

History and Imaginative Creation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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Abstract

Fiction has been the means through which the writer makes his/her experiences known. The writer is a lens through which the past is recovered and offers the means to its understanding. It represents an elucidation of social reality. It is also in this sense that literature is seen as a national biography, recounting the social conditions of certain periods in a nation's history. Therefore, this research highlights the extent to which the novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie through characters, styles, plots, settings, and events, portrays the interplay of fiction and historicity in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). The study also investigates the different scopes of history prevalent in the selected novel as regards its political, cultural, economic, religious, social, and aesthetic patterns. This study adopted New Historicism as its theoretical framework which advocates the reading of a literary text to its era. The implication is that each text is said to assume proper function when set side-by-side with the history it textualizes, that is history codified. Methodologically, this study is Content Analysis based. Some critical works on the writings of the novelists by other critics were used as secondary sources.

Keywords: Literature, Fiction, History, Imagination

Introduction

Literature draws on human experiences and tries to communicate it back to humanity in an ordered and artistic form. Fiction, being one of the genres of literature, is created in the imagination of its writer, though it may be based on a true story or situation. It encompasses an act of invention so that reality is not typically assumed or affected. Science fiction, fan fiction, flash fiction, mysteries, romance, thriller, fantasy, and crime fiction are all genres of fiction in the form of prose, especially short stories and novels. In fiction, the author invents the story and makes up the characters, the plot, the dialogue, and the setting. A fictional work does not claim to tell a true story, instead, it immerses the reader in an experience that he/she may never have in real life, introduces him/her to various types of people one may never visit in any other way and takes him/her to places he/she may have never been to. The writer creates an imaginary story and is free to deviate from reality. The truth that applies to history may or may not apply to fiction.

Historicity is an essential part of history, which helps us to know about the past through historical accounts of myths, legends, and tales of the people, which have proven over the years to be the bag of knowledge, information, and fertile sources of materials for novelists. This brings us fully to the ideas of historicity, which is the historical actuality of persons and events, meaning the quality of being part of history as opposed to being historical myths, legends, or fiction. Historicity focuses on the true value of knowledge of the past and, as well, is seen as the characteristic of having been in history.

Some critics like David Harvey, Martin Heidegger, Oswald Spengler, M. Bergson, and Alfred North Whitehead argue that historicity is an aspect of all-natural events that take place in space and time. Others like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Reinhart Koselleck, David Hume, and R. G Collingwood argue it as an attribute reserved to certain human circumstances, in agreement with the practice of historiography. Herbert Marcuse explains historicity as that

which “defines history and thus distinguishes it from ‘nature’ or from the ‘economy’ and signifies the meaning we intend when we say of something that is ‘historical’” (22). M.A.R Habib also contributes to the idea of historicity when he states that, “Historicism has been characterized by a number of features. Most fundamentally, there is an insistence that all systems of thought, all phenomena, all institutions, all works of art, and all literary texts must be situated within a historical perspective” (265).

Various periods in world history, also, have been associated with some literary trends which have effectively discussed or related humanity to the ideas of fiction and history. According to Terry Eagleton, “Literature draws strength from actual life, it deals with the joys, sorrows, poverty, plenty and above all, death to which man is subjected and which is man’s enemy” (33). To this effect, this research work is based on the accounts of historical spheres which the selected writer has drawn her sources from □ the Nigerian-Biafra War (1967-1970).

Furthermore, the concept of fiction as deriving value from historical reality is the result of the theory of its origin because a good fiction writer should possess some sense of history as espoused by T.S Elliot. Here, fiction and historicity are more alike discourses as they communicate with humanity, because they tend to evaluate and analyze the ways in which humanity reacts to the events in their environment or the role they play in such events. This brings to mind the idea of faction which is the blend of fiction and facts as used by any creative writer. Faction, in short, as regards this research embraces historicity. This is because history is also a fact. Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times*, in a review called faction, “an unfortunate genre of writing that evades the responsibilities of both history and fiction. While it trades on the news value of a story, it obeys none of the rules of journalism; while it exploits the liberties of fiction, it demands little exercise of the imagination” (1).

A historian and a fiction writer create essentially the same thing: a narrative. Part of the difference seems to lie in their motivation, their intent, and their ultimate goal. A historian will try to approach history and his work with at least an objective of adhering to the truth, with no injection of fiction or creativity as far as this is possible. It is possible that a fiction writer has the same goal. But in this case, the possible motivations are endless and may be very different from the truth objective a historical writer has. In modern African literature, the interplay of fiction and history has been complementary as well as problematic. Its problematic dimension is that some critics disagree with the blend of these categories (fiction and history); hence, the problem of this study is the gap and interactive possibilities and dimensions between fiction and historical facts as well as their interaction, interpretation, and understanding in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. And analyzing how the novelist fictionalizes history in the selected novel as regards events, characters, contexts and styles, settings and techniques reflect historical facts and project literature. How the novelist employs literary aesthetics and elements to clothe history realistically, authentically yet imaginatively.

The researcher in this study analyzes Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* and examines how her work is simultaneously understood through cultural and historical contexts. It also looks at how the her novel is influenced by historical facts of the time in which it was produced, as well the social sphere in which it moved, the books and theories that may have influenced it, especially the author’s country’s recent or pre-independence history.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, the theory of New Historicism framed the study. The New Historicism is a term coined by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982 when he collected some essays and then, “out of a kind of desperation to get the introduction done, he wrote that the essays represented something he called a ‘new historicism’, which became popular in the 1980s, reacting against both the formalist view of the related texts to the economic infrastructure. (Habib, 266)

As a literary theory, New Historicism identifies the authenticated events, characters, people and patterns in a situated context. Habib explains further,

New historicism saw the literary text as a kind of discourse situated within a complex of cultural discourses—religious, political, economic, aesthetic—which both shaped it, and in their turn, were shaped by it. Perhaps what was new about the procedure was its insistence, drawn from Michel Foucault and poststructuralism, that “history” itself is a text, an interpretation, and there is no single history. (266)

It also rejects any notion of historical progress or teleology and breaks away from any literary historiography based on the study of genres and figures. In the same way, the “culture” in which New Historicism situates literary texts is itself regarded as a textual construct. Hence, New Historicism refuses to accord any kind of unity or homogeneity to history or culture, viewing both as harbouring networks of contradictory, competing, and un-reconciled forces and interests.

New Historicism views literature as one discourse among many cultural discourses, insisting on engaging with this entire complex in a localized manner, refusing to engage in categorical generalizations or to commit to any definite political stance. It looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer’s social constructs affected the work and how the work reflects the writer’s social constructs, in turn recognizing that current cultural contexts colour the critic’s conclusions. This advocates the reading of a literary text to its era. The implication is that each text is said to assume proper function when set side-by-side with the history it textualizes, history having been codified. There is no privileging of text over the history it textualizes or vice versa. No back-dropping. This equal weighting of literary and non-literary texts to reveal the truth is what Louis Adrian Montrose terms “the historicity of texts and textuality of history” (qtd. In Abrams 219). It means that history is taken to be “textualized”. Therefore, New Historicists consider “historical” accounts as equally interpretable as literary texts, since both are seen as “expressions of the same historical moment” (Barry 173).

As a literary theory, New Historicism owes its impetus to the work of Foucault. Habib states, “Foucault based his approach both on his theory of the limit of collective cultural knowledge and on his technique of examining a broad array of documents in order to understand the episteme of a particular time” (267).

History and Imaginative Creation in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Chimamanda Adichie did not witness the Nigeria-Biafra war, because she was born seven years after the war. However, she wrote the war novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* because according to her in an interview: “I wanted to write about love and war because I grew up in the shadow of Biafra... because I wanted to engage with my history to make sense of my present, because I don’t ever want to forget” (qtd in Dickson and Preye 2).

As Chijioke Uwasomba has indicated in an article titled “War, Violence and Language in Ken-Wiwa’s *Sozaboy*”, the Nigeria/ Biafra crisis has led to the promotion of a large quantum of texts representing both historical accounts of the war and fictional creations (qtd in Uwasomba 4). The events of that war have been documented by Nigerian and non-Nigerian writers. In that respect, there are works that are easily recalled and they include: *A Man of the People* and *Girls at War* by Chinua Achebe, *Soza Boy* by Ken-Saro-Wiwa, *The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho, *Survive the Peace* by Cyprian Ekwensi, *Laughter Beneath the Bridge* by Ben Okri, *The Man Died* by Wole Soyinka, *Never Again* by Flora Nwapa, *Destination Biafra* by Buchi Emecheta, *Sunset in Biafra* by Elechi Amadi and others.

According to Alexander Madiebo in *The Nigerian Revolution and The Biafra War*, the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970) is one of the most talked about wars of the 20th century. It was sparked by a number of factors which were mainly political, economic, ethnic, cultural and religious in nature. The major signs of impending falling-out of national proportions began to emerge as some young army officers, mostly native to the Igbo-dominated part of Southeastern Nigeria, staged a coup d’état to collapse an already embattled civilian government. Besides occasioning the killing of several Northern politicians, including the then Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the 15 January 1966 coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, an Igbo officer, saw the emergence of General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi, another Igbo officer from Southeastern Nigeria, as Head of state. After some time, the seeming general acceptance and celebration of the coup, which ended an inept, visionless and incompetent civilian leadership, faded, and Northern Nigeria suddenly appeared jolted into the reality that the 15th January 1966 coup had been essentially master-minded to strip it of its leadership status. A counter-coup, this time executed by Northern officers of the Nigerian Army, took place on 29th July 1966, led by Major Theophilus Danjuma. This coup, which was principally motivated by the fears highlighted above, placed Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon in power as Head of state. After the failure of The July 1966 counter-coup and the earlier coup of January 1966 increased ethnic tensions to the extent that by September 1966, massive riots began in Northern Nigeria. In what has now been referred to as the Nigerian “pogrom” about 30,000 Igbo soldiers, officers and civilians were killed, forcing about 1.8 million Igbo people to head back home Eastward from other parts of the country. On the strength of the Northern Nigerian massacres and the collapsed democratic structures, the military governor of the Igbo-dominated Southeast, Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, proclaimed with the Southern parliament the secession of the Southeastern region from the Nigerian federation. The seceding area became the Republic of Biafra, an independent nation, on the 30th of May 1967. Several peace initiatives, particularly that held in Aburi, Ghana (referred to as Aburi Accord), the Nigerian government launched what was called a ‘police action’ in the bid to retake the secessionist territory. This transformed into a full scale war on the 6th of July 1967, when Nigerian troops began to advance in full force into Biafra. What followed were two and half years of horror, destruction of lives and property and a most incredibly blatant exhibition of the bestial tendencies inherent in man. By the end of the war on the 13th January 1970 about 3 million lives had been lost.

Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* deals with characters and individuals who were involved in a war that led to massive deaths, and the destruction of ideals, values, personal friendship, and national unity. The novel fits into the new historicist school of thought that not only breaks down the traditional boundary between literature and history but goes on to unify the two concepts. It is also a skillful re-narration of the civil war pointing out its damning effects on all classes of people living within Biafra. In this novel, the context is as telling as the content. It is

therefore difficult for writers to ignore the effect of war on the society in which they reside, and are part of.

The people that played roles in the Nigeria-Biafra war and the characters that depicted them in *Half of a Yellow Sun* at no time threaten to overtake one another but rather complement themselves. The story breathes new life and vitality into the historical facts about the past, and by choosing to focus on ordinary people and their views, Adichie makes the story more relatable. This can be recognized in the way in which the plot is built up, the way in which the dialogue is constructed, and how each character is drawn with careful attention to each detail. The story opens before the war when middle-class life at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka is rich and full of revolutionary rhetoric and hope. The characters come from all classes. Richard is an English man, who falls in love with Nigerian art and then with Kainene. Kainene and Olanna, the twins of rich Igbo parents, represent many of the period's social contradictions: one is a tough businesswoman, the other a free-minded. Odenigbo is a mathematics lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, who is quite popular within this environment for his idealistic projections about newly independent Africa, pan-Africanism, and humanism in general. Ugwu, the most strategic character, is Odenigbo's houseboy from whose increasingly maturing perspective we view much of the happening in the mathematics lecturer's house and life. Ugwu's life is drastically transformed from that of a common village boy to that of a 'University boy' who is quickly mastering the rudiments of middle-class life. There is Odenigbo's mother, a practitioner of traditional magic; Harrison, a misguided gardener obsessed with pleasing a nonexistent colonial master, and Odenigbo's friends: Dr. Patel, Professor Ezeka, Lara Adeboye, and Professor Lehman.

However, it seems that there can be no clear demarcation between the identities of the historian and the literary author. This is where New Historicism plays its role as it looks into history being codified or textualized by a creative writer. A historian will try to approach history and his work with at least an objective of adhering to the truth, with no injection of fiction or creativity, as far as this is possible. But in the case of fiction, the possible motivations are endless and may be very different from the truth objective a historical writer has. When one takes into account Hayden White's views on historic discourse, a historian and a fiction writer create essentially almost the same thing but differ in motivation: "a narrative part of the difference seems to lie in their motivation, their intent and their ultimate goal. A historian will try to approach history with at least an objective of adhering to the truth; in as far as it is possible unlike the fiction writer" (113).

Adichie's approach contrasts with exact depiction of the war because she rarely contextualizes historical background. What she does with her work is to combine fiction and historical facts. When asked in an interview if she set out to change people's perception about Africa, she confesses that,

It's not what I want to do. I think it's what my writing ends up doing in some ways. I really don't set out having someone else define my agenda in the sense that I don't look at what is happening in Africa and say 'I am going to challenge that'. I just write the stories I know. And it just happens that the stories are not about the expected African topics. And even in writing about war, I am interested in human relationships and in love and in food. I'm not so much into the stereotype of the big man, bad African leader and the helpless people that kind of very easy, and one group is the killer and one group is the killed sort of thing. (Volmers and Herald, 13)

In respect to the novel's characters, while the principal characters are fictional, there are other characters like Majaor Nzeogwu, Prime Minister Balewa, Ojukwu, Gowon who are actual 'historical' persons. Also, the character Okeoma is modeled after the poet Christopher Okigbo. All these characters lend a sense of historical realism to the novel. Also the writer's use of *The Book* within the novel provides the historical antecedents of the Nigerian Civil War.

Adichie is however identified as a historical novelist, and in the investigation of how she uses her novel to reflect on the intersection of literature and historical writing, one must acknowledge the different contact points between the two, and recognize that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a historical novel. As Chinyere Nwahunanya affirms: "The historical novelist combines the techniques of the historian (documentation) and that of the novelist (imaginative re-creation of the events) in the fictional evocation of the past" (2).

Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo also supports this view when she says that the historical novelist: is at liberty to interpret history to suit his purpose; he could dramatize and reconstruct moments in history which he considers important to the shaping of his people's destiny. Above all, his interpretation of history is creative and does not have to comply strictly with historical reality. He could manipulate dates or the chronology of events without impairing the credibility of his historical and artistic vision. (11)

Hence, the novel, in no other form, becomes the author's imaginative way of recreating a history that has been marred by ethnicity, religious bigotry, and leadership failure. By attempting to reposition this history, the writer, employs fiction as the clarifying agent that makes truth plausible. Allwell Abalogu Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu in the line of differentiating political documentaries from fiction and historicity affirm that "Despite every appearance to the contrary, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is not a political documentary. Like *The Iliad*, the legend of Krishna, *War and Peace*, *The Quiet Don*, it is concerned with the general theme of love and war" (23).

In the novel, there is careful attention to fiction writing as an art. This can be recognized in the way in which the plot is built up, the way in which the dialogue is constructed, and how each character is drawn with careful attention to each detail. Adichie uses the intersection of fiction and historical facts to keep the past in the present, to keep it alive, and also to make the historical and political history felt. The result of this fusion of the facts of history and the art of imagination is "the story of sadness, loss, resilience, and destruction that is *Half of a Yellow Sun*" (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 40). She uses Ugwu to approach Nigeria's past from many different angles, showing that there are as many interpretations as there are angles. The first excerpt describes the prologue of 'The Book' by Ugwu: "For the prologue, he recounts the story of the woman with the calabash" (*Half*, 82). It functions like a 'memoir of witnessing, as it describes how Olanna gives testimony about what she witnessed on the train. The second excerpt focuses on the colonial aspect of how Nigeria was formed: "1914, the governor-general joined the North and the South, and his wife picked a name. Nigeria was born" (*Half*, 115). The fourth discusses the economy of Nigeria that was inexistent until independence, and the fifth discusses the starvation that reigned in Biafra during the war. The sixth excerpt describes the international reactions, or the lack thereof to the Biafran Republic. The seventh excerpt represents the epilogue, which is a poem Ugwu wrote, modeled after a poem by Okeoma. Lastly, the eighth excerpt only consists of one line. "Ugwu writes his dedication last: For Masters, my good man" which ends the novel (*Half*, 433). It is through this line that the reader finally comes to the realization that Ugwu, is in fact the author of *The Book*.

In re-creating the Nigeria-Biafra War in a story, the novelist presents how colonialism remotely contributed to the war through the main narrative as well as a parallel narrative called 'The Book'. According to the writer, the political system put in place in Nigeria by the British contributed to the events leading to the war. In the main narrative, the colonial factor is revealed through dialogues between some characters and, particularly, through the couple, Odenigbo and Olanna. Colonel Madu gives an account of how the British ensured that non-qualified northerners were put in leadership positions in the military ahead of qualified southerners. Madu explains to Kainene: "The problem was the ethnic balance policy. I was part of the commission that told our GOC that we should scrap it, that it was polarizing the army, and that they should stop promoting northerners who were not qualified. But our GOC said no, our *British GOC*" (*Half*, 141).

The depiction of the historical fact, as recorded by Madiebo in his work, goes on in *Half of a Yellow Sun* after killing the Igbo colleagues in the barracks, the Northern soldiers go to the airport in Kano to search for and kill the Igbo there. Richard is an eye-witness to what happens. The Northern soldiers ask, "Where are the Igbo people? Who is Igbo here? Where are the infidels?" (*Half*, 152). They identify Nnaemeka, the young Igbo customs officer who had been speaking to Richard. Shortly afterward, "the rifle went off and Nnaemeka's chest blew open, a splattering red mass..." (*Half*, 153). The bartender is also identified as Igbo. "One of the soldiers walked up close and shot him and then aimed at the bottles of liquor lined up behind and shot those. The room smelt of whisky and Campari and gin." After killing the Igbo in the lounge, "The soldiers ran out to the tarmac and into the airplane and pulled out Igbo people who had already boarded and lined them up and shot them and left them lying there, their bright clothes splashes of colour on the dusty black stretch" (*Half*, 153).

The novelist in presenting the molestation and massacres of the Igbo uses different settings and multiple points of view. The Igbo are beaten in Lagos but in Kano, they are actually killed. It is not through just one character that these killings are seen. Olanna sees it in Sabon Gari in Kano and on the train to Nsukka. Richard sees these killings at the airport in Kano. Arize and Olanna are eyewitnesses to the beating of the Igbo in Lagos. The different settings giving very vivid and graphic descriptions as well as the different characters who witness the beating and killing of the Igbo in Lagos and Kano respectively, present an apt picture of what the Igbo who were not in their home region suffered after the second coup. The horrendous massacre of the Igbo, in especially Kano, leads to the secession of the Eastern region of Nigeria and finally to the civil war.

Through the discourse between Odenigbo and his friends, readers learn the reason these intellectuals give for the secession of Eastern Nigeria. Odenigbo thinks that secession is the only way out for the Igbo. He tells his friends:

What peace are we looking for? Gowon himself has said that a basis for unity does not exist, so what peace are we looking for? Secession is the only answer. If Gowon wanted to keep this country united, he would have done something long ago. For goodness' sake, not one of them has come out to condemn the massacres, and months have passed! It is as if all our people who were killed don't matter! (*Half*, 158)

To this, Professor Ezekwe adds, "Eastern Nigeria seethes and will continue to seethe until the federal government addresses the massacres." Okeoma also says that "...a unitary government was the very reason that he (Gowon) and his people killed Igbo officers" (*Half*, 159).

Obviously, Odenigbo, Ezeka and Okeoma think that since the issue of the massacre of Igbo in the north has not been addressed, secession is their only means of security.

It is with the foregoing background that we can understand the agitation from many quarters demanding secession which Odimegwu Ojukwu declares. The declaration speech deserves to be quoted:

Fellow country men and women, you the people of Eastern Nigeria, conscious of the supreme authority of almighty God over all mankind; of your duty over posterity; aware that you can no longer be protected in your lives and in your property by any government based outside Eastern Nigeria; determined to dissolve all political and other ties between you and the former Republic of Nigeria, having mandated me to proclaim on your behalf and in your name that eastern Nigeria be a sovereign independent Republic; now therefore I do hereby solemnly proclaim that the territory and region known as and called Eastern Nigeria, together with her continental shelf and territorial waters, shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state of the name and title of the Republic of Biafra. (*Half*, 161-162)

War is declared by the federal government of Nigeria to bring rebellious Biafra to order. Kainene explains this to Richard who is surprised at the declaration of war. She tells him, "It's the oil. They can't let us go easily with all that oil" (*Half*, 180). The writer in an interview with BBC reiterates this view when she says that oil was the main reason why Nigeria fought Biafra, and that the war wouldn't have been fought if there was no oil.

The first war scene the novelist presents is the fall of Nsukka. When the federals enter Nsukka, the sound of shelling *boom – boom – boom* is heard as Olanna and Ugwu are in the kitchen. They leave Nsukka hurriedly packing a few things and wrapping a pot of soup in a dishcloth. As many cars and people leave Nsukka, the roads are crowded. The writer presents a scene of confusion as people evacuate Nsukka, "Dust swirled all around, like a see-through brown blanket. The main road was crowded; women with boxes on their heads and babies tied to their backs, barefoot children carrying bundles of clothes or yams or boxes, men dragging bicycles" (*Half*, 179).

The novelist presents another graphic scene of the war during the fall of Port Harcourt. Richard and Kainene hear the sounds of shelling. They know for certain that Port Harcourt is about to fall so they pack hurriedly to move to Orlu. At this very moment, there is also an air raid and Richard, Kainene, together with their two stewards, Harrison and Ikejide, run to the orchard to take cover. As they run to take cover,

Then came the cold whistle of a mortar in the air and the crash as it landed and the boom as it exploded. A piece of shrapnel, the size of a fist, wheezed past. Ikejide was still running and, in the moment that Richard glanced away and back, Ikejide's head was gone. The body was running, arched slightly forwards, arms flying around, but there was no head. There was only a bloodied neck. (*Half*, 317)

When the war fully starts, Biafra has neither enough arms nor troops to fight. Okeoma, Odenigbo's lecturer friend at Nsukka, joins the army. There is also conscription through which people are forcibly recruited to fight for Biafra. On a particular occasion, Ugwu is conscripted together with a man of at least sixty-five years and a boy of about fifteen. The old man tells the soldier, "If it has come to this, that you are conscripting somebody my age, then Biafra has died" (357). What the old man says is significant in that it allows readers to see the lack of capacity of Biafra for the war.

The plot of the novel is in the form of peace-war-peace-war. In the chronological order, the writer could have finished with everything about the early sixties before talking about the late sixties but she decides to make it a 'back and forth' kind of plot, using the time shifts. It can be argued that the plot structure of the novel is appropriate in that it captures war-time life. Life during war is neither coherent nor comprehensible. It is full of confusion and this is portrayed in the time shifts that give the plot a back-and-forth nature where the writer presents certain incidents, withholds some information, moves ahead before coming back to give the details left out. This happens with the birth of Baby. In part two where the war occurs, there is Baby who is four years old, but it is in part three that the circumstance leading to her birth comes to light. Odenigbo sleeps with Amala, his mother's maid from the village and gets her pregnant. Olanna moves to her own flat where she also sleeps with Richard. This period represents a trying period, a domestic tension or war in the relationship between Odenigbo and Olanna. This is one of the few times their lovely relationship goes sour. Ugwu says that was the first time he heard Olanna shout. On one occasion when Olanna came to visit Odenigbo,

Ugwu did not shut the kitchen door, so that he could stand by it and listen, but he might as well have closed it because Olanna's raised voice was audible enough. 'It's you and not your mother. It happened because *you* let it happen! You must take responsibility!' It startled Ugwu, how that soft voice could change to something so fierce. (*Half*, 240)

Characters are also used in addition to the setting and plot to portray the effects and re-creation of the Nigerian-Biafra War in the novel. The writer creates a wide range of characters in the novel. This work looks at the effects of war through the main characters, Odenigbo, Olanna, Kainene, Richard and Ugwu. The war affects these characters in diverse ways.

For Olanna, the war brings changes in her personal values. She is beautiful and has a "curvy, fleshy body" (23). When she moves in to settle with Odenigbo, she is not concerned about getting married to him. She just wants to be close to Odenigbo, "She feared that marriage would flatten it (their relationship) to a prosaic partnership" (52). During the war, Odenigbo once again proposes marriage to her as to him it did not make sense for them to live together and not get married. For Olanna,

it had made sense to her, the decision not to marry, the need to preserve what they had by wrapping it in a shawl of difference. But the old framework that fit her ideals was gone now that Arize and Auntie Ifeka and Uncle Mbaezi would always be frozen faces in her album. Now that bullets were falling in Nsukka. (*Half*, 187)

The events leading to the war and the war itself make Olanna do away with her ideal of guarding her relationship with Odenigbo by not marrying. She now agrees to marry Odenigbo because the war has destroyed her old framework. On her wedding day, the war denies her the happiness that usually comes with marriage ceremonies. When Professor Achara gives her a plastic bouquet of multi-coloured flowers, Olanna is taken aback. She tells him, "What is this? I want fresh flowers." Professor Achara responds, "But nobody grows flowers in Umuahia. People here grow what they can eat" (*Half*, 201). Finally, Olanna does not hold flowers because what war time offers her is only a plastic bouquet which she doesn't like. On her wedding day she looks so beautiful but still has a sad smile on her face. During her wedding reception she seems to have overcome the sadness and was enjoying her day but then there is an air raid that occurs just before they cut their wedding cake. This air raid denies Olanna a simple wedding photograph as the photographer loses his camera.

The war, despite its throes and horrors, affects Odenigbo so much. It's with Odenigbo that we are shown the lives of the elites during the war. Odenigbo before the war is described as a

confident man. A man who throws “his legs out in an aggressive confidence: the gait of a person who would not ask for directions but remained sure that he would somehow get there” (27). Odenigbo who is a mathematics researcher and teacher becomes an ethnic jingoist during the war, and turns into a Biafran, thereby losing his sanity engaging in life style he would not have indulged in, if things were normal.

According to Obiechina, “out of every social crisis in the life of a people there comes a deepening of insight into the true nature of man and of human society” (*Half*, 6). This statement is true of Odenigbo, Ugwu, Olanna, Kainene and other characters in the novel. Olanna, the daughter of a rich businessman is seen living in one-room squalor with Odenigbo and others, stays in queues for food and hides during air raids. She tends to Baby, her adopted daughter in spite of the poverty spree.

Kainene is another character through whom readers see how war can bring changes in the life of a person. Kainene is described as having boyish hips and looks “almost androgynous” (*Half*, 60). She is presented as a strong and resilient person throughout the entire novel. She is very frank and does not try to please anyone. Before the war, readers learn that Kainene is someone who does not forgive easily. When Olanna betrays her by sleeping with her lover, Richard, she remains calm though deeply hurt. Olanna herself confesses, “Kainene doesn’t forgive easily. It will make no sense at all to tell her” (*Half*, 243). As expected, when Kainene finds out what has happened between Olanna and Richard, she questions Olanna while remaining “frighteningly calm.” Kainene ends the telephone conversation by saying, “It was unforgivable” (*Half*, 243). When the war occurs, the experiences that Kainene goes through changes her unforgiving attitude. She sees how her steward Ikejide is killed. She also sees the many children who die from hunger at her refugee camp. She then pays Olanna a visit at Umuahia. Later when Olanna also visits her, she tells Olanna, “There are some things that are so unforgivable that they make other things easily forgivable” (*Half*, 347). Here, the novelist highlights the intensity of the suffering of the Biafrans in the course of the civil war. For someone who holds onto hurt like Kainene, who had purposed not to forgive her sister, to finally come to realize that her sister’s offense is forgivable compared to what they as Biafrans have suffered at the hands of the Nigerians only demonstrates that the Biafran plight is an immense one.

Kainene’s confidence and fearlessness remain intact till the very end. Caught in the war situation, she does not sink into depression. She takes charge of a refugee camp as the food supplier. She witnesses countless people, especially children who die out of hunger but she does not lose hope or become bitter. Olanna looks at her and thinks of “how unrelenting Kainene’s confidence was” (*Half*, 347). It is with this confidence and fearlessness that she decides to go and trade behind enemy lines. When the crops at the camp fail as a result of the harmattan, she can also no longer get the supply of food for the camp. She is determined to get food for the camp so decides to trade behind enemy lines. It is sad that at the end of the novel, Kainene is missing and there seems to be no clue about her whereabouts. Kainene’s disappearance at the end of the novel is the writer’s way of allowing readers to experience the grief and sense of loss that war brings. This is because the writer allows readers to know very well this confident, fearless and extremely strong character.

The effect of the Nigeria-Biafra War can also be seen through Richard. He is a British who comes to Nigeria mainly because of his fascination with Igbo-Ukwu art. He is a writer who for the greater part of the novel does not know what he is writing. He falls in love with Kainene

and is happy with her. He witnesses the massacre of Igbo at the Kano airport and is shattered. While in Susan's bathroom after the incident,

He stared at himself and wondered if it really happened, if he really had seen men die, if the lingering smells of shattered liquor bottles and bloodied human bodies were only in his imagination. But he knew it had certainly happened... He lowered his head to the sink and began to cry. (*Half*, 155)

Richard sees the killing of Igbo and he expresses grief like any other Biafran would do. He contrasts with Susan. They are both British, but while Susan hears about the massacres and makes a callous statement, Richard witnesses it and is seriously affected. In fact, "He had often wished that he would lose his mind, or that his memory would suppress itself, but instead, everything took on a terrible transparency and he had only to close his eyes to see the freshly dead bodies on the floor of the airport and to recall the pitch of the screams" (*Half*, 165).

Seeing the massacres becomes an unforgettable experience for him which makes him an ardent defender of the Biafran cause. It can be argued that it is from this time that Richard begins to write with a sense of purpose and direction. He reads the foreign press' reportage on the Nigerian situation and feels a strong urge to write and correct the misinformation. He writes about the massacres and states the historical antecedents of the antagonism between the tribes of the north and south of Nigeria. Richard plays a significant role in the novel. He serves as a white chronicler of the events of the war.

Ugwu is traumatized by the experience of fighting the war, he engages in terrible behavior whose legacy is a lasting shame. Adichie captures the rape scene:

The bar girl was lying on her back on the floor, her wrapper bunched up at her waist, her shoulders held down by a soldier, her legs wide apart. She was sobbing. Please, *biko*. Her blouse was still on. Between her legs, high-tech was moving. His thrusts were jerky, his small buttocks darker coloured than his legs... Ugwu pulled his trousers down, surprised at the swiftness of his erection. She was dry and tense when he entered her. (*Half*, 365)

Ugwu's return from the war front to Orlu, where his master Odenigbo and Olanna have retired to for safety, gives him an opportunity to review his life of debauchery and even his devotion to the Biafran cause. He becomes a changed person and ceases to listen to Biafra radio. When Harrison in a fit of enthusiasm alerts Ugwu about His Excellency's speech which is about to be aired, angrily retorts: "Turn that thing off? Turn it off or carry it away" (*Half*, 399). When persuaded further by Harrison that it will be a great speech, Ugwu responds: "There is no such thing as greatness" (*Half*, 399).

According to Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, they added another view to the economical aspect, in the bid of depicting fiction and historicity in the novel, by stating:

Here also as in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie emphasizes the loss of the intellectual dignity and foundation of Southeastern Nigeria by the deliberate, mindless destruction of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka which instructively and according to Chinyere Nwahuanya, Christopher Okigbo [whose figure is fictionally realized as Okeoma, the poet, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*] died defending... (*Half*, 94)

It was recorded by BBC that one to three million people died of starvation and disease during the Nigeria-Biafra war, and Adichie draws out tragedies from it to show her own sense of historicity. She shows horrors like a woman carrying her daughter's severed head in a basket, the girl's hair still carefully braided, even Ikejide having his head cut off by a piece of shrapnel

and the butchery of Nnaemeka with others at the Kano airport. The novel through the lens of fiction and historicity shows how its characters and circumstances expose various aspects of how war left devastating effects on Nigerian soil which till date still haunts the country.

Onukaogu and Onyerionwu explain further:

Adichie's acute sensitivity to the African historical process has contributed to her profile as one of Africa's greatest literary writers of all time. She has the uncanny ability to subsume historical fact in her impressive artistry, accomplishing at the same time, the objectives of inspired, entertaining storytelling and socio-historical relevance. (111)

Unfortunately, it is the throes, horrors and trauma which characterize war that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is often associated with and that is the memory that often lingers in the mind of the reader. This negative memory is not surprising since the story begins with a symbolic reference to the negative history of Nigeria. The title of the book "Half of a Yellow Sun" is symbolic, suggesting the genesis of the Nigerian dystopia (Dickson and Okoro 84). The title is a reference to the symbol of the Biafran flag. The sun is not full, but half, a reference to the incompleteness of the fledgling republic (Biafra) and its indebtedness to the other half (Nigeria). The title could also be seen as the author's affirmation of the idea that "Nigerian identity is burdensome" (Nyairo, 21). This idea is further seen in *Half of a Yellow Sun* where Nigeria is described as "a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp" (158). This is an allusion to the country as an outcome of a colonial administration which for administrative gain and expansion joined different tribes together as one and named it Nigeria. One of its effects, which is the major, is the constant struggle for dominance among the tribes in a bid to fill the power vacuum left by the colonial administrators at independence. Professor Ezeka in the novel confirms the above idea, thus "you must see that tribe as it is today is as colonial a product as nation and race" (*Half*, 20).

In contextualizing the historical background, Adichie tries to recreate the horror brought by the massacres, the panic, and the children who starve and die during the Nigeir-Biafra war through the disposition of frightened characters in her work. All these are results of political disagreement between individuals and groups (Biafra vs Nigeria). She makes the readers aware of the tragedy behind the statistics and remembers that each of those millions of people who died were human beings capable of love, hate and everything in between. By shifting the action back and forth between the peaceful early 1960s and the gory late 1960s, she stresses the characterization of her protagonists flashing back to better days that these are people who had real full lives, betrayed each other and laughed together. The book becomes, therefore, a book about pain but also a book about joy; she dramatizes the character's struggle to survive the war. All the main characters in the novel have to find their own way to deal with the traumatic consequences of the horrors suffered during the war, its preoccupations and outcomes. Some terrible experiences changed the characters significantly.

Besides, the power in Adichie's story is found in her simplicity of description, the combination of the local language (Igbo) and Standard English in trying to drive home the consciousness and language patterns. She employs this language technique so that the Igbo in particular would know and understand the secret of the Nigeria-Biafra war that had been forgotten.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a historical novel that self-consciously recreates specific moments in Nigeria's recent or pre-independence history. The war story focuses on the monumental effects it had on the characters and their capacity to survive in the

midst of the hostilities, and at the same time keeps the past in the present. It is around the lives of these characters, their weaknesses and shortcomings that Adichie skillfully connects fiction and historicity as she weaves the story of sadness, loss, resilience and destruction to make them more real and thus more understandable.

Clearly, this research has evidently shown that history and fiction can intersect and blend in many different ways as artistically explored by the selected novel, and most importantly in the depiction of the central character(s). The author attempts to represent the daily reality of these characters, which she characterizes as interpretable from multiple perspectives. In essence, the novel is the author's discourse about the past, and it shows her relationship with that past. As White points out, we can only access history through language, and its discourse must be written before it can be digested (5). In this line, a historian refers to facts about the past, and portrays a belief or set of beliefs about the past, and purports to report or outline the past by adhering to the truth. In doing so, readers do not relate to the complete actual happenings of the past which embraces the emotions, loss, happiness, joy, businesses, relationships and interactions, sex or celibacy and all other involvements of a particular people in a given past. That is to say, a historian doesn't involve the intricate day-to-day lives of the people and their relationships with one another, which is an important aspect of any society, in what he/she has recorded. On the other hand, historical fiction merges historical reality with imagined reality, that is to say, the writer takes from the facts and re-imagines them, thereby involving the exact day-to-day lives of the people who own the past. The creative output of a writer is well appreciated when we comprehend its relevance to the other two worlds, the writer's world (his experiences) and our world (the society). This is the view this study has intricately elaborated and pointed out. In this manner, emotions, loss, happiness sex, joy and all other attributes of human interactions and relationships are relayed to achieve a striking goal in the reader's mind and in the development of a society.

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