

Sense and Sensibility: The Politics of Representation in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Obakanse Olusegun Lakanse

Department of English, Faculty of Arts,
Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos State, Nigeria
Email: obakanse2015@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1955-7139>

Abstract

No literary enterprise is as complex and challenging as writing a novel on civil war, especially in a postcolonial, multi-ethnic society. It is a narrative that often generates very contentious views, and so requires a very nuanced and complex telling. It is the contention of this article that Chimamanda Adichie must have realised the complex and difficult nature of her task when she was writing *Half of a Yellow Sun* (*Half*), hence, her attempt at some historical nuance and ambivalence in the novel. Therefore, this paper attempts a deconstruction of Adichie's methods and styles in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and highlights some of the challenges and perspectival difficulties she must have encountered while she was writing the novel. The paper also highlights some of her lapses, silences and evasions. It concludes that there is something Adichie deftly inters in the roles and assertions she ascribes to her characters and in the way she has shaped her narrative that seems to indicate not only how ethnicity permeates and structures everything we do and represent in the country but also how the question of ethnicity has seldom been made a subject of self-scrutinising reflection in public discourse.

Keywords: Nationhood, Nigerian Civil War, Politics of representation, Postcolonial literature.

Introduction

In the early 1970s and 1980s following the end of the Nigerian Civil War, there was a burst of novels mostly written by writers of Igbo extraction based on the civil war and the sectional conflicts that led to it. Some of the celebrated Igbo writers of the period such as Cyprian Ekwensi, Buchi

Emecheta, Elechi Amadi, Chukwuemeka Ike, among others, produced novels that attempted to thematise the civil war from both the federal and Biafran perspectives. Over fifty years later the war still seems to hold an ongoing fascination for both academic studies and novelistic fabulations. Since Nigeria's return to democratic dispensation in 1999, there have been novels based on the Nigerian Civil War in a way that is reminiscent of those of the 1970s and 1980s written by some writers of this present generation. These writers, mostly of the Igbo extraction offer fictional projections about the civil war and the historical forces that led to it not only to keep alive the memories of about the 2 million people that perished in the war but also as a way of commenting on the complex and contradictory aspects of Nigeria as a postcolonial nation.

Some of the fictional works include Anthonia Kalu's *Broken Lives and Other Stories* (2003), Ifeanyi Sylvester Ekenta's *While Dust Howled* (2018), Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* (2015), Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2009), the most celebrated of the historical war novels and the subject of this essay. Even writers who are not of the Igbo extraction such as Sefi Atta, Helon Habila, and Abubakar Adam Ibrahim have in their respective novelistic fabulations touched upon albeit passingly on this sad episode in Nigeria's history. This fascination with the war can only mean one thing: that the crucial issues that led to it in the first place are still with us, and have never been addressed. It is not surprising, therefore, that these writers continue to explore certain aspects of the civil war to delineate the historical forces that have brought about the manifold distortions of the present. This paper raises several questions regarding the ways discourses about the problematic nature of Nigeria as a postcolonial nation are being constructed in contemporary Nigerian fiction, using Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a case study, highlighting especially the complex and challenging literary enterprise of writing a civil war novel in a multi-ethnic society. A civil war story of an especially ethnically diverse society such as Nigeria tends sometimes to generate very contentious and divisive views because it inevitably involves the writer having a certain 'positionality' as it concerns politics of representation in their work. It, therefore, requires a very nuanced and complex telling. The contention here is that Adichie must have realised the complex and difficult nature of her task when she was writing *Half of a Yellow Sun*; hence her strenuous attempts at some historical nuance and ambivalence in the novel. This paper, therefore, seeks to deconstruct Adichie's methods and styles in the novel, highlighting some of the

challenges and perspectival difficulties she must have encountered while writing the novel. This paper also highlights some of her lapses, silences and evasions.

It was Geoffrey Barraclough who defined history as “the attempt to discover on the basis of fragmentary evidence the significant things about the past”, going further to assert that “the history we read, though based on facts is strictly speaking not factual at all but a series of accepted judgments (Barraclough, 1994). So, challenges often arise when a writer constructs his or her story based on a reconstruction of the past which is what history essentially is. The relationship between history and literature has from time immemorial been construed as problematic by thinkers and scholars alike. Aristotle in his classic discrimination between the two concepts regards history as the documentation of facts while literature (poetry) is conceived as the possibility of facts happening. In other words, while history is made up of declarative assertions based on evidence, literature consists in mimetic displays of what Aristotle terms as “universals”, things that are possible everywhere across different times and cultures in terms of probability or necessity. History and literature interweave on so many levels. However, the main difference between the two concepts is that literary representation tends to have a certain kind of verisimilitude that is not as scientific and veritable as that of historical narration.

To compound matters since the advent of structuralism and poststructuralism in the 20th century the two concepts have become increasingly problematic. New Historicists, for instance, see little ontological difference between literary texts and historical texts since both are narratives constructed in words – language, and employ similar techniques. The concept of history as an accessible reality is further problematised by Foucault’s conceptualisation of it as a discursive practice, a non-linear, epistemic construct which evolves through successive forms of discourse with no continuities between the different historical epochs. Thus Foucault not only disengages history from the monolithic conception of it by traditional historians as one continuous process of progress but also opens it up to the plurality of interpretations. He opines that instead of presenting a monolithic version of any given historical epoch, researchers must reveal how the period reveals “several pasts, several forms of connections, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies”(Barraclough, 1994, p.50). With Foucault and the New Historicists such as Stephen

Greenblatt and Hayden White began the notion about history and literature as seemingly unstable concepts. The argument there is not settled or certain knowledge about the past. The past is not an object to be observed directly but one that has to be constituted in language, using different verbal strategies and narrative points of view, and so liable to different interpretations. In fact, White (2015) conceives history as a mere narrative sequence framed within a plot. He asserts thus:

The process of historicism can only be a process of figuration (a schematisation in Kant's terminology) in which real events are encoded as happening in a historical scene and as 'caused' by historical agents. This presentation of historical events is as much as imaginative as it is rational and provides an object of potential study of the mode of understanding. The connection of the constructed scene-action to a larger environment provides a kind of explanation by employment in a narrative which connects events by assigning them places in a beginning-middle-end scenario. (8)

In contemporary Nigerian fiction narratives about the civil war has been a way of exploring Nigeria's history and thereby raising questions that border on its existence as a nation. Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is one of these many narratives. In it, she utilises certain aspects of Nigeria's history relating to the civil war, touching on some of the events and protagonists. She thus creates literary artefacts that not only speak to the present Nigerian condition, but one that unwittingly underscores the problems associated with fiction attempting to reconstruct history which itself is a reconstruction of the past. This double remove from the past can be incredibly problematic. What role have the novelist's personal experience and ideology played in her representation of certain concrete historical facts? What narrative choices does she make? What questions does she raise regarding ethnicity in relation to nationality? How does she attempt to answer these questions? These are the kind of questions that Foucault and the New Historicists enjoin us to ask when we are engaged with a writer's historical or literary representations. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*; a novel written by a writer of Igbo. Is Foucault's contention that in analysing a literary work, one should also indicate how one is implicated in one's discourse in relation to the work?

The Nigeria Civil War

The main problem of writing about the Nigerian Civil War and the events leading to it lies principally in their interpretations. Interpretations are subjective and are always open to questions, as a civil war. There are difficulties a young novelist must face who wish to write a truly Nigerian novel. Nigeria, to borrow one of Chinua Achebe's proverbs is like a masquerade dancing. To be able to view it properly, one will have to keep hopping from one corner to another, assuming different perspectives. Adichie's sense and sensibility in *Half of a Yellow Sun* consists in her strenuous attempts at overcoming the difficulties of writing a narrative about a sad episode in Nigeria's history that indicts everyone but holds some more complicit than the others. In designating the disastrous event that happened between 1967 and 1970, these are terms that come to mind: 'The Nigeria Civil War', 'The Biafra War', 'The Civil War', 'the Nigeria/Biafra Civil War'. Are these terms interchangeable? Are there no subtle differences among the terms? Whichever one chooses, one seems exposed to risks. In which of the terms have our history books mostly described the event between 1967 and 1970? Has not that history been subject to different textual treatments? Can the ethnic provenance, personal involvement and the verbal strategies of the historian influence his narration of the event?

Whatever questions we pose, it does not obviate the fact that millions of people perished in the war, and that millions of others still bear the scars of the war, and that these people belong to a particular section of the country, and so must claim the narrativisation of the war. Adichie makes this quite clear at the end of the novel when Richard, a British journalist confesses his failure at writing the Biafra story, and Ugwu thinks he never thought it was his (Richard's) to write about (425). In any case popular sensitivity seems to have conceded to the Igbos the unilateral prerogative of narrativising the war. There are three principal characters from whose perspectives Adichie tells the story of the civil war in *Half of a Yellow Sun* henceforth to be referenced as *Half*, and these are Ugwu's, Olanna's and Richard's, the last being the only non-Igbo and non-Nigerian among the group. Adichie uses this foreign character to negotiate a number of obvious obstacles. One is to provide what can be said to be a distant objective view of the civil war in a bitterly divided country. To have a Nigerian character gives us snippets of the country's history such as we have in *Half* might be a bit problematic at best. As with everything in Nigeria it is more of the question of "which ethnic group is s/he?" than

with the truth of what s/he says. Even with this, Adichie makes Richard's distant objectivity a subjective one. She complicates his point of view by allowing several markers of subjectivity to slip through his synopses of the country's history. Here is one of the snippets about the country's history in the novel. He writes about Independence. The second war changed the world order:

Empire was crumbling and vocal Nigerian elite mostly from the south had emerged. The North was wary: it feared domination from the more educated south and had always wanted a country separate from the infidel south anyway. But the British had to preserve Nigeria as it was their prized creation, their large market, their thorn in France's eye. To propitiate the North, they fixed the pre-independence elections in favour of the North and wrote a new constitution which gave the North control of the central government. The south too eager for independence accepted this constitution. With the British gone, there would be good things for everyone: "white" salaries long denied Nigerians, promotions, top jobs. Nothing was done about the clamour of the minority groups, and the regions were already competing so fiercely that some wanted separate foreign embassies. At independence in 1960, Nigeria was a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp. (155)

The above is fairly Nigeria's history. The first thing one notices is that Richard writes in the third person. This obviously is to achieve some measure of distance from his subject. The second thing is that the piece is not impersonally written. It has a 'voice,' a human personality behind it. There are traces of human judgments in the piece, thereby pointing to the possibility of error. It is part of Adichie's remarkable sensibility that in giving us snatches of our collective history she not only does that through the refracting eye of a foreigner whose views on the subject can be said to be distant and objective but also problematises the observer's perspective by deftly acknowledging his mediating role as interpreter. "The Snippets" have, however, been attributed to both Richard and Ugwu by different scholars. Jane Bryce (2008) clearly thinks the credit should go to Ugwu. She writes: the main narrative is interspersed with excerpts from a different parallel narrative-in-process known as "The Book" which since he is a writer, we at first attribute to Richard. On the last page, however,

we realize that the story is Ugwu's (p.63). Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2010) seem to think that the credit is Richard's. They write: towards the end of the war, Ugwu is already completing work on his own book "Narrative of the life of a country" and by the end of *Half* we are told that Ugwu writes his dedication last; to master, my good man, an indication that he completes the book (p.166).

The book being, "Narrative of the life of a country" as against *The World was Silent When We Died* in which we have the snippets. We agree with the latter's view because many of the experiences which Ugwu is said to be writing about do not feature in "the snippets". This confusion among scholars should be a tribute to Adichie's nifty deployment of ambiguity in the novel. Adichie also uses the character of Richard to achieve another end: to highlight those admirable aspects of the Igbo culture and history. Through him, we get to know that the Igbos were in the past a republican ethnic group who had no kings and about their remarkable art and so forth. Richard falls in love with an Igbo lady, imbibes her culture and soon begins to learn and eventually masters the Igbo language. Richard evinces absolutely no critical attitude towards the culture of his host community. He, in fact, desperately wishes to assimilate himself into the community. That critical attitude will come from 'an insider,' Kainene.

Richard socialises himself successfully with the ways and manners of his host community. A case in point is the episode of his visit to Nnaemeka's family where he displays the tact and circumspection associated with the breaking of bad news in an African traditional society (64). Another episode is when he goes to meet some foreign Journalists at the airport who have arrived to cover the war. While he is engaging them in some conversation about the war, one of the journalists suddenly blurts out accusingly "You keep saying we" (p.372), "we" of course being the Biafrans. His eventual mastery of the Igbo language and his strenuous attempts to assimilate himself into Igbo society are greeted with some reserve by the Igbo community. Here is a British character from the upper echelons of British society who affectively and cognitively can be said to be Igbo being treated with certain aloofness by the Igbo community. What precisely does Adichie wish to suggest by this? The natural reserve we evince at somebody crudely trying to ingratiate himself with us or is she in fact pointing to a certain stereotype about the Igbo? In any case boundaries have been transgressed. Henceforth, being Igbo cannot longer be defined in absolute terms.

Adichie's third and final use of the character of Richard consists in making him serve as a negation to the British narratives and ideas about the country and the war. Here is a character that in many significant ways realises how complicit his country has been in Nigeria's woes. In the final paragraph of the article he writes about the refugee problem as a result of the pogroms in the North, he makes his country's culpability quite clear (167). Susan is another British character in the novel whose point of view is not focalised as Richard's. Nonetheless we get to hear her views on Nigeria and her peoples through the mediating voice of the narrator. As ethno-nationalities willed into a political entity by the British, there are many things we admire as well as deplore in one another. It was indeed our conflicting values that led to the civil war in the first place. It was obviously important for Adichie to express these contradictions as a contributing factor in the advent of the Civil War. To have a Nigerian verbally express the contradictory values of the three major ethnic groups in this country might be too bitter a truth for our ethnic palates. So Adichie uses Susan. She writes:

She (Susan) spoke with authority about Nigeria and Nigerians when they drove past the noisy markets with music blaring from the shops, the haphazard stalls of the street side hawkers, the gutters thick with mouldy water. She said "they have a marvellous energy, really but very little sense of hygiene I'm afraid" she told him (Richard) the Hausa in the North were a dignified lot, the Igbo were surly and money-loving and the Yoruba were rather jolly, even if they were first rate lick spittle. (55)

The above statements are clearly stereotypes, no doubt, voiced by a cynical, narrow-minded British lady. Though we do not hear her directly in the extract above, for Adichie distils her opinions for us, we must concede the stereotypes come close to the ones we hold of one another. However I am rather struck by the fact that Susan in expressing her opinions about the strengths and the weakness of the three dominant Ethnic groups in Nigeria, had neglected to say what the weakness of the Hausa was. Why this slippage? Do they have a weakness? Why should the question of the Hausa's weakness be left out? Did Adichie run out of informal and euphemistic words with which she had described the others' weaknesses in the case of the Hausas? Is this a concession to discretion or a prime example of a psychological situation in which an over-

traumatized subject despises himself or herself and the friends of her oppressor instead of the oppressor? We must ask these hard questions, if we are to confront our worst impulses as bitterly divided ethnic groups in this country. The fact that Adiche presents Susan with a cynical, ironical voice whose views must not be taken seriously does not help us here. It must be borne in mind that Susan is the creation of Adichie. She has created the character to dramatise certain perceptions that are not unfamiliar with us. She made the character say what she says. It hardly matters whether Adichie holds the same view as her character. My contention is why should the question of the Hausa's weakness left out of her appraisal?

Also, there is the issue of politics of representation in contemporary Nigerian fiction. Adichie should not be singled out for critical flogging a certain Igbo-centric bias in her fiction. Writers as everyone else are part of their society and either actively or passively participate in the political issues of the day, and so their biases sometimes tend to slip into their writings. Sarah Ladipo Manyika is a Nigerian novelist with Yoruba antecedents. In her novel, *In Dependence*, she writes about the love affair between a young Nigerian student in Britain, Tayo and a British middle class student, Vanessa whose grandfather and parents had been part of the British colonial rule in Nigeria. Vanessa's father, Mr. Richardson while hosting his friends, the Murdochs and discussing generally the future of Africa in relation to the civilising mission of Great Britain in the world, opines thus: ...We've had quite the foreign lot to visit including the Nigerian chappie at Balliol. Now that's a bright fellow for you, with good manners, reading PPE at Balliol, and he's Yoruba of course. They've always been the most straightforward. With the Hausa you can never tell what they are up to, and the Igbos are always sly (p.44)

It is interesting to see that Manyika adopts the same dodge and approach as Adichie in *Half* in highlighting the stereotypes we hold of one another as ethnic nationalities. Both novelists have chosen foreign characters to do so. Mr. Richardson and Susan are both British middle class characters, cynical and narrow-minded as they come. Being of Yoruba ethnic provenance Manyika unsurprisingly makes one of her characters say the nicest things of the Yoruba. This kind of representation is not limited to Igbo and Yoruba novelists. Writers from other parts of the country, namely from the north and the south-south, are beginning to come out very strongly to make their own contributions to the circulation and correction of certain stereotypes in our literature in their

narrativations of our national experiences. Earlier, we queried Adichie why she omitted to state precisely what the weakness of the Hausa is, but the fact of the matter is that she was being extremely tactful. A general perception exists in the southern part of Nigeria that the people of the north are not only largely uneducated but are also prone to violence. This perception is perhaps caused by the constant occurrence of ethno-religious crises in that part of the country since independence. It is quite interesting that even though Adichie never quite categorically characterises the people of the north in 'Half' as violent, Abubakar Adam Ibrahim, a novelist from the north, reacted quite irascibly to what he perceived as Adichie's misrepresentation of the north in *Half*. He sees this as part of the general tendency of southern Nigerian writers to misrepresent the north in their writings as largely illiterate and violent. Writing in *Ana Review* (2011), he harangues:

The insensitiveness of Nigerian novelists to the reality of Nigeria's existence and their reader(s)' feeling is worthy of note. Nigeria as a country has had difficult periods that have affected all sectors of the country. Nigerian writers must not retreat to tribal or regional forts and hurl out fiction – distorted facts in novels. After all the writer is an intellectual and should be ideally objective.

Ibrahim is one the group of excellent novelists which include E.E. Sule, Amed Maiwada and Elnathan John that has emerged from the north in recent times/ These writers are not only galvanised by their ambition to create a space for themselves within the hallowed south-dominated halls of Nigerian literary but also more importantly to contest the validity of the southern writers' representations of the north in Nigerian literature. Ibrahim writers further: ...whatever the case, this debate brings to the fore that Nigeria's regional sentiments are very much present with the literary circles. In certain circles the opinion is that every literature or at least most, written by Nigerians of the northern extraction has to be a response to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (p.66). However the merit of Ibrahim's reaction, there seems to be some truth in his critics' claim. In *Half*, Adichie writes of a scene where Kainene distraught and debilitated, tells her boyfriend, Richard how Northern soldiers were killing Igbo officers in Kano following the coup which overthrew Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi's military government. She tells him how Colonel Ododi Ekechi, an Igbo officer died: Northern soldiers put him in a cell in the

barracks and fed him his own shit. He ate his own shit... Then they beat him senseless and tied him to an iron cross and threw him back in his cell. He died tied to an iron cross. He died on a cross (p.138).

This extract above seems loaded with ethno-religious implications. First, the northern soldiers not only killed Colonel Ekechi because he was Igbo but also because of his Christian faith; hence their murder and humiliation of him on the symbol of his faith. Second, the extract serves to depict the people of the north as intolerant of other people's religion, and that this intolerance seems to stem naturally from their Islamic faith in contradistinction to the pacifism of the Christian faith. It is these assumptions that A.A. Ibrahim attempts to dismantle in his novel, *Season of Crimson Blossoms* (2015). In a passage that seems a retaliatory response to the extract we have just quoted from Adichie's *Half*, the novelist writes: Binta fiddled with her fingers. My husband God rest his soul, was killed by some Christian boys he employed. These were people he called by their birth names and did business with. My sister's husband and her son were hacked to death by their Christian neighbours because a woman urged them to (p.271). Despite Ibrahim's arguments to the contrary, it is quite impossible to read the extract above in any other way, but as a response to Adichie's earlier depiction of our national experience. Paul Liam (2017) describes Ibrahim's attempt at correcting the Northern stereotypes in Nigerian contemporary literature as radical. He writes: His reaction to the stereotypes is radical in nature; a juxtaposition of the evil committed by us and the ones committed by them. In other words everyone is guilty of the same charge... (p.272). A little later he adds that Ibrahim shows that: evil is not a pressure of a single ethnic group or religion. This purports that hate and violence is a shared human experience as though the situation is dependent on who is doing the portrayal (p.272).

What we can deduce from the foregoing is that while contemporary Nigerian novelists attempt to create narratives with a pan-Nigerian consciousness, they still seem on occasion unable to transcend their respective ethno-religious biases. This inability is a reflection of the contradictory nature of the Nigerian postcolonial state. The question then arises. What happens to historical truths in an era where everybody seems to be constructing their own narratives about our national experiences tinged with their own ethnocentric biases? Admittedly, we know that writers are not historians, but as cultural producers they have a way of fabricating realities for us and shaping our consciousness. How will

posterity refract historical truth from the ethnic polarities we find in the narrativations of our national experiences in our contemporary fiction? So much have been written about Ugwu being portrayed a bildungsroman character. He is at first a naïve village boy, then a domestic servant, then a soldier and at the end an author. But very little have been written of Adichie's use of his point-of-view to overcome the apparent challenges concerning her narration of the war. Adichie's strongest literary powers seem to reside in her ability to depict a world through the eyes of a naïve, awkward character in his/her teens. Kambili and Ugwu are teenagers around whom Adichie weaves her narratives in both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* respectively. Even in her latest novel, *Americanah* she seems to be at her best when in her frequent flash backs, she writes about Ife Melu's growing up in Nigeria and the beginnings of her love affairs with Obinze. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2010) have drawn attention to Adichie's Bildungsroman-oriented narratives. They write:

Part of the literary success of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has come from the fact of how expertly she has handled the young (especially teenage/adolescent) characters at her artistic disposal; how passionately she has told the stories of their lives, re-codifying and transmuting the common recognisable details of their lives into sublime narrative signposts in the process; how credibly she has made them the centre of the narrative and dramatic action (p.146)

This paper concurs with the above postulations but with a slightly different inflection. War is a complex thing to depict whether in history or literature, still less the several searing events leading to it, especially in a narrative which rates the depictions of the causes of the war as equally important as the war itself. These events are often very complex and multi-faceted, frenetic and searing, discordant and fragmentary. A writer willing to depict these will not only have to make subtle connections between superficially disparate events but will also have to fill out the sequence of these events with dramatic materials and narratives. This is formidably challenging indeed, and will require several pages of furious writing. Adichie deftly negotiates this challenge by adopting the limited points of view of outsiders, separated from the centre of action and events. Here are some examples from the text to prove my point: Ugwu didn't think again of the strange spice or the cat because, while Master had dinner, he sneaked a glass of palm wine from the pot and then another glass, since it

was so sweet, and afterwards he felt as if the inside of his head was coated in sort wool. He could hardly walk from the living room; he heard Master say in an unsteady voice, "To the future of great Africa! To our independent brothers in Gambia and to our Zambian brothers who have left Rhodesia!" followed by laughter in wild bursts. The palm wine had got to Master as well. Ugwu laughed along, even though he was alone in the kitchen and did not know what was funny (p.214). Here is another character who is an outsider on the events much more closer home: They were days when she woke up from her naps feeling clear-headed like today. Her bedroom door was open, and she could hear the rise and fall of voices from the living room... sometimes she followed the conversation. She knew that the university women's association was organising food donations for the refugees, that the markets and railways and tin mines in the North, were said to be empty now that the Igbo had fled, that colonel Ojukwu was now seen as the leader of the Igbos, that people were talking about secession and a new country, which would be named after the bay, the Bight of Biafra. Olanna's head ached...

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 glass lands. Aburi came up often in their conversations: Okeoma would say that Gowon should have followed the agreement he and Ojukwu signed in Aburi or Professor Ezekwe would say that Gowon's reneging after Aburi meant that he did not wish the Igbo well or Odenigbo would proclaim: 'On Aburi we stand'. But how can Gowon make such a turnaround? Okeoma's voice was louder 'He agreed to 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. (pp.158-159)

The characters above whose points of view are focalised, are both distant and separate from the events unfolding; they are eavesdroppers even, on the discourses going on in the sitting-room about the events. One is not only a naive teenager who understands very little of what is happening but who also appears a bit drunk, the other is a female adult over traumatised and recovering from a delirium. In effect Odenigbo and his cronies while increasingly getting drunk, follow the events leading to the war in his sitting-room, while Olanna does so in the bedroom and

Ugwu in the kitchen! Why has Adichie put these characters in different states of 'subconsciousness' in relation to the events they are reacting to? My guess is that she probably knows how highly contentious and divisive the issues she is dealing with are, and to be on safer grounds decides to adopt very uncertain and tentative attitudes and styles in her recreation of the events leading to the war. This shows clearly the fact that while she was writing the novel; she was working with great discretion and restraint, tact and intelligence. Odenigbo is a fiery intellectual whose radicalism sometimes verges on the irrational. He is naturally a benevolent man. We see this in his undeviating love for Olanna, even though he a couple of times breaks his fidelity to her, and also in his fair-handed treatment of his domestic servant, Ugwu. He is depicted as often engaging in fierce intellectual debates with his cronies before the war. But how has Adichie truly presented this character to us? It is pertinent that I quote at some length some part of his numerous debates with his group. Ugwu who as usual had been eavesdropping on the arguments of the group from the kitchen, was able to catch the following: "You are digressing" Professor Ezeka said, and shook his hand in his usual superior manner. "Maybe it is a European notion" Miss Adebayo said, "but in the bigger picture, we are all one race" "What bigger picture?" Master asked "The bigger picture of the whiteman! Can't you see that we are not all alike except to white eyes?" Master's voice rose easily, Ugwu had noticed, and by his third glass of brandy, he would start to gesture with his glass, leaning forwards until he was seated on the very edge of his armchair..."Of course, we are all alike, we all have white oppression in common" Miss Adebayo said dryly "Pan-Africanism is simply the most sensible response".

Of course, of course but my point is that the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe" Master said I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed 'black' to be as different as possible from his 'white'. But I was Igbo before the white man came. "Professor Ezeka snorted and shook his head, thin legs crossed. But you became aware that you were Igbo because of the whiteman. The Pan Igbo idea itself came only in the face of white domination. You must see that tribe as it is today is as colonial a product as nation and race" Professor Ezeka crossed his legs. "The Pan-Igbo idea existed long before the white man!". Master shouted, "Go and

ask the elders in your village about your history". "The problem is that Odenigbo is a hopeless tribalist, we need to keep him quiet" Miss Adebayo said. (pp. 20-21)

Later in another part of the novel, Odenigbo declares: "This nationalism that means we should aspire to indifference about our own individual cultures is stupid (p.109). The truth or otherwise of all the contending views expressed above hardly matters for the moment as the way the novelist has presented to us the articulators of those views. In the dialogue we see two characters of the same ethnic extraction engaged in a fierce argument: one argues for the bigger picture while the other insists on the tenability of the smaller one. A third character outside the ethnic province of the other two supports the former though less ardently. Professor Ezeka is presented as a supercilious character who though does not assert his views as energetically as Odenigbo, leaves us with no doubt as to the superiority of his learning and his views. Mrs. Adebayo who perhaps nurses a secret crush on Odenigbo is presented as someone not sure of the views she is asserting. However, the impression we have of Odenigbo is someone who is rather irrational in his views. One will have to be irrational to make the kind of reckless ad-hominem retort that Odenigbo makes to Professor Ezeka: "God and ask your elders in your village about your history". There are two things we immediately notice in Odenigbo's position: one, he sounds rather defensive, and two his allusion to a narrative which urges us to aspire to "nationalism" at the expense of our respective ethnic identities is false. I think the narrative has been about the need to have our respective ethnic identities and narratives re-signified in ways that divest them of their inherent parochialisms and dangerous impulses and meanings so that they fit into a more inclusive and comprehensive Nigerian story. But our divided and bitterly envenomed co-habitation continues to distort this narrative. Odenigbo's views therefore represent a form of throwback to the tribal days of old. I concur with the character from my own ethnic group and declare Odenigbo a recidivist tribalist, one who though must not be kept quiet, must by all democratic means be kept away from our politics.

Odenigbo's Igbo compatriot Professor Ezeka on the other hand may have displayed the same supercilious attitude towards his "elders in the village" and so through self-alienation denied himself the knowledge of their ways, but there can be no doubt that being a learned individual, he must have read *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrows of God* and learned

something of the noble qualities as well as tragedies of his literary fathers: Okonkwo and Ezeulu to make him realize the futility of holding on to an idea whose time has passed, and so makes him amenable to the inexorable sweeps of time. If Adichie has used the character of Odenigbo [one whose name literally means He who writes in Igbo] to dramatise certain ideas perhaps current among her own ethnic group, then she subtly counters or more appropriately questions them by the character of Kainene. Kainene is a complex character, complex simply because of the air of mystery with which Adichie surrounds her. Adichie neither gives her a narrative perspective nor does she allow us to hear her in much discussion. Her contributions to discussions with the other characters seem minimal, cryptic and blunt. She is the only true critical voice in 'Half'. Adichie has used Kainene to question certain concepts we usually consider as givens - nation, ethnicity, capitalism, revolution, etc., but most especially the idea of 'Igboness'. Here is a character who against conventions takes a whiteman as lover unlike her sister, Olanna who leaves her Hausa lover Mohammed to pitch her tent with a character from her own ethnic group. Unlike Odenigbo whose pride in his ethnic group is blind and excessive, and who constantly asserts it as though he were in some doubt about it, Kainene's pride in her Igboness is present in everything she does - calm, clear and undeviating.

In fact the only time she is forced to voice her ethnic pride is when she has to correct a pregnant woman who refuses to be treated by Dr. Inyang 'a non-Igbo' because she considers the doctor a 'saboteur'. 'Saboteur!' The pregnant woman said." It is you non Igbo who are showing the enemy the way! Ha pu m! It is you people that showed them the way to my hometown...We are all Biafrans! Anyincha bu Biafra." Kainene said 'Do you understand? We are all Biafrans!' (p.320). Here is another example of the transgression of boundaries. Here is the idea of 'Biafraness' being resignified to embrace non-Igbos. Adichie underscores in the scene the fact that old certainties have broken down and ethnic boundaries are no longer secure. The nature of post-colonial societies has made the self inevitably syncretic. It is impossible to withdraw into one's ethnic cocoon without constantly having to shift backward into some pure, narrower and narrower ethnic recess that is impossible to attain. The fact is even in one's ethnic group there are several grades of tribal discriminations. All this Adichie eloquently demonstrates in 'Half'. Kainene also represents a self-critical attitude, questioning all cant and hypocrisy. In a discussion with Richard, she pokes fun at Odenigbo's

socialist pretensions. And when Richard hints that socialism would work well in Nigeria if done right, Kainene retorts: Socialism would never work for the Igbo... Ogbenyealu is a common name for girls and you know what it means? Not to be married by a poor man." To stamp that on a child at birth is capitalism at its best (p.69).

In another place in the novel, she informs Richard about the outcome of her bidding for a government contract. The man in charge was Igbo, and Madu said he was keen to give the contract to a fellow Igbo. So I was lucky. And he's asking only for a five per cent cut (p.81). Nepotism and corruption in Nigeria are of course not reducible to one particular ethnic group alone. Adichie has used the above incident merely as an example of how some people from every ethnic group in the country trades in nepotism and corrupt practices. Mohammed which is the last character we will briefly discuss hardly merits a sustained glance. He is a rather bloodless character, no more than an ideal through which Adichie makes a couple of important points. His relationship with Olanna seems from the beginning destined for the rocks. The respective parents of both the lovers view their relationship with extreme reservations. This is another instance in the novel that underscores the ethnic tensions and suspicions among the Nigerian people. There is no doubt that Adichie has written a very 'Igbo' novel but not in the sense in which her ethnocentric panegyrists have almost irrationally interpreted it. Some of the faults we have noticed in her writings arise out of the difficulties a writer encounters who sets out on a deliberate programmatic quest to compose works based on large fashionable ideas of the times.

All the themes that run through Adichie's writings to date can be abstracted roughly into two broad ideas: feminism and what Obi Nwankama (2008) describes as "the Igbo experience in a postcolonial nation". For instance, in her attempt to make some feminist point, Adichie creates strong women - characters, but these so-called strong women not only lack the courage to put an end to the unfortunate relationship in which they are involved with their respective men, but also seem to find their grace in small vindictive acts. Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* endures in silence her husband's battery of her while lacing his meals over the years with small doses of poison. In *Half*, Olanna sleeps with Richard just because she has found her lover, Odenigbo to be unfaithful, and Kainene burns Richard's manuscripts for sleeping with her twin-sister. If all these instances are meant to score some feminist point, it is a petty one indeed. Compared with its superb beginning, the latter parts of the novel

are not well-handled. The reason is quite obvious, isn't it? Adichie did not experience the war. Her descriptions of the war and its horrors were only based on research, imagination and talent. If we feel quite uncomfortable with this part of the novel it is precisely what the novelist wants us to feel. The horrors are harrowing enough to make one declare: *We need no mourners in our stride, No remorse, no tears, Only this: resolve, That the locust shall never again visit our farmstead.*

Conclusion

Adichie in *Half*, confronts us again, especially the present generation of Nigerians with certain issues that have been the bane of our co-habitation ever before the war and since. There is something Adichie deftly inters in the roles and assertions she ascribes to her characters, in the way she has shaped and articulated her narrative. When abstracted with some reflection, it turns out to be little of what we readily assume it is, that is how ethnicity permeates and structures everything we do and represent in Nigeria, but much more of something approaching the notion that seldom has the question of ethnicity been made a subject of self-scrutinising reflection in our public discourse. Ethnicity is asserted only in essentialist terms when we want to claim political and institutional privileges.

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