



**Point of View: Manner of Realising The Matter in Adichie's
*Half of A Yellow Sun***

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ABSTRACT

This study is based on the fact that writers of no mean repute use 'technique' or 'manner' to create meaning or matter. The best form of art is the blending of form and content; means and end; manner and matter. Therefore, the uniqueness of any novelist's product is contingent upon how well or otherwise their peculiar application of fictional technique or manner such as point of view has enhanced the expression of that writer's world view or vision of society. This study aims at examining point of view as a technique or manner available to Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, in order to demonstrate how it has helped her to discover meaning or matter. To this end, the concept of point of view or manner as resource for realising matter or meaning has been defined. There is also an x-ray of the effects or matter derived through the proper application of the technique of point of view in the work under review. Finally, a concluding section presents a panoramic view of all that have been discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Novelists of worth apply literary innovation through linguistic creativity, proper selection of and the effective application of relevant fictional methods in the process of realising specific narrative objectives. They include: language, irony, symbolism, point of view, plot and fictional structure, and characterisation. African writers have a lot to write about. They include slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, military incursion into politics, civil wars, capitalism, feminism and so on. These phenomena have had huge impact on the continent and its people. They, therefore, constitute the meaning, effect and experience which most African writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie try to communicate to their readers. To do this, technique or manner which is

the mediating principle between experience and the successful narrative product comes in. A work of fiction can only be said to be complete only when the author's experience or form has successfully been transformed into quality art.

It is in the clan of world class writers, who use manner to realise matter, that we find Adichie whose *Half of a Yellow Sun* forms the subject of this study. Adichie's story mixes well with the manner of its presentation in a bid to create an organic whole. She follows the trend of social, economic, political and historical events in Nigeria, Africa and The United Kingdom as they affect the lives of individuals or characters. All these inform her artistic vision. Through the use of Igbo language and translation, Adichie promotes and expresses unbridled pride in African culture. In following closely the developmental trends in the lives of individuals in Nigeria, Europe and America, Adichie applies aspects of narrative technique in order to suit the demands of effect and meaning at different times including the period between 1967 – 1970 when the Nigerian Civil War took place. Here, she takes "...on the intimidating horror of Nigeria's civil war (Achebe, 2006: Blurbs). As Wainaina (2006) would put it:

We see how every person's belonging is contested in a new nation; find out that nobility of purpose has no currency in this contest; how powerfully we can love; how easily we can kill; how human we can be when a war dictates itself to stripping our humanity from us (blurb).

It is, therefore, absolutely necessary to find out the extent to which Adichie has successfully manipulated form and manner – her fictional methods – to realise meaning, effect or manner in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Point of View as a Literary Window

Novelists of acclaim apply literary innovation through linguistic creativity, proper selection of and the application of relevant fictional methods in the process of realising specific narrative objectives. They include: language, irony, plot and fictional structure, point of view and characterisation. The uniqueness of any writer's technique depends largely on the peculiarity of the manipulation of fictional methods. When a writer fails to effectively manoeuvre a particular fictional method at their disposal, the realisation of the narrative objective in the

that regard becomes an uphill task. Writers in the clan of Adichie apply certain literary technique which helps them to express their world view. Of all the fictional methods mentioned above, Adichie's point of view in *Half of a Yellow Sun* form the subject of this study. Who tells the tale in the novel; the narrator or the author? A work of fiction, such as the one under review, can be complete only when there exists a crystal clarity in the application of the technique of point of view. Since form can successfully be manipulated by a writer to inform the readers, and manner can also be used to achieve matter, it, therefore, becomes necessary to find out the extent to which Adichie has successfully or otherwise manoeuvred form and manner – the point of view – to achieve his narrative objective. In other words, this study seeks to find out how effectively or otherwise Adichie's application of the fictional technique of point of view has helped him to express his vision of society in *Half of a Yellow Sun*..

Set against other forms of writing, point of view as the telling voice, finds in fiction incomparable hospitality. As a narrative technique, it brings to mind the perspective from which the teller tells the tale. It is the voice we hear in the story, the tone and mood it adopts during the narrative, and the overall meaning, message or impression that it hopes to convey to the audience. Onukaogu et al (2011) see point of view as:

...the narrative position of the writer; the point from which he tells the story. Does he tell the story as if he is part of the story, as if the action of the story also includes and involves him? Or is he telling the story from... the narrative position of an "independent" observer or witness of what happened to others? (p.106)

This means that the narrative voice determines the thoughts, feelings, private history, reactions and responses of characters. It colours the presentation and moulding of characters. The setting, plot and fictional structure, and the themes of a tale are all conditioned by the thought process of the narrator. It, therefore, follows that no story can rise above the quality and thinking pattern of a narrator.

Anderson et al (1989) has similarly observed that:

When we speak of point of view, we simply mean the person the writer has chosen to see the story and to tell it as well. In broad terms, there are three points of view: omniscient, third person limited, and first person...The more you think of it the more you realise what a huge difference point of view makes to a story. (p.135)

The implication here is that the tone and mood, experience, level of education or ignorance, idiosyncrasy and prejudices, feelings and memories of different narrators can give a particular tale entirely various effects, meanings and messages. Lubbock (1968) points out that “The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of point of view – the question of the relation in which the narrator stands” (p.251). The truth in the above views becomes clearer when we consider the fact that the narrating voice in a story is not necessarily the author but a representative whom he selects to 'represent' or reflect his world view through the tale.

Although detached from the story, the omniscient narrator's position is comparable to that of a 'god' looking down on earthly characters and is able to tell everything about every character including how each one feels and thinks, their past, present, and future. The narrative voice in the third-person limited point of view on the other hand, focuses on the thoughts and feelings of just one character. The audience (reader) experiences the story mainly through the voice, feelings, memories and consciousness of only one character. The weakness in this point of view is that the audience is exposed to a great deal of the private history, reflections and responses of one character in the story, but would not be let into much about the others.

In the first-person point of view, the narrative voice is one of the characters in the tale and, therefore, uses the “I”, first-person pronoun (Anderson, 1989, p.135-136). The snag about this narrative voice is that his inability and choice as regards information or insight, greatly affect the unravelling of the knots of the story. The fundamental question that goes through the mind of the average listener of the first-person storytelling voice is whether or not the narrator is telling the truth. Therefore, reliability or the absence of it becomes the central issue in listening to the “I” voice.

The second person point of view also exists. Here, the narrator seems to be interacting with the protagonist using the pronoun 'you'. According to Onukaogu (2010):

...the narrative voice speaks to the central character about the character's own experience...knows almost everything about the protagonist but does not arrogate to itself an omniscient status whereby it could tell about other characters...it is guided by the protagonist's awareness of himself and the world around him (p.327).

This 'you' exchange between the protagonist and the narrator exclude others, that is, both the audience and the other characters. Similarly, Abrams (2005) observes that it is “the mode in which the story gets told solely, or at least primarily, an address by the narrator to someone he calls by the second-person pronoun 'you', who is presented as experiencing that which is narrated” (p.243). Nwachukwu-Agbada cited in Onukaogu et al (2010) has identified a storey telling perspective which he dubs objective/camera point of view. Here, “...the author makes no attempt to describe them [citizens populating the fictional world] nor to penetrate the recesses of their consciousness, nor to judge their actions and reasons for doing what they do” (p.29). The treatment given to the characters is at best skin-deep and cursory.

The central idea being proposed in this part of the study is that the narrating voice adopted by the author and the manner in which he manipulates this particular fictional method usually emphasise his narrative objective and, by extension, the overall message or meaning. In other words, a writer is provided the opportunity to show-case his vision of society which the fictional world in the story reflects by means of the pivotal technique of point of view. Through the storytelling voice, the writer's intended effect is delivered in snippets and snatches thereby sealing the blend between the means and the end, form and content, and between manner and matter.

Point of View in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Point of view means the perspective or angle from which the narrator, often chosen by the writer, narrates the story. Booth (1970) argues that since the essence of analysing point of view is to reveal the connection between it and the writer's fictional objectives, the inherent traits of the narrative voice determines the nature and characteristics of the story presentation. According to Agwu (1993):

It relates directly to the narrating act, to the triangular relationship between the author, the narrator... and the story subject. In terms of the narrator, it answers such questions as: Who tells the story? How does he tell it? And to what effect? (30)

This implies that point of view affects the overall messages and themes of a work of fiction and that the type and experience of the narrator is a matter for very serious analysis (Friedman, 1967, p.100). It is by the means of point of view that such writers of fiction in the class of Adichie are able to reveal the way the values and attitudes, which form part of their artistic worlds should be considered and analysed.

This part of study is going to look at Adichie's use of the omniscient narrator who serves as an all-knowing maker, not restricted to time, place or character, and free to move and to comment at will. Although the author assumes a detached position, this study shall attempt to locate meanings, effects or matter in the various instances of the omniscient narrator's perceived intrusion into the past and present activities, thoughts, feelings, and desires of such characters as Ugwu, Olanna, Odenigbo, Kainene, Richard and so forth who populate the world of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

The author uses the omniscient narrator to reveal to the reader how the colonial masters and the world powers have continued to distort history and master-mind atrocities in their favour, and to the detriment of Nigerians and Africans. This she does through the point of Odenigbo's view on history:

'You know who really killed Lumumba?' Master said, looking up from a magazine. 'It was the Americans and the Belgians. It had nothing to do with Katanga'... 'You are my houseboy', Master said. 'If I order you to go outside and beat a woman walking on the street with a stick... who is responsible for the wound, you or me?(21)

The omniscient narrator observes with dismay that "They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Niger. That is rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born" (23).

He even discloses Ugwu's secret wish that the so-called Mungo Park had not offended Master so much as to make him react with so much vehemence.

Adichie uses the omniscient narrator to further explore the issue of misconceptions about the Igbos and Africans by the West. The reader is made to follow Richard on a fact-finding journey to Igbo-Ukwu, "...the home of the roped pot..." (92). As Richard ignorantly enquires to know whether the burial chamber discovered during excavation by the archeologists was for the Igbo king, the omniscient narrator is used to put the Igbo history in proper perspective as the translator explains to Richard:

Pa said he thought you were among the white people who know something. He said the people of Igboland do not know what a king is. We have priests and elders. The burial place was maybe for a priest.... It is because the white man gave us warrant chiefs that foolish men are calling themselves king today.... Richard apologised...the Igbos were said to be a republican tribe for thousands of years...but one of the articles about the Igbo-Ukwu findings had suggested that perhaps they once had kings and later deposed them (94).

From the foregoing, Adichie, no doubt does not take the issue of misconception about the life and times of the Igbo race lying low.

Through the same omniscient narrator, Adichie's audience is catapulted to the scene in Susan's house in Lagos. Here, Susan, a Briton, drunk, indulges in idle gossip and unsubstantiated hearsay about the Igbo race in particular and Nigerians in general. Hear her:

There are lots and lots of Igbo people here... Very Jewish, really. And to think they are relatively uncivilized;... I remember somebody telling me when I first came to be careful about hiring an Igbo houseboy because, before I knew it, he would own my house and the land it was built on. Another small whiskey? Richard shook his head.... Her voice echoed...and worsened the splintering pain in his head (192).

The expression, "I remember somebody telling me..." erodes the authenticity of the above ascertain. That she was apparently drunk explains her warped and twisted imagination, and that Richard declined her offer of whiskey, showed his disapproval and exception to the spurious commentary on a people she hardly knows. And for the fact that it worsened, "the pain in his [Richard's] head after witnessing the massacre of the Igbos at the Kano airport, shows the extent to which Susan's reckless banter irked him. Adichie, perhaps, intends to expose how most people from the West, under some kind of influence ranging from alcohol, drug or simply racism pass ignorant judgements on Africans; assumptions that even fellow European sometimes disagree with.

The misconceptions which Adichie sets about to correct through the omniscient narrator is not limited to the Igbo race but extends to all Nigerians in general. Through the eye-of-God narrative technique, the reader is introduced to the scene in which the newspaper articles published in London which misrepresented facts about the civil war in Nigeria annoys Richard:

The articles annoyed him. 'Ancient tribal hatreds' the *Herald* wrote, was the reason for the massacres. *Time* magazine titled its piece MAN MUST WHACK...but the writer had taken whack literally and gone on to explain that Nigerians were so prone to violence that they even wrote about the necessity of it on their passenger lorries.... But there was a hollowness to all the accounts, an echo of unreality (205).

By the same token, the reaction of Richard, a Briton privy to a 'first-hand' information about the real situation on ground, is made available to the reader. Bugged by the falsity of the English newspaper reports, "Richard sent a terse letter off to *Time*. Using Nigeria's Pidgin English, he used the term *whack* which means to eat" (205). He does not stop there. He writes about other subjects such as: war the refugee problem, displaced Nigerian Igbos belonging to different spheres of life, the aim being to sound it loud and clear that "The notion of the recent killings being the product of 'age-long' hatred is therefore misleading.... If this is hatred, then it is very young, which was caused, simply, by the divide-and-rule policy of the British colonial exercise" (206).

The fictional technique of making the reader see the above European misconceptions about Nigerians and the Igbos from the eyes

of a British national is very remarkable. It underscores their intensity and validates their erasure. Perhaps, Adichie's intention here is to prove that yellow journalism is not the exclusive preserve of developing nations; it could be found anywhere, even in Britain. The choice of Richard for the clean-up exercise is like using a pig to tidy up a pigsty. It makes the effort appear impressive and unusual and, therefore, more noteworthy. The issue of European misconceptions about Africans has continued to bug many African writers. Irked by a similar situation, Achebe (2008) wishes:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the Europeans acting on God's behalf, salvaged them...(58).

The author passes comment on the overall colonial experience in Nigeria and Africa in general. For instance, the omniscient narrator is aware of the aimlessness of Richard Churchill's endeavour in Nigeria. According to Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2010):

He remains shy, self-conscious, and deficient of a proper sense of his own identify... He cannot actualise the idea of family or nation... he is seized by Susan Granville-Pitts who forces him to repeat the nanny sequence all over again. Then he meets Kainene (25).

The constant reference to Winston Churchill, the former British Prime Minister each time Richard is introduced to the other characters is a constant reminder of the involvement of the British colonial experience in Africa. Like Winston Churchill, representing the British government's activities in Africa, Richard Churchill's "self-consciousness, deficiency, in defining a proper sense of his own identify" (25) point to the failure of the colonial experience in Africa. Just like the British colonial administration did not know for sure what, in the positive sense, their mission in Africa had been, Richard sometimes wondered what Harrison, his houseboy would say if he confessed about the uncertainty of the subject of his writing. He had written sketches which he had discarded. They covered subjects

ranging from archeology, love story to life in a small Nigerian town (97).

The indiscriminate exploitative and dehumanizing tendency towards neo-colonialism in Africa is further brought to the attention of the reader through the third person's narrative point of view. During an argument with Professor Ezeka, Odenigbo stresses the fact that Africans are being dehumanised in South Africa and Rhodesia; that the West “fermented what happened in the Congo”, and would not let either the American blacks or the Australian Aborigines vote. “... but the worst is what they are doing here.... They are controlling us from behind drawn curtains, and his is very dangerous” (141). The senselessness, incoherence, and aimlessness of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa is further brought home to the reader through Richard's stream of consciousness as he “sipped his beer and wondered what Okeoma would think if he knew the truth – that even he [like the colonial masters] did not know whether it was a novel or not because the pages he had written [like colonialism] did not make any coherent whole” (141). Little wonder “He started to crumple them page by page...” just like colonialism destroyed, crumpled the economy and underdeveloped Africa from country to country “...until he had a jagged pile next to his dust bin” (141), something similar to the heap of crumbling economies in colonial Africa today.

The sad implications of colonialism is expressed further as the omniscient narrator opens to us the scene where Colonel Madu recounts his ordeal as he narrowly escaped being butchered in the North during the massacre. Adichie's narrator permits the reader to hear Madu blame the mutiny of 1966 in the Nigerian Army on the British Colonial Administrations ethnic balancing in the armed forces which polarized the army along ethnic lines. “The problem was the ethnic balance policy. I ... told our GOC that it was polarizing the army.... But our GOC said no, our *British* GOC” (176). The omniscient narrator had witnessed every hidden detail of Olanna's Dark Swoops after she comes back from Kano where she had witnessed the massacre of her relatives and other Igbos. The narrator even sees friends and relatives come by “...to say *ndo* – sorry” (195) and informs the reader of “...other stories too, of how British academics at the University of Zaria encouraged the massacres and sent students out to incite the youths, how crowds at the Lagos motor parks had booed and taunted, 'Go, Igbo, go, so that garri will be cheaper!....’” (196). Adichie's all-seeing narrator also presents us with snatches of conversation during the celebration on the streets of Biafra, all blaming Britain for the Biafran woes:

'It is Russia you should blame, not Britain.'
'Definitely Britain. Our boys brought us some Nigerian shell cases from Nsukka sector for analysis. Every single one had UK WAR DEPARTMENT on it.' 'We keep intercepting British accents on their radio messages too (244).

Perhaps, Adichie's intention here is to debunk the exaggerated view of the positive colonial values in Nigeria or Africa. This she achieves by leaving the narration in the voice of an omnipresent narrator that is careful in selecting for presentation to the readers only those scenes that point to the snag about the colonial encounter in the past. According to Taiwo (1985):

It is important to learn about the past to which [Africans] make constant reference – a past which was almost wiped out by two important historical events, the slave trade and colonialism... They show the devastating effect of this contact on his culture, which has led to his present dilemma (29).

Adichie's concern derives from a concern with the contemporary African situation. Adichie, through the omniscient narrator “... delves into the past only because otherwise it would be impossible to understand how the present came into being and what the trends are for the near future” (Rodney, 1972, p.7). Through the all-seeing narrator, Adichie joins the vanguard of African novelists concerned with thorough examination and elucidation of colonialism and neo-colonialism in order to formulate the strategy and tactics of Nigerian or African development. Orie (2011) could not agree more as he avers:

We write either to educate Africans and/or re-educate the whites...miffed and necessarily recalcitrant and demurrals at the prejudiced way they have treated us; or to sensitise ourselves on how far we have come as a new independent continent (98).

Therefore, Adichie sets out to skilfully recollect our colonial past through a narrator's eye-of-God point of view as a way of either re-educating or sensitizing the readers on the dark side of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Through the omniscient narrator, Adichie calls attention to the injustice of the late 60's against the Igbos of Nigeria. The omniscient narrator presents the readers with an array of gory scenes of unmentionable war crimes. Anchored on *The Book: The world Was Silent When We Died*, the narrator chronicles the bombing of schools, markets, churches and even hospitals. He even hears, for the benefit of the readers, the sad and desperate lamentations on Radio Biafra on the complicity of world powers in the carnage and mass murder of the innocent Igbos: The African states have fallen prey to the British-American imperialist conspiracy to use the committee's recommendations as a pretext for a massive arms support for their puppet and tottering neo-colonialist regime in Nigeria... (206).

He even sees Okeoma cast an apologetic glance at Olanna before painting a verbal picture of how his commander (a mercenary) drinks whiskey like water after which "... he throws girls on their backs in the open, where the men can see him and does them..." (335) or abuses them sexually. We are also told about how surprised Odenigbo's mother must have been when she was shot. The omnipresent narrator witnesses the mass execution of helpless civilians who were promised rice if only they "... would come out and say 'One Nigeria'". This they did but "... the vandals shot them, men, women, and children. Everyone" (463). And to drive the idea of genocide home, we are told emphatically that "There is nobody left in the Njokamma family. Nobody left" (463).

The omniscient narrator witnesses the cold-blooded killing of Nnaemeka at the Kano airport; the soldiers as they "... ran out to the tarmac and pulled out Igbo people who had already boarded and lined them up and shot them and left them there..." (153); the splitting open of pregnant women; and the spectacle of the mother carrying in a bowl the head of her dead child as a memento. According to Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2010):

The neurotic and psychotic motivations for the woman's act of putting her dead baby's head in a bowl would then tally with Olanna's

psychological devastation as occasioned by the pogrom, and on the other, with the several cases of shell-shocked victims going paranoid in the story (87).

In painting these horrifying spectacles of war, Adichie's intention is perhaps to draw the attention of Nigerians, especially the younger ones to the devastating effects of wars. This becomes necessary as the nation goes through various forms of political, military and economic upheavals that recently include terrorism. By this token, those beating the drums of war and their eager dancers would be reminded that it is an ill wind that blows no one any good. This is in line with the regretful tone of Mene in Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985) as he admonishes:

You will not know that war is foolish until you have fought inside it for some time and suffer very much as I have really suffered in this foolish terrible war that has separated me from my wife and mama (150).

CONCLUSION

In Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the technique or manner of point of view takes up a pivotal position and transforms into a determiner of other fictional factors within the novel; and in fact, the nucleus of the matter, meaning or the message the author intends for the audience, the reader. The third person's omniscient point of view has served as Adichie's window into the Nigerian society as it grappled with first, the pogrom, and then, the resulting civil war. Her choice in this regard relates to her story telling skills, to the tripartite connection involving the novelist, the narrating voice, and the themes, messages, meaning or matter. In this work of fiction, Adichie has successfully chosen an omniscient narrator thereby assuming an anonymous position, and the effect has been very fulfilling and rewarding.

In other words, Adichie's factorial voice has successfully chosen the relevant recipe for this fictional product and skilfully fashioned the combination and arrangement of the materials in the way the various characters have been ushered in and developed; the quality of the incidents and how they related to one another; the complexion of the narrating tone; the lay out of the stream of consciousness, and the manner of presenting symbols. At the end, each is in tandem with the all-

seeing narrative voice. This project has been as convincing as it has been successful on account of Adichie's reluctance to interfere in the narrating act.

In summary, by means of the manner of omniscient point of view, Adichie has successfully revealed her artistic opinions and views of the values and attitudes which the imagined Nigerian society in the late 60's during the civil war entails. The matters; her vision of the Nigerian society are situated in various levels within the eye-of-God narrator's point of view. In this way, the manner makes the matter tell.

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