have taken over. The BBC says they are killing Igbo officers in Kaduna... many Igbo officers were dead. The killings were organized... the Northerners picked out all Igbo soldiers and took them away and shot them" (*Half*, p.137-138). It is also notable to state that not only Igbo soldiers were killed in the historic May 29, July 29, September 29 and October 29, 1966 pogroms in Northern and Western Nigeria but indeed all categories of people of Eastern extraction - pregnant women, civil servants, children, men and women of all age brackets. Amidst the violent crisis, a voice from ENBC Radio Enugu states: "We have confirmed reports that up to five hundred Igbo people have been killed in Maiduguri" (*Half*, p.142). Similar reports are subsequently received from other notable places like Zaria, Jos, Bauchi, Kafanchan, Kano, etc. Obiozo, an escapee, narrates horrifying cases of "...teachers hacked down in Zaria, a full Catholic Church in Sokoto set on fire, a pregnant woman split open in Kano" (*Half*, p.144). Later on, Adichie would inform the reader what actually becomes the main bone of contention between the Eastern Region of Nigeria headed by the character Ojukwu as Military Governor and the rest of the federation under Gowon as Head of State when Colonel Madu states: "And Gowon cannot be head of state. They cannot impose Gowon on us as head of state. It is not how things are done. There are others who are senior to him" (*Half*, p.140). Ojukwu's refusal to recognise Gowon as head of state resulted in a series of negotiations which does not produce the much desired peaceful and conciliatory outcome. Historically, it was at this point of ominous deadlock of negotiations at home that the two parties traveled to Ghana to see if they could find peace at the

invitation of the then Ghanaian leader, Lieutenant General Joseph Ankra in the historic town of Aburi where a landmark accord was reached. The narrator captures the circumstances surrounding the Aburi Accord thus:

Then she heard Okeoma say 'Aburi.' It sounded lovely, the name of that Ghanaian town, and she imagined a sleepy cluster of homes on stretches of sweet-scented grasslands. Aburi came up often in their conversation: Okeoma would say Gowon should have followed the agreement he and Ojukwu signed in Aburi, or Professor Ezeka would say that Gowon's renegeing after Aburi meant that he did not wish the Igbo well, or Odenigbo would proclaim, 'On Aburi we Stand.' (*Half*, p.159)

Okeoma reveals the content of the Aburi Accord when he says, "But how can Gowon make such a turnaround? He agreed to a confederation at Aburi, and now he wants one Nigeria with a unitary government, but a unitary government was the very reason that he and his people killed Igbo officers" (*Half*, p.159). Confederation as a system of government lays emphasis on having a weak centre and strong regions. It gives the confederating units a level of control over their resources and therefore the opportunity to develop at their own pace while contributing a certain percentage of such resources for the well-being and sustenance of the centre. Adichie's argument through Okeoma shows that she believes strongly that the Aburi Accord would have largely resolved the burning tensions and crises that besieged the country at that moment in history. Indeed, many Nigerians still believe that if the Aburi Accord was dutifully honoured by the relevant parties, various resource-based crises that bedevil the nation even in contemporary times would have been averted, and that the country would have been set on a better and faster trajectory of lasting peace and development. The accord was the last hope for peace for a nation in turmoil; a nation torn apart by hatred, tribalism, nepotism, avarice, corruption and all manner of vices that suffocate growth and development of a people. The unfortunate "turnaround" Gowon made as revealed by Okeoma results to the declaration of the independent State of Biafra by Ojukwu.

Adichie, again, daringly follows the path of historical accuracy in documenting Ojukwu's exact historical broadcast in declaring the State of Biafra (*Half*, p.161), as well as the euphoria that

immediately greeted the broadcast right from Nsukka University community to the rest of the places within the Biafran territory. She notes that “they swayed as they sang, and Olanna imagined that the mango and gmelina trees swayed too, in agreement, in one fluid arc. The sun felt like a flame brought too close and yet it was drizzling ...” (*Half*, p.171). When it is announced that “...the federal government had declared a police action to bring the rebels to order” (*Half*, p.180), Adichie simply alludes to Gowon’s historic statement at the outbreak of the war. By declaring that he is using “...a police action to bring the rebels back to order,” Gowon states that he does not take the Biafra declaration and imminent resistance a sufficiently serious threat, and that he thinks the rebellion will not take long to quell. But that is not to be so because when fire begins to meet fire, Olanna informs that “...Nigeria now says this is war, no longer a police action” (*Half*, p.201).

Just like Part One of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Part Three is equally captioned “The Early Sixties.” Adichie signals her major historical concern early on this part when Master rhetorically questions: “How can more politicians return unopposed than elected? Utter rubbish! This is rigging of the worst order” (*Half*, p.214). Ogaga (2008, p.129) refers to this historical condition when he states that “the political crisis of the era culminated in a widespread violence, blood-shed and electoral fraud, which left the political climate cloudy. The election of 1965 created the path for the military’s easy entrance into governance.” While Part One with the same caption “The Early Sixties” as Part Three evaluates tribalism and ethnic prejudice as major contributory factors to the destabilization of Nigeria’s First Republic, Part Three in addition to also foregrounding the factors sees Adichie focusing her creative and analytical searchlight on others factors such as corruption, nepotism and electoral fraud. To demonstrate how the factors of corruption and nepotism negate national development, Adichie first creates a situation of domestic conflict involving the family of Chief Ozobia - a notable government contractor and politician.

He is portrayed as a philanderer and a man who becomes stupendously rich through the proceeds of corruption. The cause of the domestic conflict, however, is that Chief Ozobia buys a house for his mistress who is said to have “two children from two different men” (*Half*, p.218). On hearing that, Mrs Ozobia prepares for a showdown as she tells her daughter and heroine of the novel Olanna:

“He has bought her a house in Ikeja. My friend lives on the same street” (*Half*, p.217). The dust raised in their home is yet to settle when another domestic conflict erupts. This time, it is between Olanna’s mother and a domestic staff – a driver. The driver steals some cups of rice from their kitchen and Olanna’s mother discovers it when “a woven bag had fallen from the backseat, spilling rice onto the group” (*Half*, p.220). Olanna’s mother severely punishes the poor man by making him to kneel down as she rains all manners of verbal abuses on him to the disgust of Olanna who orders him to get up. Then she reveals: my father and his politician friends steal money with their contracts, but nobody makes them kneel to beg for forgiveness. And they build houses with their stolen money and rent them out to people like this man and charge inflated rents that make it impossible to buy food. (*Half*, p.221)

Olanna is obviously displeased that her “father and his politician friends” steal so much from the country and are neither caught nor punished for that, while a poor man who steals only a few cups of rice from their Kitchen is being severely disgraced. Issues bordering on ethnic prejudice are foregrounded when an unnamed character sitting next to Olanna in an aircraft on their way from Kano informs her that “they have finally removed that Igbo vice chancellor from the University of Lagos.” Then the man questions rhetorically, “Why should an Igbo man be the vice chancellor in Lagos?” (*Half*, p.227). This is a historical allusion to the Biobaku/Eni Njoku saga of the middle sixties at the University of Lagos. *Wikipedia* (2020) documents: In 1962, he [Professor Eni Njoku] became the first vice-chancellor of the University of Lagos. Following a major crisis in 1965 over his re-appointment, he resigned and became a visiting professor at Michigan State University, United States. In 1966, Njoku was appointed vice-chancellor of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka where he remained until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1967 (“Eni Njoku”),

In historical reality, the reason for the “crisis” of re-appointment being referred to in this excerpt did not border on Njoku’s incompetence, lack of qualification or abuse of office but rather on ethnicity. Since the prestigious University of Lagos is located in Southwest Nigeria, some people considered it abnormal for someone of Southeast extraction like him to be reappointed to head the institution for a second time no matter how well he may have performed in his first tenure. This is one of the manifestations of

ethnic prejudice which pervaded the Nigerian political, economic, social and educational landscape in the early and middle sixties and till today continues to rear its ugly head in almost all spheres of national life. Adichie further historicises the situation when the unnamed character states: the problem with Igbo people is that they want to control everything in this country. Everything. Why can't they stay in their East? They own all the shops; they control the civil service, even the police. If you are arrested for any crime, as long as you can say Keda they will let you go (*Half*, p.227).

All the while the anonymous male character is venting out all these expressions to Olanna – a lady he had clearly got attracted to as a result of her tantalizing beauty – he had assumed that she is a Fulani woman. However, on realizing that Olanna is an Igbo lady, the man becomes so disappointed and retorted, “But you have the face of Fulani people” (*Half*, p.227). Then it is observed that “the man mumbled something that sounded like sorry before he turned away and began to look through his briefcase. When she handed the newspaper, he seemed reluctant to take it back... if only he knew that his prejudice had filled her with possibility” (*Half*, p.227)

Indeed, the Nigeria of the sixties as portrayed by Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun* was a nation laden with a thousand trailer loads of ethnic prejudices which, of course, weighed it down in a thirty-month fratricidal civil war. The devastation caused by the war is still being felt in different dimensions today. Unfortunately, five decades after the war, one cannot really say that the ghost of ethnic prejudice has been laid to rest, hence the justification for this study. Part Four - which is the last part of the novel is captioned “The Late Sixties” just like Part Two. But whereas Part Two focuses on Nigeria's first military coup led by Major Nzeogwu as well as the counter-coup which results to the death of the Head of State, General Aguiyi-Ironsi, and which consequently installed Lieutenant Colonel Gowon as his successor, Adichie in this last part of the fiction leads the reader instantly and fully to the turbulent theatre of the Nigerian Civil War. Thus without any preambles, the reader is immediately confronted with the harsh reality of the war right from the very first sentence of this last part: Olanna jumped each time she heard the thunder. She imagined another air raid, bombs rolling out of a plane and exploding in the compound before she and Odenigbo and baby and Ugwu could reach the bunker down the street. Sometimes she

imagined the bunker itself collapsing, squashing them all into mud (*Half*, p. 261).

It is in this part that the excruciating sufferings and losses occasioned by the civil war is glaringly portrayed in all its multi-faceted ugly dimensions. Mass deaths, starvation, kwashiorkor, hopelessness, treachery, forced conscription, abuse of women and children, cruelty of diverse shapes, relief efforts and so on are all demonstrated using various characters, settings, expressions, and characterisations. Adichie uses all these to teach and remind Nigerians, Africans and indeed the entire world of one major lesson – WAR IS UGLY and does not bring any form of beautification to society. Thus in the words of John Sherman, in reference to the Nigerian Civil War, “Had those of us who were in the war learned nothing else, it was that war is so often futile. ...war is not a game, but a deadly experience.... The futility of it all does make one a little insane” (2010, p.112).

Conclusion

This study has utilized the theoretical parameters of New Historicism to evaluate issues on historiography and verisimilitude in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun* . The novels are notable exemplifications of the harmonious nexus existing between literature and history; literature being intricately connected to historical developments as it is also connected to other aspects of society and culture. Society and the kind of history it generates continues to shape the type and direction of literature emanating from it. Thus relying on known historical evidences, Adichie has liberally beamed her creative and analytical searchlight to certain historical conditions in order to offer meaningful interpretations or make sense of some present circumstances, as well as convey certain vital messages. Such significant literary experimentation as has been done in the two novels being investigated clearly demonstrates that the past always reflect in the present, and that the present will play a role in shaping the future. It is in this sense that the novelist has extensively and dutifully manipulated and deployed diverse resources of history in order to demonstrate and explain some contemporary predicaments of her nation. Adichie has incorporated in her fictions a variety of textual and ideological insights from a myriad of extraneous sources in

order to create knowledge and project some vital meanings and artistic vision. As a social prophet, she also uses certain representations to appropriately remind society of the past and to raise the necessary alarms for the present as well as for posterity. Aside all these, the infusion of a myriad of historical data and issues in the fictions enables the author to achieve an optimal degree of verisimilitude which invariably helps in consolidating the divergent messages and meanings she earnestly wishes to convey. Her dutiful and creative interrogation and interpretations of certain historical circumstances in the fictions reveal that certain societies even in contemporary times have not really made quite significant progress or triumphed over some unsavoury situations that characterised them in the past. Such situations include human rights abuses, bad governance, corruption, ethnic and religious prejudices and many more which prevailed in the past in Nigeria, Adichie's country of birth. In all, the author draws profound inspirations and textual materials from a myriad of historical and intertextual sources to foreground divergent meanings and enrich her artistic canvass.

References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*. London: Heinemann.
- Achebe, C. (1972). Interview in D. Duerden & C. Pieterse. *African writers talking: A collection of interviews*. London: Heinemann.
- Adichie, C. N. (2006). *Purple hibiscus*. Lagos: Farafina.
- Adichie, C. N. (2006). *Half of a yellow sun*. Lagos: Farafina.
- Adimora-Ezeigbo, A. T. (1996). The taste of madness: The short story on the Nigerian civil war. In Chinyere Nwahunanya (Ed.), *A harvest from tragedy: Critical perspectives on Nigerian civil war literature* (pp.194-207). Lagos: Springfield Publishers.
- Adimora-Ezeigbo, A. T. (2011). *Roses and bullets*. Ibadan: Jaala Writers Collective.
- Agasi, J. (1972). *Faraday as a natural philosopher*. University of Chicago Press.
- Barry, P. (2002). *Beginning theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bertens, H. (2008). *The basics of literary theory* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Christopher Okigbo. *Wikipedia*. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>
- Conal, F. & Salevouris, M. J. (2015). *The methods and Skills of history: A practical guide* (4th ed). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Copnal, J. (2011, December 16). Steak knife. *The Times Literary Supplement*, 20. News UK. www.davidpublisher.org
- Dickens, C. (1995). *Hard times*. London: Wordsworth.

- Ezeonu, I. & Korieh, C. J. (2010). Perspectives on Biafra: Fact, fiction and memory. In C. J. Korieh & I. Ezeonu (Eds.), *Remembering Biafra: Narrative, history, and memory of the Nigeria-Biafra war* (pp. 1-16). Boston: Goldline and Jacobs Publishers.
- Fugard, A. (1972). *Sizwe bansi is dead*. London: Heinemann.
- Gbulie, B. (1981). *Nigeria's five majors*. Enugu: Africana.
- Greenblatt, S. (1980). *Renaissance self-fashioning: From more to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Habila, H. (2002). *Waiting for an angel*. Abuja: Cassava Republic Press.
- Hudson, W. H. (2008). *Introduction to the study of literature*. New York: Lightning Source.
- Ike, C. (1976). *Sunset at dawn*. Ibadan: University Press Plc.
- Ike, J. O. (2014). *New historicist reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's purple hibiscus*. BA long essay, Niger Delta University.
- Ike, O. (2018). *Shackles of freedom*. Markurdi: Sevhave Publishers
- La-Guma, A. (1962). *A walk in the night*. London: Heinemann. Literature. Wikipedia. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>
- Lowenthal, L. (2015). *Literature and the image of man*. Transaction Publishers.
- Lukacs, G. (1962). *The historical novel*. New York: Merlin Press.
- Lynn, S. (1994). *Texts and intertext: Writing about literature with general theory*. Harper Collins College Publishers.
- Madiebo, A. (1980). *The Nigerian revolution and the Biafran war*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension.
- McGarry, D. D. & White, S. H. (1963). *Historical fiction guide*. New York: The Scarecrow Press Inc.
- Nwahunanya, C. (2012). *Literary criticism, critical theory and postcolonial African literature* (4th ed.). Lagos: Springfield Publishers.
- Nwajiaku, I. C. (2010). Revisiting the Nigeria-Biafra war: Social perspectives in sunset at dawn. In C. J. Korieh & I. Ezeonu (Eds.), *Remembering Biafra: Narrative, history and memory of the Nigeria-Biafra war* (pp.39-54). Boston: Goldline and Jacobs Publishers.
- Nweke, B. O. (2010). Exhuming the ghost of a troubled present: History and survival in Adichie's half of a yellow sun. In C. J. Korieh & I. Ezeonu (Eds.), *Remembering Biafra: Narrative, history and memory of the Nigeria-Biafra war* (pp.39-54). Boston: Goldline and Jacobs Publishers.
- Oha, A. C. (2007). Beyond the odds of red hibiscus: A critical reading of Chimamanda Adichie's purple hibiscus. *Journal of Pan-African Studies*, 1(9), 199-211.
- Okigbo, C. (1966). *Hurray for thunder*. <https://www.gradesaver.com>
- Okigbo, C. (1986). *Labyrinths*. London: Heinemann.
- Okpewho, I. (1976). *The last duty*. London: Heinemann.
- Onyema, C. (2010). Biafra war, Historic burden and artistic vision. In C. J. Korieh & I. Ezeonu (Eds.), *Remembering Biafra: Narrative, history and*

- memory of the Nigeria-Biafra war* (pp.19-38). Boston: Goldline and Jacobs Publishers.
- Otu, O. O. (2015). Race and identity politics in selected plays of August Wilson. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Port Harcourt.
- Scott, W. (1978). *Five approaches to literary criticism*. New York: Collier Press.
- Shakespeare, W. (1996). *Hamlet*. New York: St. Martins Press.
- Sherman, J. (2010). Relating personal experiences of the Biafra-Nigeria war through artistic expression. In C. J. Korieh & I. Ezeonu (Eds.), *Remembering Biafra: Narrative, history and memory of the Nigeria-Biafra war*. (pp.102-115). Boston: Goldline and Jacobs Publishers.
- Suspension of disbelief. *Wikipedia*. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>
- Udumukwu, O. (2006). *The novel and change in Africa*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.
- Verisimilitude. *Wikipedia*. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>
- Washaly, N. (2018). The representation of gender violence in Chimamanda Adichie's purple hibiscus. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, 6(12), 2043-2067.
- Wellek, R. & Warren, A. (1949). *Theory of literature*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.
- Williams, R. (2004, November 10). An Igbo patriarch. Review of purple hibiscus. *Times Literary Supplement*. www.weaverpresszimbabwe.com
- Wright, R. (1970). *The black boy*. New York: Pearson Educational Limited.