



Representation of War, Sexuality and Motherhood in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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Abstract: This study tries to approach the schism of Nigerian Biafran War in the novel of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In addition, it attempts to address the rich culture of Nigeria, and how Adichie brings out sexuality in this novel in contrast to war. This study also analyses the History of Biafra and how the characters in the novel undergo severe trauma of war. Adichie portrays the cultural ultimatum of the society from men and women and how they meet up with their expectations. Though gender difference is not innate, the author's assumption of war is from a man's point of view and illustrates the Biafran War through the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba people. In a nutshell, this study analyses the History of Biafra and the traditions of Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba.

Key Words - Biafran War, Motherhood, Sexuality, Nigeria, Culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term African Literature covers a complex body of literary works, which comes mostly under the genres of war, post colonialism, slave writings, etc., *The Half of a Yellow Sun* comes under postcolonialism and aims highly at drastic war effects and depicts the issues through female characters. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian novelist, short story writer who also writes non-fiction. She has also written *The Thing around the Neck*, *Purple Hibiscus* and the essay "We All Should Be Feminists". The novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* is located in Nigeria and deliberately expresses the narrative of war and conflict in Nigeria. There are many languages spoken in Nigeria (around 450-500), in which Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa are the three major languages spoken in Nigeria. Most of the characters in the *Half of a Yellow Sun* are Igbos. The novel sets in the Eastern Nigeria and it is occupied mostly by Igbos. It is a historical novel which recounts the Nigerian Civil War in which the majority are Igbo people and delineate the secession of Biafra and the failure. This

novel explicitly portrays motherhood as a sign of femininity, though the female characters are completely out of it leaving no room for nurture and patience. The femininity and motherhood were completely different before the Biafran War. The role of women changes prior and after the war. The central character, Olanna, in the beginning of the novel, is a kind of feminist, who would like to liberate her mind from the need of men, by empowering education. This study focuses mainly on the history of Biafra and its failure; how Adichie brings sexuality in contrast to the war and the post-war effects which traumatise the characters of the *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

II. HISTORY OF BIAFRA

The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War was fought between the Nigerian government and the secessionist state of Biafra. Nigeria gained independence in 1960 from Britain. The British gave most of the control to the Hausa, as they were far easier to influence, but the Yoruba and Igbo were the strongest middle-class people which the Britishers failed to influence them. The Hausas began slaying the Igbos in their region. Hausas were Muslims, whereas, Igbos were Christians. In 1966, Hausas massacred around 10,000 to 30,000 people in the Northern Nigeria. On 30th May, 1967, Lieutenant Colonel, Odumegwu Ojukwu with the proper authorization declared the region independent under the name of Biafra. The name Biafra itself has a meaning that Bi - two, the war between two traditions in Africa. The leader of the federal government, Yakubu Gowon, refused to consider Biafra's secession. The Biafran troops were powerful and successful at first, but federal forces were more superior and started pressing the boundaries of Biafra. Biafra shrank to the 1/10th of its area during the War. British and America gave their armed forces to Nigeria to get back Biafra, while the Soviet Union and France gave only a minimal support. Chief Ojukwu ran to Cote d'Ivoire and the remaining officers surrendered to the federal government on Jan 15, 1970 and the conflict ended officially. After 30 months of war, Biafra surrendered. About three million people died during the Biafran War, mostly of starvation which led to kwashiorkor. Adichie shows the extreme motherhood through a woman carrying a head of her decapitated daughter in a basket and she says to Olanna that her hair was braided carefully. There are some sacrifices in the book that the poet Okeoma gives up writing in order to fight for Biafra. In the *Half of a Yellow Sun*, one of the central characters named Ugwu, goes to the war to fight against the federal government. The soldiers forcibly took him to the front line in the battle with no training. But Ugwu, both excited and scared is basically from a bush village of Opi, later becomes Odenigbo's houseboy and marvels at everything Odenigbo has. The war shaped him into a better person than before, which he believed had brought a change in him intellectually. An uneducated Ugwu after war, started writing a novel from his own experiences of war, blood and violence. The novel ends with Ugwu's book *The World Was Silent When We Died*, which he dedicates to his master.

III. REPRESENTATION OF RACE AND CULTURE

The six largest ethnic groups are the Igbo in Southeast, the Tiv people of the Northern Nigeria, the Efik - Ibibo, the Hausa and Fulani in the North. The Yoruba and the Fulani are predominantly Muslim

whereas the Igbos, Efik, Ibibo and Annang people are Christians. The traditional religion of Igbo is known as Omenani. Their literature starts from traditional Oral literature. The main reason for the Biafran War was the race and culture of Igbos and Hausas. In this novel, it is illustrated in the characters like Susan, an American who views Africans as uncivilized and inferior to whites. The main conflict in this novel is between autocratic Hausa and republican Igbo. The central characters Olanna and Kainene belong to the upper-class Igbo, Odenigbo belongs to a middle-class family, who has an intellectual vision in everything. Ugwu belongs to an extremely poor family, who is also an Igbo, from a bush village and Richard, a white, English expatriate. Richard came to Nigeria for his love towards roped pots, which he saw in a magazine. He marvels at their tradition and admires every little thing in Nigeria. Though Richard is a white, Adichie portrays him good and Adichie, though she is an Igbo, clearly portrays the mistakes committed by Biafra. Odenigbo's mother, Mama, who strictly follows the culture over there, rejects Olanna for being literate. In Nigerian culture, it is assumed that if a woman is educated, she will not obey her parents, society and her husband. Nigerians are always rich in tradition and culture which draws attention from all over the world.

IV. REPRESENTATION OF SEXUALITY AND MOTHERHOOD

Olanna Ozobia is one of the central characters in the *Half of a Yellow Sun*. She is an upper-class Igbo woman and she has a twin sister named Kainene. Olanna was raised in Nigeria before she moved to United Kingdom to acquire her Master's degree in Sociology and after completing her degree she moved back to Nigeria. During her time, only a few women were auspicious and could afford the Bachelor's degree. She had a Hausa boyfriend, Mohammed, but she left him for Odenigbo and gets married to him. Despite the superficiality of her parents, she remains the character with morals and self-worth. The name Olanna means,

“God's Gold. She appears to be a sexual object at first for Ugwu. Richard, Kainene's lover, sees Olanna for the first time, he sets his eyes on her and immediately experiences a sexual attraction towards her. Olanna is so beautiful that her parents offer her as a sex bait to their business partners. Olanna is offered to Chief Okonji, the Minister of Finance, in exchange for a contract Olanna's father bids for.” (Adichie 36)

The novel begins with an intellectual setting rather than a traditional opening. It runs in such a way that, Olanna is an attractive partner to Odenigbo, but his mother dislikes her, as she is insecure about her state of control over her daughter-in-law, coupled with her son's control over his wife. Her reason for disapproving Olanna is societal not personal. At Odenigbo's home, his mother once expressed to Ugwu that she heard her son is controlled by a woman and she often calls Olanna a witch. Motherhood, to Odenigbo's mother is over protection. Education to women, according to the Nigerian populace, is related to power struggle and control. “These girls that go the university follow men around until their bodies are useless. Nobody knows if she can have children. Do you know? Does anybody know?” (Adichie 98). Apart from this, Olanna and Odenigbo

share a satisfying sexual life, which they both knew wouldn't end in impregnation. It serves as a medium for the two to overcome hardest situations in life. When Olanna is away, his mother sends another girl to Odenigbo's room and the girl who spends a night with Odenigbo gets conceived. To deal with this, Olanna uses sex as a tool and sleeps with Kainene's husband, Richard, which ultimately suffices Richard's desire to copulate with Olanna and both were conscious enough to be secretive about their fling.

Nancy Chodorow argues that it's completely out of a woman's choice to become pregnant. "Women's mothering, like other aspects of gender activity, is a product of feminine role training and role identification. Girls are taught to be mothers, trained for nurturance, and they ought to mother" (Chodorow 31). It becomes difficult for a woman to define herself without the vision of childbearing. Though gender roles are not innate, childbearing is the common expectation in Nigerian women. If a woman decides not to bear a child, she is considered to be lacking in femininity. The society wanted Olanna to get married and to get conceived. As Olanna grew up, she came to realize that her parents are materialistic and selfish and could even sell her for their materialistic desires. Her parents fail to give the love and care which Olanna expected. Olanna's mother fails to give her what she wanted. Instead, she offered Olanna as a sex bait to the business partners. During the war, Amala, the girl who slept with Odenigbo out of his mother's condition, gave birth to a girl baby, and she refuses to touch it. Even Odenigbo's mother refuses to touch it since a girl baby is a sign of bad luck. But Olanna, though she knows it's Amala's baby, wanted to take the baby with her.

Olanna enters into motherhood completely out of her choice; Odenigbo himself cannot believe that Olanna is taking the baby with her. The story portrays the pathetic state of Nigerian women, who as wives fail to conceive, their own family and husbands will go in search of other women. Resonating at the fact that Amala spent just one night with Odenigbo turned out pregnant but Olanna, who has been attempting for so long, could not. "In the bathroom, she stood in front of the mirror and savagely squeezed her belly with both hands. The pain reminded her of how useless she was; reminded her that a child nestled now in a stranger's body instead of in hers" (Adichie 232). Most of the women in Postcolonial Nigeria define their femininity by procreation, which is having a male child. Anulika, Ugwu's sister, soon after her first menstruation, was made to understand the importance of bearing a boy baby. "I want to have a baby boy first, because it will place my feet firmly in Onyeka's house" (Adichie 119). After the war, Olanna stands at the relief centre for daily food. When Olanna encounters a woman showing her daughter's head, she undergoes mental trauma and temporary paralysis and becomes muted. Many people underwent such post-war effects which caused both temporary and permanent trauma.

V. CONCLUSION

Adichie demonstrates the history of Biafra in a whole image and represents the same along with the fictionalized Nigerian history. The role of women slowly started changing in some characters before and after the Nigerian Civil war. The nonconformity of gender roles during the war is illustrated through the

Half of a Yellow Sun. This study attempts to explain the history of Biafra, sexuality and motherhood in the female characters and the war effects of Nigerian Civil War.

VI. REFERENCES

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