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## Evolution of women across Civilisation in the novel half of a Yellow Sun by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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### Abstract

In this article, the role of women in the Biafran War and the evolution of female characters in the novel is elucidated. As a woman, their love for the nation and their motherhood is established. The novel is a satire of horrors in the Biafran War and the devastating effects on the victims. The novel also explains the separation of Igbo land from the country and the assassination of the leaders. Adichie portrays the characters Olanna and Kainene as reflecting the poignant scars left by society in their personal lives. The resilient twin sisters remarkably evolve despite their suffering a traumatic life. They draw a line of a real-life example for the theme of trauma, psychological suffering, gender bias, human values, the emergence of women, etc. This research article explores the abandonment of Olanna and Kainene in their personal lives and surmounts the violent and unjust acts that happen to people during the war.

**Keywords:** Emergence of women, Gender discrimination, Human values, Violence, War

### Introduction

The British Empire left the country of Nigeria. In 1960, Nigeria was announced as an independent country. In 1966, the Igbo people were killed a lot due to racial practices, which provoked the division of southeast Nigeria and led to the creation of Biafra. The government of Nigeria, along with Britain and Russia, fought against Biafra. From 1967 to 1970, a three-year war took place. During the war, famine and combat claimed the lives of more than a million citizens. There are a lot of diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. The three major groups are the Southeastern Catholic Christians. Hausa- Fulani: 65% of the population is Muslim. Yoruba is the last one of 75% of the population, who are partially Christian and Islamic groups. The Hausa were considered the largest group in the country. So, they were considered the northern part of the nation.

They have been Muslims for several centuries, and during a large part of their history, they have participated in a large Hausa community in the northern region of today's Nigeria with shared traditions, hierarchy, and political system (Onyuku 5). Igbo was considered, after independence, a small tribe from the southern part of Nigeria, which had a connection with other small tribes. But they didn't have the coherence to form the Igbo state. So, the colonisers allowed the Hausa to take the political system, religion, and government. While the Igbo had missionaries forced upon them and had to accept a stricter form of governing (9). During most of the colonisation, the northern region was separated from the rest of Nigeria, and they had their own set of laws, basically being treated as a separate nation from the western, eastern, and southern parts of Nigeria (Isichei 390-391).

As a result of the complications, the upcoming unification between the states was problematic to say the least. Hawley, in his article about Biafran history, "the nation" that follows colonialism is usually not much of a gift; throughout Africa, in fact, it has been more akin to "the black man's burden, a problematic assemblage of people who frequently enough have little more in common than proximity (16).

John Stremlau, in The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970, notes the difficulty of managing Nigerian Cultural Diversity: "In the years following Independence, Nigeria's civilian leaders became increasingly embroiled in conflicts resulting from their attempts to consolidate national authority over some 250 linguistically distinct groups" (4). In Africa, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the partition took place. In the year 1914, many of the ethnic groups were destroyed. After independence in 1960, tribal battle escalated into the

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Nigerian Civil War. This war was a major consequence of the post-independence disharmony across the African continent. The major causes for the war are to control the natural resources like gold, diamonds, and crude oil. Nick Tembo in "Ethnic Conflict and Politics of Greed: Rethinking Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*" suggests that ethnic heterogeneity and disharmony combine disastrously with economic inequality: "ethnic cleavages have the power to run the nation aground when people, often from one ethnic group are given an advantage and enjoy the privilege of exercise greater control over a nation's resources at the expense of other tribal grouping with the country" (184). The eastern part of the country attempted to secede by force, and the Nigerian Civil War started. After the assassination of General Agwui Ironsi Biafran story started. J. De St. Jorre, in his historical study, explains the key event for the start of the Biafran War. The Nigerian Civil War, "A little before midnight on Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1966, while Ironsi was still on tour of the Federation, a group of armed Northern Subalterns Strode into the officers' mess in Abeokuta barracks and shot their garrison commander and two other senior Ibo officers dead" (68). The assassination of an Igbo general in the Nigerian army shifted the military power to the north. By this, the civil war started, and it lasted for three years; many of them lost their life, it is due to the inability of the Government and the Secessionists to reach a compromise. Susan Strehleir, "Producing Exile: Diasporic Vision in Adichie's 'Half of a Yellow Sun', "establishes the historical exploitative relationship between Nigeria and Britain: "Half of a Yellow Sun places Nigeria in historical context as a nation created in Europe, by Europeans, for European profit, and infused with European ideological commitment to the nation as an emblem of popular unity" (654-655).

During the Nigerian Civil War, literature was oppressed by the political forces. The writer belongs to the ethnic groups that share wartime sentiments. The government suppressed the writer's work. By grace, many of the works produced during this period have been recorded by many Nigerian writers. Chinua Achebe's *Girl at War* and *Other Stories* (1972), Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra* (1973), Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset Dawn* (1976), and Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982). All of these are Nigerian Civil War narratives. But unable to grab the reader's interest. But unable to grab the reader's interest. But Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) wins the hearts of the readers. The government of Nigeria imposed many limitations on the historical Biafran war works. After thirty-nine years of the Biafran war. The third book of Adichie is *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and the literary critics divide the literary period of Nigeria into three generations. The writer's work published after the period of Independence (1960), Chinua Achebe, belongs to the first generation. The second-generation writers' works were published after the Nigerian Civil War (1966-1967). Niyi Osundare belongs to that period. The works of third-generation writers were produced during the 1980s. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie belongs to the third period. Their work reflects the revolutionary changes in the lives of African people. They are involved in historiography and preliminary theoretical considerations. Adichie recreates African history in all her works.

### Methodology

There are several themes used in the novels. The methodology used in this study is a sociological method, and it is a product of society. It evaluates the social

conditions, class structure, gender roles, and power relations, and how they change the society.

### Olanna and Kainene Revolutionary Act in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

*Half of a Yellow Sun*, both Chinua Achebe and Binyavanga Wainaina have also recognised Adichie's fearlessness, asserting that it takes guts to take on the "intimidating horror of Nigeria's civil war" without looking away (cover). Toni Duruaku (2006) <sup>[4]</sup> has identified courage as one of the attributes of a good creative writer, stating that the creative writer "needs to be courageous to be true to his art and play the role of the guardian of the society's conscience" (24). Wainaina remarks that in this novel, we "find out that nobility of purpose has no currency in this contest." Continuing, she says that in it we also see "how powerfully we can love; how easily we can kill; how human we can be when a war dedicates itself to stripping our humanity from us" (blurb).

*Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie's work, focuses on an overlooked moment in the international legal story, the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). This novel explores the rhetorical strategies that the Biafran government used when struggling to justify its sovereignty. While Nigeria insisted that Biafra was a rough state without international legitimacy, Biafra claimed that Nigeria had given up its control over the region because it had violated their human rights during the 1966 pogroms. Throughout her literary work, Adichie's voice-over clarifies the misinterpretation of Africa, especially Nigeria, in all her works.

These three works express different voices, which makes the readers think from three different perspectives about the issues presented in the novel. Eleni Coundouriotis, in her book *The People's Right to the Novel: War Fiction in the post-colony*, hails Chimamanda Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* for its reinvention of "the genre of domestic fiction by using it to tell the story of war" and, also for, "feminizing" the war novel in the tradition of women forebearers in Nigeria such as Flora Nwapa and Butchi Emecheta (225). Jane Bryce, in her chapter titled "What is this country? Reimagining National Space in Women's Writing on the Biafran War," claims that Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* belongs to "a Wider Corpus" of "Nigerian" women's writing on the Biafra- Nigeria War that "fundamentally questions, not only the authority of fathers, but (also) the legitimacy of official history by which nationalism is configured" (450).

Roshan K, Morve. In his article entitled "Representation of History in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006)," he expresses his thoughts about the conflict: "The history of Nigeria is located within a conflictual war crisis that has seriously hampered. It's a peaceful existence. Conflict is primarily of two kinds: internal and external conflict. Internal conflict is a struggle, which is portrayed through the characters as well, and external conflict occurs when the character and the outside forces of the circumstances clash. It can be a struggle for a community. Adichie focuses more on internal conflict. Which addresses questions of ethics or morality; the questions of ethics and morality are seen in the characters of Ugwu, Baby, Odenigbo, Richard, Olanna, and Kainene. All these characters have an internal and external conflict with dissatisfaction, discomfort, and unhappiness, turning. (Roshan K, Morve, 151).

This story was adapted into the film *Half of a Yellow Sun*. There are many suppressions for the film, the film adaptation of the absence of more than a hundred minority peoples, the absence of the mutilation of women and children during the war, and the absence of cannibalism, pointing to the repression of history within the film. And the removal of the Kano massacre on the insistence of the government shows there is a deliberate political repression of history in the movie. The suppression is found in another work of the writer Buchi Emecheta. Her work, *Destination Biafra*, went through a reduction process before publication. According to Robert Berner, "In a foreword, Emecheta tells us that her publisher was forced by high production costs to reduce the [...] manuscript of *Destination Biafra* by half. This may account for what often seems a rather elliptical narrative [...] which too often blunts the novel's satiric edge" (160).

Another suppression account was given by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, who affirms that "..... Emecheta claims that the original first part of *Destination Biafra* [...] disappeared mysteriously, while the manuscript must have posed a serious threat to whoever effected this sabotage" (262). The other form of suppression is explained by Omar Sougou's *Writing Across Cultures: Gender Politics and Difference in the Fiction of Buchi Emecheta*, he suggests that publishers have the power to reframe the content of the writer: "The profile of this community of readers in primarily defined by the text- producer, but it may also be pre-determined by publishers in some cases" (60).

The story starts before the war, in the middle-class life at Nsukka University, which is rich and full of revolutionary rhetoric and hope. The major characters, Olanna and Kainene, twin sisters, belong to the rich Igbo fathers. Another major character is Ugwu, the house boy of talented Mathematician Odenigbo. Olanna became his wife. Kainene breaks with Richard, an Englishman. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a novel that makes a connection between humanity and war throughout the novel. It also dwells on the effects caused by the war on women, children, and elderly people. Odenigbo serves the pressure of British rule. The story also includes Ugwu, a young village boy in the house of Odenigbo. Olanna and Kainene transition from peripheral figures in the political discourse to central positions, with one's traumatic experiences and the other's courage and sacrifice embodying the reason behind the war. The novel can be seen as an exploration of Olanna's trauma stemming from her personal experiences, with each key event structured to connect, in one way or another, to Olanna or her traumatic journey.

*Half of a Yellow Sun* is a creative response to the traumatic effects of the Biafran War through the perspective of common people. All the main characters in the novel must find their own way to cope with the traumatic consequences of the horrors they suffered during the war, and some of the terrible experiences significantly alter them. Olanna witnessed the massacre of her relatives in Kano. These events and images will haunt her, and she will not be able to walk for a while. Richard also witnessed the brutal murder of a young Igbo man at an airport. This experience will help him feel closer to the Igbo people and further the development of his role as a witness for Biafra.

Finally, Ugwu, after being traumatised by the experience of fighting in the war, faces a trauma of his own doing when he lets himself be convinced to participate in a gang rape. The

novel provides fragments of the disintegration of a nation and descent into chaos. People by the roadside, staring sick, yet unable to buy medicines, families torn apart, feeding centres and improvised hospitals, petrol rationing, planes bringing relief food. Life during the war revolves around air raids, "the clatter of gunfire and the boom of mortars" (366). Olanna had an education in London. She was a beautiful girl, both lover and wife of Odenigbo. She is introspective and emotional. She is very sensitive and gentle to everyone. Olanna faces emotional pulses in the novel.

The reader will feel the pain together with her enduring capacity for compassion and love. She was most deeply affected by the trauma, and her struggle to come to terms with it is the most detailed one (44). Olanna and Kainene internalise the horror and violence of war, but remain steadfast in their efforts to uphold the bonds of family. Adichie's heroines are both educated, holding master's degrees from prestigious universities, and daughters of the upper-class Igbo society parents, but still, they fall prey to both patriarchy and the Nigerian Civil War; still, they never stoop to circumstances, rather, they enjoy victory, freedom, and emancipation from all sorts of misery, oppression, dilemma, and confusion with the aid of intuition, education, courage, and wisdom. Apart from the major characters, minor characters like Mama, Amulika, and Eberechi all stand for long-suffering.

African women who try to overcome but seem to be too vulnerable to stand against omnipresent anarchy. In short, Adichie here emphasises the education of women that paves the way for emancipation: "Adichie celebrates the new breed of African women who are highly educated, free-thinking, resilient, and independent. It is the high level of education of the female protagonists of Adichie's works that acts as their bulwark against the retrogressive cultural patterns that exacerbate the subjugation of women.... Women are strong and dynamic individuals who would allow nothing or no one to deter them from achieving their set goals." (Azuike 89).

The Kano massacre took place in Nsukka. Many Igbo people were killed. Olanna is very concerned for her family members' lives and the security of pregnant Arize. She rushes to Sabon Gari to save their family members. Olanna found "Uncle Mbaezi lay down in an ungainly twist, legs splayed. Something creamy white oozed through his head. Auntie Ifeka lay on the veranda" (HYS 147). Mohammad's friend, Olanna, drags her out of the scene to save her, but still, she cherishes a sense of close affinity with kith and kin: "she could not leave without Arize. Arize was due at any time" (HYS 147). She feels numb and completely incapable of participating emotionally, and considering the death of her relatives, even during the flight. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is replete with episodes of premeditated violence. Olanna's visit to her kinsmen in Kano before the pogroms:

The sun had turned red in the sky before it began its descent, when Uncle Mbaezi.

Came home. He called out to Olanna to come and greet his friend Abdulmalik (...)

He sold leather slippers close to uncle Mbaezi's stall in the market (...)

Abdulmalik pointed at the ripe gourd-like pods on the Kuka tree and said, 'You.

Come to my house. My wife cooks very sweet kuku soup.' (56-57).



### Olanna's love for children

Adichie intends to record the riots from her point of view while also distinguishing herself from other characters with whom she shares the experiences of war, but not alone, the traumatic images of Kano, or her fight back to Nsukka together with the refugees. Olanna, after seeing the bodies of her family members, felt a watery queasiness in her bowels before the numbness spread over her and stopped at her feet" (147). Her love for Amala's baby is unexplainable. During the war, the baby suffered from a severe cough and loss of appetite, and she consulted many doctors and spent all her earnings to save the children from starving. "Her greatest fear was that Baby would die. It was there, the festering fear, underlying everything she thought and did" (HYS 267). Olanna is considered the epitome of female characters in the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, because Olanna begs for food for the baby. She screams, "No, no, she has not been eating anything, but she ate egg yolk. Olanna held the woman's arm. Biko, please, I need the egg yolk" (HYS 269).

The endless love for her Baby is explained in this passage. The relationship between Olanna and her adopted Baby illustrates how the repetition of a mother's duty and everyday tasks in Adichie's novel shows the love of a non-biological mother. Obioma Nnaemeka summarises in her introduction to Huma Ibrahim's article on "Ontological Victimhood," a woman's choice of adoption as an alternative route to motherhood may allow her to "[define and participate] in motherhood as mothering on her own terms" (Nnaemeka 1998, p.5) <sup>[8]</sup>.

Olanna, throughout the novel, repeatedly does the task of bathing and taking care of the Baby. She is not only taking care of the Baby; she is fulfilling the duties of a good mother. Olanna needs to fill the gap in the missing biological link between her and the child. This definition of motherhood, "beyond the binary logic of fertile/infertile," helps to destabilise normative biologizing notions of the concept (Kowino 2013, p.25) <sup>[6]</sup>.

In the process of taking care of the baby, bathing alone is not the right thing to do. Olanna had the right to name her baby; it is a consequential role in motherhood. Mainly, the name should be significant according to the Igbo culture. Olanna claims that the choice of name is an act that Igbo parents will not take lightly, given that first names predictor's of a person's future. Olanna and Odenigbo discuss possible girl names immediately after Odenigbo's mother, "Mama named her Obiageli," Odenigbo explains, but Olanna refuses to accept the name, thinking that " [h]is mother had no right to name a child she rejected" (HYS 254). As soon as Olanna claimed a name for the baby, "we'll call her Baby for now until we find the perfect name. Kainene suggested Chiamaka. I've always loved the name: God is beautiful" (254). Finally, after some years of struggle, even though the baby is a couple of years old, Kainene mentions to Olanna that "it's about time the girl began to be called Chiamaka. This Baby business is tiresome" (344).

The relationship between the Baby, Olanna, and Ugwu is one of sharing and caring. Once returning from his hometown, Ugwu noticed that Olanna was bathing the Baby, and all of a sudden, he went to prepare food for the baby. Ugwu does the job merely cooking for the child; beyond that, he cares for the baby. Olanna suggests some nightwear for the baby, "that blue dress Arize made for her,"

Ugwu tells that "[t]he pink one is better" (HYS 123). Ugwu knows everything about the baby. He knows whether it fit to baby or not. Basically, Olanna and Ugwu's relationship is more than an employer-employee dynamic. When Ugwu is done with one role, Olanna will get another job to work on the baby. Both are trying to raise the baby, but they are not biologically related to the child.

Caring for the Baby is the only duty of Ugwu. The reason is that Ugwu is emotionally attached to the baby, and he is portrayed not as a servant.... Ugwu is portrayed not as a mere servant but as someone who performs his child-rearing task with great affection. He plays with the baby, sings to Baby, and has a need to "shield" the child (143). Ugwu bathes the baby; he is emotionally connected to the baby. "Ugwu helped Baby up and took her inside. 'Bath time', he said, although it was a little early, 'I can do it myself', Baby said, and so he stood by and watched her bathe herself for the first time. She splashed some water on him, laughing, and he realized that she would not always need him," (424). Ugwu's relation resembles that of a parent who watches his or her child become independent.

Olanna's love is not for the Baby alone. She is also affectionate and lovable to her houseboy boy Ugwu. In the beginning of the novel, they live a silent and peaceful life in the apartment of Nsukka, Ugwu, a village boy who works in the house of Odenigbo, an illiterate person. Olanna teaches him some manners and educates him. Olanna teaches the man how to put the talcum powder and bathe with Dettol to get rid of body odour, and to be decent in front of everyone. "There was clearly affection, but there was also a quiet speculation in his eyes, as if he was holding her up to something" (HYS 48).

### Ugwu's respect for Olanna

Ugwu considered Olanna a motherly figure, and he obeyed everything she told her. One day, Ugwu disappeared from the place during wartime. They had a hope that one day he would return to the place. In wartime, both Olanna and Odenigbo took care of Ugwu's sick mother. At once, Olanna heard the serious condition of Ugwu in the hospital. She rushes to the place and encourages him to be bold and to fight against death, "Olanna was always beside him, forcing him to eat and willing him to live" (HYS 397). Olanna had pride in Ugwu's participation in the Biafran war. Her patriotism reached its zenith by teaching the students amid the struggle. The civil war has wreaked havoc and caused massacres upon the Igbo people. Olanna's dream: "It is what happens in war, too many people die.... But we will win this thing" (HYS 397). Being an optimistic person, Olanna does not care for anyone who misleads her from her goal. Her main aim was to take care of the family and to educate the children throughout her lifetime. "She worried about other things: how her periods were sparse and no longer red but a muddy brown, how Baby's hair was falling out, how hunger was stealing the memories of the children" (HYS 389).

Olanna's life changes drastically after the war. Her peaceful life, which she can withstand with wisdom, confidence, certitude, intuition, and flexibility. The war washed out her happiness. There is a shortage of food, petrol, money, and sustenance for life. The bomb continually explode, and air raids by the Nigerian soldiers are very fierce. Olanna's mind is filled with the thought of death, destruction, end of every tedious object. She gathers strength to fight against the

agony: "If she had died, if Odenigbo and Baby and Ugwu had died. The bunker would still smell like a freshly tiled farm, and the sun would still rise, and the crickets would still hop around" (280). Olanna is in fear of death. Her mind is filled with unusual thoughts. She is exhausted with fear: "Olanna jumped. "Was that a plane? Was that a plane?" (278).

The major consequences of the civil war are malnutrition, starvation, infant death, and mass evacuation on the Biafran side. The Biafran side is continuously losing its strength to the Nigerian armed forces. War creates an intricate situation that provides ample scope to divulge the paramount qualities of Olanna and Kainene " Kainene and Olanna serve as surrogates for the middle-class Igbo women's experience during the Biafran War, but their experiences also demonstrate the large need to include a history and literature of women's experience with war to combat the belief that women are always the victims of conflict. Women can be victims of war, agents of war, or the combination of the two" (Rackley 23).

Olanna's twin sister, Kainene, also epitomises the traits of African women's freedom. She is also ambitious, kind, sensitive, optimistic, genuine, authentic, and flexible. Her role in the Civil War is also praiseworthy. In a life-threatening situation, she goes to import stockfish to earn money for helpless and hapless Biafrans. She opens a refugee camp for them and tries to provide them with a secure life: "I was an army contractor, and I had a license to import stockfish. I am in Orlu now. I'm in charge of a refugee camp there (HYS 342). As a flexible woman, Kainene forgives Olanna, who voluptuously engages in a sexual liaison with her lover Richard to avenge Odenigbo, and earnestly wishes to be reunited with her sister, her, and Baby. "Come with me. Bring Chiamaka, come and stay in Orlu... Kainene was holding her (HYS 38). During confusion, disorder, and misery. She is considered a woman with human values tied to her sister. The presence of Kainene gives hope, "Olanna got up and sat next to Kainene on the bench and put an arm around her. Kainene smelt of home" (HYS 344).

Kainene fights strongly against the hurdles of war. The Biafran army was almost losing its strength against Nigerian forces. She hopes for the land of Half of a Yellow Sun, where she can live with dignity and confidence: "The world will turn around soon, and Nigeria will stop this Kainene said quietly 'we'll win" (HYS 390). Kainene requires money to run the refugee camp. So, with a brave heart, she engaged herself in the dangerous trade across the border of enemy lines, wherefore she never returned. Everyone searches for Kainene, but cannot trace her movements. The novel ends with a sad note, whether Kainene will ever come back or not. Kainene sacrificed her life to Biafra: "Olanna's moment of solid hope, when she was certain that Kainene would come back, was followed by stretches of raw pain, and then a surge of faith would make her hum under her breath, until the downward slide came and she would crumple on the floor, weeping and weeping" (431).

## Conclusion

Mama wants to remove Olanna from his son's life. She brings Amala from her village. She intoxicates both Odenigbo and Amala. Amala has been used as a victim of his passion and sexual desire. Mama had a strong belief in tradition and culture. So, she had never left his village,

Abba. At last, she had been shot dead by the Nigerian army forces. Odenigbo laments, "Mama never understood that we were really at war and that her life was in danger" (323). Many of the women had been sexually assaulted during the civil war. The suffering people are Amulika, Amala, and Eberechi. Amulika Ugwu's sister was raped by the Nigerian soldiers. "They said the first one that climbed on top of her, she bit him on the arm and drew blood. They nearly beat her to death" (421). All these characters are physically assaulted. While Olanna and Kainene, as brave young women, fight for the freedom of others. Olanna evolves for the voices of infants affected by the war. Till the end of the war, she educated the children. Kainene at last helps people in the refugee camp. Till the last breath, both the protagonist surrenders their life to serving the people of the nation.

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