



RELIGIOUS DOGMA VS. HUMAN CONNECTION: THEMES IN HALF OF A YELLOW SUN"

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ABSTRACT

It is a common human experience that everyone wants their deepest desires to be met and their anguish to be eased. This universal need is the source of well-known spiritual movements and their evolution (Albert Einstein 1930, pp. 1-4). In the past, homoeopathic magic helped to relieve people's suffering and anxiety. The ancient people turned themselves in to the monks and priests for magical power and direction to lead a better life free from physical and mental pain since they were dissatisfied with the outcomes of sorcerers. This caste of priests conjured up imaginary creatures that the regular people might sacrifice to appease the gods (Sir James George Frazer, 1922).

Today's political elites and the clerical caste are abusing religion to further their own agendas. This essay attempts to concentrate on how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's book *Half of a Yellow Sun* depicts how religious ideas in modern society have choked and complicated human love and relationships. While *Half of a Yellow Sun*'s main goal is to remind people of the famine, suffering, killings, and mass slaughter that occurred during the Nigerian civil war—also referred to by the author as the Biafra war—it also shows how human relationships and love underwent significant changes during this time. In actuality, the novel's other themes are subverted and pushed back by the subject of human love and relationships.

In order to make the story universal, the author has infused the relationships between various characters with a great deal of color and passion. In the narrative, religion subtly introduces friction into the relationships between the various ethnic groups. But during times of conflict, the rulers and religious fanatics exact their price in the form of bloodshed and hate. The religion card exacerbates the severity of Nigeria's civil war, which is being waged between the Hausa Muslims in the north and the Igbo Christians in the southwest. Therefore, in order to comprehend how the religious views of the Hausa Muslims and the Igbo Christians stood in the way of their love and relationship, one must be aware of the historical context and the reasons for the battle.

Key Words: Igbo Christians, Hausa Muslims, Biafra, Human love, Civil war

INTRODUCTION

NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR- A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Known also as the Nigerian-Biafra War, it started on July 6, 1967, and ended on January 15, 1970. Nigeria was first created as an artificial border by the colonial powers. They ignored the linguistic, religious, and ethnic distinctions that were there. The Nigerian provinces in the southeast made many efforts to break away and establish the Republic of Biafra. The conflict between the British, Dutch, French, and Italian oil firms over the lucrative Nigerian oilfields is one of the reasons for the civil war. The stark division between Nigeria's many regions is reinforced by religious differences. Nigeria is home to hundreds of distinct ethnic groups. The three largest groups are the Igbo, who make up between 60 and 70% of the country's population and are primarily Catholic Christians; the Hausa-Fulani, who make up roughly 65% of the country's population and are mostly Muslims; and the Yoruba, who make up roughly 75% of the population and are predominantly members of various Christian and Islamic sects. A tyrannical, traditional Islamic hierarchy of Emirs reigned over the semi-feudal and Islamic Hausa-Fulani in the North. The majority of the colony's armed forces were composed of Hausa people, who were also highly skilled in the military (Alexander Madiebo 1980). The Igbo in the Southeast, on the other hand, mostly lived in democratically run, self-governing villages.

The British system of colonial control in Nigeria preserved and strengthened these tradition-derived inequalities. The British found it expedient to use emirs to impose indirect authority in the North. With a literacy rate of only 2% compared to the East's 19.2% at the time of Nigerian independence, the North was the least developed region in the country. By the 1960s, businessmen and educated elites were active across Nigeria, and the Igbo political culture had become more cohesive and the area had become quite rich. The economic, political, and social divisions between various ethnic groups were exacerbated by the British colonial ideology that split Nigeria into three regions. It has been called a purposeful gerrymander of ethnic and religious lines to maintain the country's weakness and instability as well as its vulnerability to the UK firms, especially British Petroleum, stealing its enormous oil deposits.

The Igbo and Yoruba parties banded together to struggle for independence from Britain in the 1940s and 1950s. Additionally, they desired an independent Nigeria divided into a number of minor states to prevent the conservative North from controlling the country's other parts. But the authorities in the north, fearing that the more westernized elites in the south would seize political and economic power in the wake of independence, favored keeping Britain as the dominant force. They insisted that the nation remain split into three sections, with the North holding a certain majority, in exchange for the country's independence. Leaders of the Igbo and Yoruba people, eager to achieve independence at all costs, complied with the demands of the North.

Coup and Counter Coup by Military Officers

Major Kaduna Nzeogwu and several junior Army officers staged a coup on January 15, 1966. Because of the ethnicity of the people who were slain, there was widespread conjecture that the Igbo army commanders had started the coup and were using it for their own gain. Among the explanations offered by the coup plotters was allegations of election fraud. General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo and the army chief, became the first military head of state in Nigerian history and the country's president as a consequence of this coup. Ironsi rallied the troops against the plotters, causing the coup itself to collapse. Subverting the constitutional succession and claiming that democratic institutions had failed, he then imposed military control. Though the true motivation for the coup has never been revealed, there was a great deal of suspicion that it was carried out to benefit the Igbo people. Ironsi's military leadership and the suspicion and dispute around it created the conditions for another coup on July 29, 1966, which was carried out by Northern army commanders. Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon spearheaded this coup. He was selected as a candidate for compromise. He was from a minority tribe in the North, was a Christian, and was well-liked in the army. The coup and countercoup exacerbated ethnic tensions. Mass pogroms in May 1966, which were repeated in July and September of the same year, are remembered for the widespread killings of Igbo Christians residing in the Muslim north.

The Breakaway and the Civil War

On May 30, 1967, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the military governor of the Igbo-dominated southeast, formally announced in the southern parliament that the territory will secede from Nigeria and become the sovereign Republic of Biafra. The very young country was determined to protect itself even though it never had enough weaponry to go to war. Despite widespread support in Europe and beyond, very few nations acknowledged the newly formed country. At Aburi, Ojukwu succeeded in securing agreement for a Nigerian confederation as opposed to a federation. The Yakuba Gowon-led military administration quickly renounced the Aburi pact. Ojukwu so began making plans for the conflict. Although the Nigerians were outnumbered

and outgunned, the eastern area was very well-prepared for battle. Their combat in their own country, encouragement of the perseverance of most Easterners, and efficient use of few resources were among their advantages. While Canada and France supported the Biafrans, the British and Soviet Union backed the Nigerian government. Despite seeming to be undecided, the US supported the Biafran people via the Red Cross. To regain the land that the secessionists had taken, the Nigerian government sent police forces. On July 6, 1967, Nigerian Federal soldiers marched into Biafra in two lines, sparking the start of the war. Subsequent to encountering unforeseen intense opposition and losses, they proceeded towards Nsukka town. In response, the Biafran people launched their own onslaught. Lt. Col. Banjo, a Yoruba, commanded the Biafran attack. General Gowon allocated four infantry divisions. They seized back control of a large portion of their territory with ease, but Nigerians eventually took back most of the towns with the aid of foreign mercenaries. The conflict reached a standstill in 1968 when strong opposition prevented the Nigerian troops from making major progress into the remaining Biafran-controlled territories. However, Nigeria started to blockade the encircled Biafra by closing the ring around the Biafran people. This resulted in severe malnutrition and hunger in the besieged Igbo territory, which caused a humanitarian calamity. According to the Biafra leadership, Nigeria was winning the war by committing genocide and starvation. There have been claims that the Biafra aid effort caused up to 180,000 civilian fatalities by extending the conflict. The Biafra administration started using foreign mercenaries to extend the war in retaliation to the Nigerian government's use of foreigners to spearhead certain advances. The Nigerian military even attacked volunteers, physicians, and other health professionals, and they saw citizens being killed and starved.

Operation Tail-Wind, the Nigerian federal troops' last offensive, was started with the increasing backing of the British. On January 9th, the Biafra town of Owerri fell, and on January 11th, Uli fell. Just a few days before, Ojukwu had flown to the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire to go into exile. He left his second in command, Philip Effiong, in charge of coordinating the specifics of the federal army's surrender to General Yakubu Gowon on January 13, 1970. A few days later, the conflict came to a conclusion as Nigerian soldiers easily advanced into the remaining areas controlled by Biafra.

Aftermath of the Civil War

The Igbo people suffered heavy losses in terms of infrastructure, finances, and human lives during the civil war. Up to three million people may have died as a result of the fighting, mostly from malnutrition and illness, according to estimates. Although the oil money aided in the quick reconstruction, Nigerian politics continued to be influenced by long-standing ethnic and religious conflicts. Legislation was enacted prohibiting political parties from having an ethnic or tribal affiliation, however putting this into reality has proven to be challenging. When the pogrom and conflict ended, the Igbo people who had fled for their safety discovered that their posts had been taken over. The government chose to treat these individuals as having resigned rather than restore them. This logic was also applied to homes and assets held by Igbo people. Any Igbo-owned home might be quickly taken over by people from other areas. The Nigerian government used the phrase "abandoned" to justify this. Even long after the war, they were seen as further economically crippling the Igbo people and contributing to their sense of discrimination.

Plot of the novel

The novel's plot revolves on three central characters. The protagonist of the book, Odenigbo, is introduced. He is an Igbo man who works as a professor at a university in the town of Nsukka. Before being married, he cohabitates with Olanna. They squabble and bug each other nonstop. As Odenigo's mother takes Mala, a country girl, to their flat and assists Odenigbo in having a sexual relationship with Amala, their relationship is damaged. Olanna is very upset about this affair. By having an affair with Richard, the boyfriend of her twin sister Kainene, and an English journalist, she exacts vengeance on him. Ugwu, a thirteen-year-old rural kid, is another significant character that is presented in the story. Additionally, he is of Igbo origin. An elderly maid who was assisting Odenibo folks took him to the town. After working around the home for a while, he becomes Odenigbo's reliable helper and assistant. Later on, the Baby and Olanna both grow to like him. His forced enlistment in the army throughout the war marked his maturation. Following the war, he starts writing. He writes about the atrocities committed by war on defenseless civilians.

The pastor family had two twin sisters: Olanna and Kainene. But they didn't like their parents' haughty mannerisms. Each pursued their own path in life as a romantic. Even before the American Civil War broke out, they experienced great suffering. They were all caused by the internal tensions they had with one another. No lives were lost as a result of their relationship's strife. Their whole life cycle was thrown into total chaos by the subsequent civil war that broke out between the Nigerian United Army and the Biafran Army. The major protagonists' lives were severely altered and shattered by the civil war that followed and the choices

they made in their personal lives after the British departed Nigeria. The events of the early 1960s and the late 1960s, when the conflict broke out, are alternated throughout the book. The primary characters are first presented in the early 1960s. Four years later, there is tension between the Hausa and the Igbo people, and hundreds of people, including Olanna's cherished aunt and uncle, perish in massacres. The Igbo establish Biafra, a new republic. Olanna, Odenigbo, Ugwu, and their daughter Baby are forced to leave Nsukka, the university town and the main center of the new nation's intellectual life, due to the violence. They eventually arrive at the town of Umuahia, where they endure hardships due to a lack of food, frequent air strikes, and a suspicious environment. A fight between Olanna and Odenigbo, Richard and Kainene, and Olanna and Kainene is also hinted to.

The narrative leaps forward to the early 1960s, when we find out that Odenigbo had an affair with a rural girl who later gave birth to his child. In a moment of weakness, Olanna sleeps with Richard because she is so angry with him for betraying her. After her mother refused to care for her baby, she returns to Odenigbo, and they took in his daughter. When the conflict first started, Olanna, Odenigbo, Baby, and Ugwu were living with Kainene and Richard in a camp for refugees that Kainene was in charge of. They are without food or medication, which makes the situation worse. Even when the conflict ends a few weeks later, Kainene does not come back from his decision to trade over enemy lines. The reader is left wondering if Kainene is still alive at the book's confusing conclusion.

Impact of Religious Conflict on Human Love and Relationship

Adichie was born seven years after the war ended, but based on her vivid retelling of the events, it is possible that the conflict had a lasting impact on the identity of Igbo people in Nigeria. Half of a Yellow Sun is narrated from the perspectives of two couples, Odenigbo and Olanna and Kainene and Richard, and is set before and during the Biafra War. Along with numerous difficult topics pertaining to gender, ethnicity, and class, the work also poses political dilemmas. It gives a delicate depiction of the individuals and their interactions with one another. The novel's portrayal of relationships among individuals is not without its challenges, especially prior to the introduction of conflict. For instance, there is a conflict between Odenigbo, his girlfriend Olanna, who cohabitates with him but is not married, and Amala, a local girl who Odenigbo's mother set up as a ruse to get even with Olanna. Olanna's twin sister Kainene has a close relationship with her boyfriend Kainene Richard, a British journalist who has slept with Olanna. She is retaliating against her living partner Odenigbo for having an extramarital affair with Amala by having this affair. With the exception of Richard, who is also a Christian, all of these individuals are Igbo Christians, therefore despite their illegal connections, they have learned to live together and learn to accept one another.

Before the conflict, Mohammed and Olanna had a very close connection. But because of their disparate religious affiliations, a split develops in their otherwise harmonious relations. Olanna never misses an opportunity to remind him of her heritage and religion. Mohammed was rendered defenseless when her relatives, including her aunt Arize, were massacred. Olanna does not trust him even if he helps her escape the angry mob since he practices a different faith. She tells him she was a Biafran first and rejects his affection. Before the civil war, the Hausa Muslim Abdulmalik and the Christian Mbaezi family lived as friendly neighbors. Their relationship was quite solid. Excellent work, Abdulmalik said. His slender face stopped in a grin as he pulled out a pair of slippers from his luggage and extended them to her. She used both hands to grab the slippers. Abdulmalik, thank you (Half of a Yellow Sun, 40). But then everything radically changes, and the Mbaezi family suffers a catastrophe. When there was turmoil because of the civil war, the close bond did not last for very long.

Abdulmalik's cruelty and bestiality against Uncle Mbaezi's family demonstrates how religious differences permanently destroy human principles of friendship and love. We consumed the whole family. That was the will of Allah. The dude was someone I knew. Abdulmalik (Half of a Yellow Sun, 147) was the one. The senseless slaughter of Nnaemeka and other Igbo people at Kano airport is a striking example of the worldwide inhumanity that has been unleashed.

Richard was shocked to see people acting so viciously against one another only because they have a different faith or are of a different race. The soldier approached him and said, "Say Allahu Akbar!" His accent would have revealed who he was, therefore he would not exclaim Allahu Akbar. As if in response to his thoughts, the rifle went off, causing Nnaemeka's chest to burst open into a splattering crimson mess, and Richard dropped the letter he was holding. Richard wanted him to speak the words, to try, nevertheless. (Pages 152-153, Half of a Yellow Sun).

Not every Muslim in Nigeria harbored animosity for the Igbo people. The Mohammeds and the Abumaliks of the conflict are divided along a certain line (Sophia Ogwude). He became enraged with them after seeing

the atrocities and said, "Allah will not forgive them. Allah does not allow this." Allah won't pardon anyone who forced them to act in this way. Allah won't ever pardon this. (Page 150, *Half of a Yellow Sun*). There is a sense of patriotism among the primary protagonists for their new country. But as the atrocities of war worsen, they will have to struggle to maintain their bond as their world and their beliefs are destroyed. Mature relationships exist between confident men and women who are happy in their separate positions and taking pleasure in their time together. A freed Olanna rejects her long-term partner's marriage proposal because she is content with their newfound connection. In a beautiful statement, Adichie states that "we are the sum of our experiences." Adichie reveals the self-righteousness and hypocrisy of individuals who persuaded people to participate in a war they had no business fighting in. Broken limbs, gory calabashes with severed heads, and dashed hopes are all part of combat. During war, everything is scarce: happiness, food, and sex. You lose even the closest bond. Forever lost is Kainene. Nobody is aware of her location. She crossed the enemy line to look for dry food for the infant. Olanna is no longer with her spouse. Ogwu has been selected by the army of Biafra. Lover of Kainene has returned to England. A romance is stuck in the middle of a civil war.

CONCLUSION

Although there are other factors contributing to Nigeria's civil war, the impact of religion is firmly ingrained in the nation's consciousness. The country's Christian elites were always proud of their education, accumulated fortune, and came dangerously close to becoming the governing class in Nigeria. It ought to have played the deep-seated envy that was impulsively inflamed during the civil war in the back of the minds of the majority of the illiterate Hausa Muslim populace. Second, when faced with hardship, each person's first priority becomes survival. Thus, in their desperate attempt to live, they will stop at nothing to destroy others. This tactic has been valued by the ruling class and politicians to further their own agendas. This is especially evident in the Gujarat riot in 2002. According to Markandey Katju, there has always been speculation that the violence against the innocent Muslims was an impulsive response by the Hindu community to the murder of fifty-nine Hindus on a train at Godhra. It's also important to observe that the ethnic groupings are equally split in terms of their adherence to various religions. The Emirs and Sultans are to be respected by the Hausa people, who are all Muslims. The Igbo people, on the other hand, are entirely Catholic Christians who are loyal to the pope. Even though the civil war ended in 1970, there is still a great divide between these two ethnic groups. They are unable to put aside their differences and work toward creating a unified Nigeria because of their differing religious beliefs.

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