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Patriotic Women In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half Of A Yellow Sun

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Abstract

In this paper, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's captivating book Half of a Yellow Sun, which relives the frightening consequences of the Biafran War is examined for how it celebrates the variety of sexual identities and behaviours in Africa as well as the hard realities of living in a dangerous conflict zone. In the book, Kainene, Mama, and Olanna describe Nigeria's struggle for freedom. Mama represents the past, and Kainene the future. Olanna is the allegoric feminine icon of nationhood since both are eliminated as unacceptable extremes. Olanna, an educated woman from Europe, joins the Civil War by taking after Kainene's bravery and Mama's customs. At the novel's conclusion, she comes to represent the woman as nation in the new Nigeria.

Keywords: Patriarchy, sexual assault, individuality, battle, achievement, survival

Introduction

“During wars, women are ubiquitous and highly visible; when wars are over and songs are sung, women disappear.” By Linda Grant De Pauw (Battle Crisis and Lullabies – 1966)

Elshtain contends that a tradition “that assumes affinity between women and peace, between men and wars, a tradition that consists of culturally constructed and transmitted myths and memories...the personas of just warriors and beautiful souls” is the source of the binary construction of masculinity and femininity. (Women and War:

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A New Epilogue, Chapter Four) Images of a male warrior or female victim predominate in war narratives due of these persuading gender dichotomies. These male-constructed binaries portray women's identities and military achievements as exclusively masculine domains. Nigerian war narratives, particularly the male authored narratives, are borrowed heavily from this tradition. Elshtain critically revisited the scene of World War II and the American Civil history to liberate female heroines swallowed in the wilderness of masculine mythological history.

Difficult topics like war and gender realism can't be fully depicted in a mythic story. War is much more complicated in reality than it is in the tales that have been used historically. Even more complicated than the masculinized myth is how gender is fragmented in battle. In *Women and War*, Carol Cohen acknowledges that women's roles in and experiences of war are much more significant and complex when one takes into account their varied individual identities, options, and experiences shaped by additional factors like the type of war, age, economy, class, interest, race, clan, belief, ethnicity, religion, culture, sexuality, physical ability, geographical location, state citizenship, and national identity.

The author narrates her tales not as an eyewitness but as a second class narrator because they are excluded from being participant observers. The narratives about the Nigerian Biafra conflict, can be seen in works like *The fighting*, *Girls at War* and *The Last Duty* are framed by the same old assumptions about women and masculinity. The traditional paradigm of "Arms and the Man" is prominent in these stories, undermining the substantial roles that women play as soldiers, leaders, decision-makers, and active participants in war and national struggle.

An attempt has been made to deconstruct the author's navigation of truth in the construction of female identities in Nigerian war narratives and the subversive reconstruction of Patriarchal truth particularly in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow sun* in 2007. There is no doubt that the Nigeria – Biafra war imposed unprecedented hardship on women left to shoulder the responsibilities of home making, bread winning, humanitarian services and community development. However these women embarked on several improvised strategies that included attack trading, farming, and social mobilization and win the war as a means of survival. The last category of women has been hidden in the Biafran war narratives because of the authors' intention to masculinize the war by reproducing grotesque image of Biafran women.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of Yellow sun* emerges four decades after Nigerian Biafra war. The novel identifies the women struggles towards vocalization, presentation and emancipation of Biafran women. It recreates the story of the war in its different significant stages and portrays the important resilient roles of the Biafran heroines in their struggles to survive, win the war, and to rebuild a war ravaged society. The novel remarkably distinguishes itself from the other narratives by its ability to reproduce the Biafra war stories through different social, cultural, and diplomatic perspectives.

The story's plot relates the war's causes and effects, as well as its consequences on Biafran families, the political climate prior to the conflict, the leaders of the counter-coup who were corrupt, the anti-Igbo massacre, secession, and war. These events are mirrored through the conversation among university intellectuals in their evening gatherings at Odenigbo's house at Odum Street of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Their regular meetings become a centre for national discourse. The novel evokes the early war-causing events and the university women's recovery efforts of the thousands of refugees who fled their workshop.

The major plot of the story revolves around the experiences of the Ozobia family particularly their twin daughters, Kainene and Olanna, before and during the war. The protagonist, Kainene, is represented as a male daughter in her family.

Kainene is not just like a son, she is like two', her father said. He glanced at Kainene and Kainene looked away, as if the pride on his face did not matter (HOYS – 32)

As a business administrator, the head of her own home, the manager of her own contracts with the government and oil companies, and the controller of her relationship with her lover Richard, an emigrant researcher, she is characterised throughout the novel by such masculine traits as those expressed in the aforementioned statement. When Kainene takes the initiative to establish and oversee refugee camps to save the war victims, her leadership abilities become very apparent. She is portrayed in the book as having an imposing masculine height and vigour in taking on difficult work, speaking her thoughts, and occasionally smoking like a man. These photographs are put side by side to show her as a superwoman or a woman-man, an image that challenges male authority.

Kainene's success in the business world and her economic independence de-stabilize the patriarchal structures of gender inequalities and economic imbalance as found in the works like *The Combat*, *The Last Duty*. *Half of Yellow Sun* introduces a reversal of social roles where the male characters like Odenigbo, Richard and Ugwu have to depend upon Kainene for survival, especially at the critical period of the war. Adichie equips her female character with the weapons of western education and financial security. Kainene and Olanna are independent women of substance and social relevance, not like Omotoso's *De Madam*, who is bereft of intellectual freedom and voice. For example Kainene is a master degree holder in Business Administration and her sister holds master degree in sociology and works as a lecturer in University of Nigeria in Nsukka. Both characters are strongly empowered with all it takes to participate as active members of society, leaders and decision makers

By highlighting the contrast between Olanna and Kainene's social and economic freedom and their mother's marital enslavement, the novel recreates the binary relationship between the old and the new. Because she lacks the economic and educational empowerment of her daughters, Lady Ozobia experiences marginalisation similar to that experienced by the women of Okpewho and Omotoso. In Adichie's book, Igbo women have access to social freedom, gender equality, freedom of expression, and active engagement in societal matters.

The novel portrays this using Olanna's relationship with Odenigbo, her maturity by confronting her mother-in-law's prejudice and later attempt to supplant her in her marital home because of childlessness. She transcends over these margins by her rational initiative to adopt Odenigbo's illegitimate daughter whom her mother-in-law rejected because of her sex. These features characterize Olanna as a new Igbo woman who has not only surmounted male-female dominance but has conquered female antagonism imposed by Patriarchal structure. Her maternal relevance in fostering baby in addition to her spousal commitments to Odenigbo does not limit her patriotic service in Biafra. Olanna continues in her diligent service as a teacher during the war rendering humanitarian services to Biafran children. She taught them about the Biafran flag:

“They sat on wooden planks and the weak morning sun streamed into the roofless classes. She unfurled Odenigbo's cloth flag and told them what the

symbols meant. Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the prosperity the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have and, finally, half of the yellow sun stood for the glorious future. (HOYS – 281)

The novel expands Olanna's maternal role to include national service. Despite her status, she readily identifies with the local woman and incorporates herself into their wartime victories. In order to win the battle, women are being mobilised under the leadership of Mrs. Muokelu. She carries Olanna through several orientations to survive the war and resuscitate her adopted daughter from Kwashiosrkor. As the Republic begins to dwindle as a result of high death tolls and tremendous poverty, Mrs. Muokelu later joins female attack traders. Along with her family, Olanna relocates to the Orlu refugee camp, joining Odenigbo, Baby, and Ugwu.

Kainene's refugee camp is a center of revival and family reunion at such a time when there is no vestige of hope for many Biafrans. She reunites herself with her sister Olanna, her lover Richard, and her twin sister's family members. Other Biafran families are accorded refuge in this camp. She employs her personal resources and available humanitarian relief resources in running the center. She explores improvised strategies such as farming as means of survival. In the dearth of food and economic supplies, she resorts to the perilous attack trading as the only resource available for survival.

The continuation of Adichie's attacks on women overcomes the limitations of narrative conclusion. After her initial adventure, Kainene finds herself in a place without boundaries, where her resourceful existence continues unabatedly. The ending of the book doesn't address how women's lives in the conflict are compelled. Olanna seeks for Kainene with intense anticipation, but she does not go back to her previous residence because the attack trade turns into a journey to an unbounded world of female achievement.

Kainene remains the heroine in Adichie's *Half of Yellow Sun* not only because of her ability to break a marginal ground but as a result of her enormous exploits to win the war and redeem the war ravaged Biafran society. She makes personal donations to Biafra, takes up a contract to support the war, participates in administering humanitarian logistics during the war, makes the personal sacrifice of her initiatives and talents and explore challenging avenues for rescuing the Biafran population under her patronage. Her attack exploits metaphorically end the storyline, but her enormous roles stretch beyond narrative possibility, making her an enigmatic character.

Adichie objectsifies them as sisters with a shared goal of emancipation, freeing womanhood from the shackles of tradition, superstition, and custom and outlining a redemptive path that increases women's chances of living fully realised lives. They are linked to other contemporary females through their liberation movements, including feminists, womanists, and African feminists. They highlighted the plight of millions of domestically mistreated and battered women who suffered no relief or recourse at home, at work, on the battlefields, or in refugee camps. Their stories rediscover the unacknowledged patriotic contributions made by women as spouses, mothers, sisters, and humanitarian workers as well as participants in battle and nation-building, which are frequently problematicized in stories written by males.

Half of a Yellow Sun in particular recreates the Biafran war history to celebrate the tapestry of Igbo woman's passive female purveyor entrenched in the myth. The images of educated, vocal, valiant and committed female players in the struggle to win the war and re-build the ravaged Biafran Republic undoubtedly indict the patriarchal structures that undermine female heroism.

The novel fulfills the legacy of creative enlightenment, mental liberation and emancipation. It is obvious that a plausible sense of history not only be redemptive but sustains the hope and courage for confronting the future. Adichie's strategy of re-telling the Biafran war stories through womanist perspective uncovers the untold truth about Biafran female characters, signals hope for future struggles and re-emphasizes the woman's significance in the human struggles for victory and survival.

Race and financial status are also exploited to further marginalise people in the piece, which depicts conservative segments of society as holding that sex is the only factor that determines gender identity. The racially marginalised and sexually oppressed yet fighting rebellious female characters of both works declare that race or biological construction have no bearing on determining social or gender identity with their performances in a range of crucial areas. They struggle not just against a male-dominated culture, but also against portions of traditional women who, sometimes out of ignorance or fear, are unquestionably committed to traditional societal standards and laws. Despite the fact that such unconventional ladies differ from one another due to their unique socio-cultural backgrounds, they demonstrate that they are far superior to their gender-assigned responsibilities

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