



Representations of Nigerian Political Unity and Dynamisms in Achebe and Chimamanda

Ifeoma Abana¹ and Vera Okoli²

¹Department of English, Madonna University, Nigeria

²Department of English, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State, Nigeria

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 8 March 2020;

Received in revised form:

5 April 2020;

Accepted: 15 April 2020;

Keywords

Multilingualism,
Unity,
Corruption,
Tribalism,
Nepotism,
Mother-Tongue

ABSTRACT

This study is based on the dynamics of Nigerian politics as portrayed in the two select post-colonial works of Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Adichie. The paper considers the role of identity in the post-colonial era and narrows it down to the Nigerian/Biafran civil war of 1967-1970. It sets out to reveal the problem of identity that was prevalent in Nigeria during the civil war and the state of Nigeria's politics during the period of the war. The study is based on different research materials such as internet sources, journals, textbooks and interviews. Achebe's book is the most accurate, recent and comprehensive prose that has discussed the past, present and the possible future of Nigerian politics. Adichie, though never experienced the war, skillfully constructs a tragic story that depicts accurately the events of the civil war. The findings of this research is based on the fact that, if the political leaders of the country will be able to compromise their diverse identities and the ethnic groups in the country come together to believe in a common identity, then the strife and disagreement will be in its barest minimum. Finally, conclusions are drawn on how to address the problems of national disunity and selfish politics in Nigeria.

© 2020 Elixir All rights reserved.

Introduction

The concept of post-colonial literature has been used as an umbrella term for the writings of various disenfranchised groups from countries of Asia and Africa which were on the primacy list of the colonizers due to motley reasons. Ironically, the idea of post-colonialism does not was gained sovereignty. Instead, it incorporates the experiences of the indigenous people during the colonial phase and the manner of their retaliation is both silent and manifest. Very soon the idea spread in various arenas of art and literature and a new theory rose to the dais of world literature and art. Post-colonial literature is an attempt of the colonized to reshape and restructure their clan identity once again and revive their customs and traditions in their narratives. For instance, Chinua Achebe in most of his works tries to present an insider's view about Igbo customs and conventions to the readers and at the same time juxtaposes the pre-colonial and colonial situations in Nigeria. He brings home the idea that a rich and prosperous clan was victimized under pacific attempts by the colonizers. "Identity" in its present incarnation has a double sense. It refers to social categories and to the sources of an individual's self-respect or dignity. In ordinary language, at least, one can use "identity" to refer to personal characteristics or attributes that cannot naturally be expressed in terms of a social category and in some contexts, certain categories can be described as "identities" even though no one sees them as central to their personal identity. Nonetheless, "identity" in its present incarnation reflects and evokes the idea that social categories are bound up with the bases of an individual's self-respect. A typical instance of this is in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The

deconstruction of Adichie's works mimics the post-colonial identity in that the post-colonial identity occupies a paradoxical space in which both the colonizer and colonized identities are interdependent. Together, Ugwu (a house boy), Olanna (a wealthy and the educated Igbo woman) and Richard (a British man infatuated with Igbo culture and in love with an Igbo woman), create an assemblage of personalities, cultural attitudes and positionalities that seem to be arbitrarily interconnected. Adichie seems to skillfully connect three very different characters whose relationships, were it not for the Biafran War, would not be deeply intimate. The social gatherings at Odenigbo's house are full of debates on Africa's political future. Here, the usefulness of various forms of African governance is discussed amongst the Nigerian intelligentsia. One particularly noteworthy debate involves Odenigbo defending the tribe as the ideal unit for Africans, as other characters stress the need for pan-Africanism or nationalism. He is quoted as proclaiming: "the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe... I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came". In the novel, genda also determines the characters' lives and identities. The central pairing is that of Olanna and Kainene, twin sisters who are delineated according to what the other is not. They are characterized by two opposing types of femininity: Kainene is ostensibly a cool and enigmatic femme fatale, while Olanna is generous to the point of relegation. The novel makes clear that the women are able to play out these types of feminism

because they are in a position of financial security and have been gifted with overseas education. Due to their privileged backgrounds, they are lucky enough to explore what it means to be a woman in a time of social upheaval seeing that they have the means of self-indulgent in questions of identity. This is most certainly the case when it comes to marriage. Nigeria became politically independent on October 1, 1960, after about seven decades of colonial rule by Britain. Prior to colonial rule, most of the groups that today make up the country were often distinguished by differences in history, culture, political development and religion. Several important developments that have continued to affect Nigerian government and politics in the postcolonial period marked the period of colonial rule. In creating largely artificial regions, the British government fostered the cleavage between ethnic majority and minority groups. Each region contained the nucleus of the majority group that dominates in its respective region: the Hausa/Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west and the Igbo in the east. The major political parties that emerged in the regions and controlled them were based on these groups. With regional autonomy, the major groups became the major "shareholders" of the federation. The minorities, feeling oppressed and dominated, agitated for separate states in the regions. Since independence, there has been struggle among the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria over natural resources and political power that has led to civil conflict between 1967-1970. This war was fought between mainly Igbo dominated Biafra and Nigeria. Over three million of its citizens mainly of Igbo extraction were killed. The causes of the war are very controversial. The general consensus among historians, social commentators and political scientists were fear of domination and struggle over economic resources. Political antagonism and increasing corruption characterized the first government of independent Nigeria. After the first coup, northerners who feared Igbo dominance staged a counter-coup in July of 1966 which resulted in the death of Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi. Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a northerner, replaced Ironsi as Chairman of the Federal Military Government. Political dissension continued in many northern states where mobs began killing easterners, particularly members of the Igbo ethnic group. Ojukwu announced his secession and on May 30, 1967, declared the eastern region an independent state named the "Republic of Biafra". Nigeria attempted to counter this secession by initiating a war with Biafran forces. Achebe in his memoir, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, maintains that the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafra war was as a result of the struggle for power and class stratification among political leaders. He sees the war as a collision of ego between the Igbo and the Nigerian federal government. Ojukwu, being "the voice" of the Biafrans, saw himself as an Oxford man that deserved better treatment than his counterpart, Gowon (120).

This issue of class-consciousness, according to Achebe, remains part of the Nigerian society till date. One of those who also harboured an alternative view was the distinguished diplomat, Raph Uwechue, who served as Biafra's envoy to Paris up until 1968, and then later as Nigerian ambassador to Mali. Uwechue published a well-known personal memoir called *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War: Facing the Future in 1969*, in which he unleashed a scathing criticism of Ojukwu and the leadership he provided for Biafra: "In Biafra two wars were fought simultaneously. The first was for the survival of the Igbo as a race. The second was the survival of

Ojukwu's leadership. Ojukwu's error, which proved fatal for millions of Igbo (sic), was that he put the later first" (22).

The story of Nigeria during the post colonial era has been one of a search for the constitutional and political arrangement that, while allowing for the self-expression of its socially and culturally diverse peoples, would not hinder the construction of a nation out of this mosaic. In this search, the country has experienced cycles of military and civilian rule, civil war and peaceful reconstruction. Many distinguished novelists have contributed immensely on the history of the Nigerian civil war. These novelists include: Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Buchi Emecheta, Adichie, Chukwuemeka Ike and many others.

Statement of the Problem

Many research works have looked into events of Nigeria during the post-colonial era, the events leading to the civil war and the state of Nigeria's politics during the period of the war. However, this research work is set to reveal the various identities of the diverse ethnic groups and how they eventually contributed to the civil war. It also reveals the corrupt practices of the politicians in the country. No researcher to the best of my knowledge has looked into these issues. This conflict, which lasted from 1967-1970, is now mostly forgotten by countries outside Nigeria. It was a brutal war and Adichie does an excellent job of simply telling her story, preventing the novel from being advocacy literature. She indicts the outside world for its indifference and probes the arrogance and ignorance that perpetuated the conflict. Similarly, (Maslin, 2007, p.319) opines that, *Half of a Yellow Sun* takes us inside ordinary lives laid waste by the two ordinary unraveling of nations :

There was a manic vibrancy about her, about the way she left for the refugee camp each day, about the exhaustion that shadowed her eyes when she returned in the evenings. She spoke about twenty people living in a space meant for one and about the little boys who played the war and the women who nursed babies and the selfless Holy Ghost priests, Father Marcel and Father Jude .

Abubakar Atofarati opines that, "Nigeria used starvation and genocide as weapons of war, and the Biafran soldiers committed their own atrocities against the Nigerians and even their own people"(9). Alfred A. Knopf focuses on the partition of Nigeria, most notably the impact of war's brutalities through the humanist perspective. Knopf focuses on the impact of war and its damages at various levels. The harrowing experience and savagery of war is foregrounded with history of haunting intimacy. Knopf further writes:

... Adichie tells her profoundly gripping story primarily through the eyes and lives of Ugwu, a 13-year-old peasant houseboy who survives conscription into the Biafran army, and twin sisters Olanna and Kainene who are from a wealthy and well-connected family. Tumultuous politics, power plot and several sections are harrowing, particularly passages depicting the savage butchering of Olanna and Kainene's relatives... This is a transcendental novel of many descriptive triumphs most notably its depiction of the war's brutalities on peasants and intellectuals alike (1).

For Knopf, the novel is all about the savagery of the war which is shown through the variety in narration. The most traumatic events due to racial conflict is shown vividly; like butchering of Olanna and Kainene's relatives and Ugwu's pathetic condition while conscripting into the Biafran army to

fight the racial or ethnic war of secession. Commenting on the novel, John, Marie-Elena, a novelist argues that the novel is not a standard war account but it does not excel the horrors. She sees hope, future, unity and love out of such conflict in Nigeria. She further writes:

...Adichie insists on accountability and then forgiveness as the only option for redemption: what will you do with the misery you have chosen? Will you eat misery?" By the end, after breaking our hearts, she uses her last sentence to blind-side us with a gift. She offers hope in the future, which is what we imagine (41). E. Frances white views the novel from the nationalist point of view. She focuses on the futility of Nigeria's ethnic nationalism. She also blurs the boundary of master and servant, Odenigbo and Ugwu respectively. She further argues that Odenigbo and Ugwu are a fascinating pair and writes:

As Nigeria descends into bloody civil war, naïve Ugwu's experience helps him find his voice.... Many of the war's most harrowing experiences are shown through Ugwu's eyes. In contrast to his servant, Odenigbo becomes more and more mute, as his idealism is 'dashed along with Biafra's hopes. At the beginning of the book he is a man sure of his opinions and place in the world. By the war's end, his narrow ethnic nationalism seems empty. With no defenses against slights to his manhood, he sinks into alcoholism. Yet Ugwu dedicated his book to Odenigbo, but for Odenigbo, Ugwu would never have learned to read, write or challenge the injurious values he learns in school (10).

The concept of ethnic nationalism which Odenigbo raises turns out to be mere futility. His revolutionary attitude at the last fades with alcoholism and amnesia. Ugwu, on the other hand, though presented as a slave within the ethnic hierarchy, at last turns to be the hero of the novel as he challenges the harrowing condition caused by the civil war. Another critic Donna Seaman, focuses on the psychological horror out of the war showing the psyche and ethnical pressure because of the racial violence. She also portrays the neo-colonial mission which is hungry to exploit oil and influence. She, in this concern, writes:

Half of a Yellow Sun is Biafra's emblem of hope, but the horrors and misery Adichie's characters endure transform the promising image of rising sun into that of a sun setting grimly over a blood-soaked and starving land. Adichie has masterminded a commending, sensitive epic about a vicious civil war predicted by prejudices and stroked by outside powers hungry for oil and influence (39).

Seaman sees the psychological pressure that Adichie employs to depict the rising of hope. *The Half of a Yellow Sun* represents the rising sun which is turned into the setting to the destruction. Thus, the main focus of Seaman is on the doomed breakaway of Igbo State and fate of Biafra. She sees the colonial motif in the very vicious civil war in some extent (for oil).

A Review of Chinua Achebe's, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*.

Chinua Achebe's *There was a Country* is one of the most recent autobiographic works on the Nigerian Civil War. It has been diversely criticized and interpreted by various critics from the very outset of its publication. Adeyinka Makinde on his part has this to say:

The book is at its best when the details are personal: the story of the last time Achebe saw slain poet Christopher Okigbo; his account of cowering overnight in a car emptied of petrol; the fate of trusting his first and only draft of *Things Fall Apart* to the Royal Mail Service. His own free verse poetry is interspersed with the text. But still Achebe would rather talk politics (7).

Makinde is of the view that, Achebe has other things to emphasize on, regarding his experience during the civil war, but he rather prefers to talk about politics, Abiodun Oyewole argues that:

There was a Country, that was, Biafra, no matter how briefly it lived, "There was a Country". Achebe was just drawing our attention to the principles of the Biafran revolution which led to the secession of the East. The principles were called the "Ahiara Declaration". It was a model country where justice, peace, law and order reigned. The "pogrom" was on and Igbo people were being slaughtered in many parts of Nigeria. One who can understand how people were facing extermination like the Jews during the Holocaust would want a model country where there would be peace, justice, law and order. Achebe lived through this war and saw the slaughtering of his people. So, it was very emotional to him. Hence, he gave plenty of space to the Igbo side of this war (3).

Achebe's personal stake in the Biafran war makes his account more than just a standard historical retelling. His writing reveals his love for his people and his hope for Nigeria's future. Throughout the book, Achebe is very blunt about many things. He states clearly that he is for a new seceded State of Biafra; he also states the evils of tribalism (Nigeria has over 250 tribes).

(Nwagbara, 2015, p.121) as regards this, posits that, Achebe gives a detailed account of events that transpired in Nigeria during the colonial era, especially the political wizardry of some of the political leaders of that period. These leaders benefited from the education provided by the colonial institutions like the church. They consequently constituted the reservoir of leadership that the nation needed at independence.. Achebe does not fail to establish the fact that tribalism was a major event in the politics and leadership of colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. This was coupled with political corruption prevalent amongst those in the political class. The leaders of the period utilized the weapon of tribalism to remain relevant in politics. Achebe has been openly critical of the Nigerian government his novel, *A Man of the People* even anticipated the military coup that launched the conflict. But, he was also horrified by the brutality of the war and was torn between his sympathy for the Biafran cause and his disappointment with the leaders of the Biafran independence movement. Achebe assumes the role of a tribal spokesman bent on building up the Igbo as a master race, absolving it of any blame in the events that culminated in the war, reducing other (major) tribes of Nigeria as less-sophisticated and incurably envious of the Igbo tribe. Idowu posits that, "it's an odd decision... readers expecting a juicy literary memoir will be disappointed, but Achebe is a credible guide (2017,p.13). Achebe's memoir is an answer to many questions that have been asked. However realistic Achebe's memoir might seem, it only earned him more Nigerian enemies. This is because of it's daring bluntness. It contains information that will aid the young generation to know more about the history of Nigeria. According to James Tar Tsaaior

(2013,p.71), in his latest book, *There was country*, Achebe again ploughs the furrowed landscape of Nigeria's political and social existence with characteristic uncommon courage, fortitude and forthrightness. In this compelling, haunting and masterfully executed autobiographical narrative, Achebe reaches deeply into the inner contours of his native Nigeria's undulating history and recuperates it with searing and penetrating insights. In this rite of self-telling and re-telling through the instrumentality of the "I" of the beholder, Achebe summons past history and imposes on it the sacred duty and cumbersome burden of answering to the contingencies of present history and the challenges that await the nation in future history. This dialectic between the past, present and future is important to Achebe because his role as "a private, public and prophetic figure who is ordained to bear the burdens of society" is precisely located within this temporal configuration (84). By frequently recalling the sights of infants and unarmed civilians with tattered clothes fleeing to nowhere in the Biafra war zones, dying in droves, killed by federal war planes or cut down, lynched or decapitated with machetes by federal soldiers and their civilian supporters under the watchful eyes of their commanders, Achebe portrays the war as a crime against the Igbo that should have been redressed. Going by this and many other atrocities committed against the Easterners, Achebe asserts his deep sense of disappointment stating: "My feeling towards Nigeria was one of profound disappointment, especially because the federal government sat and let it happen" (71). It is this abiding sense of disappointment over the Nigerian project that has compelled his memoir so that the living might learn some lessons from this historical memoir. Regarding all these issues and commentaries, it is clear that Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Achebe's *There was a Country* are seen as a personal history of Biafra, can be analyzed from various perspectives, but the present research prefers to analyze the fictional and non-fictional narratives as capturing the identity and political issues prevalent in post-colonial Nigeria. These war areas have not been looked at by previous researchers.

Identity and Politics in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

It is interesting the way Adichie discusses the shift in identity depending on the surroundings of the individual. The simplicity and complexity of identity is played out in *Half of a Yellow Sun* through the way characters are forced to change their behavior and adapt to changing social situations. Adichie also contrasts the identities of the main Nigerian characters through the way they are described to the readers and the way the other characters (white intellectuals) view them. One of the key themes in the novel is identity and the way different characters view each other and the way the characters are presented to the reader. Within the black community, there are certain stereotypes and preconceptions that can be seen. For example, the houseboy, Ugwu expects all intellectual black women to have western features, Ugwu "imagined the bald woman, beautiful, with a nose that stood up, not the sitting-down, flattened noses that he was used to" (32). However Adichie challenges that stereotype by showing that there are different kinds of beauty and that having a fuller figure, flattened nose or androgynous body does not make a woman any less beautiful (28). Richard (a white man) falls in love with Kainene (a black woman) who by the standards of the other people in the book is not considered a definition of beauty. Odenigbo's view is that colonial legacy is still working. The African identity is not free, it is associated with the traces of colonialism. Odenigbo is more concerned with

his ethnicity, Igbo rather than Nigerian identity or humanism. At the same time, his statements work in two levels; historical and cultural. On the one hand, he is troubled by the historical trauma of colonization and on the other hand, he is excluding the other ethnic groups focusing on Igbo. This kind of attitude is guided with the cultural hierarchy among the Africans. He seems to be guided by "thick ethnics" rather than "thin morality" or critical humanism. His statements voice the collective identity of Igbo eliding the ethnics of co-existence. *Half of a Yellow Sun* intriguingly portrays the subtle-and occasionally bold-identity politics. While reading this novel, the following questions of identity quickly come to mind: Did colonialism create new identities? Did colonialism create conflict between groups based on pre-existing identities? What does one do when one's own identity is inextricably tied up with a colonial past? Does Adichie's identity representation point at within the Nigerian identity politics? These questions are suggestive of the significance and the reason why Adichie's writing is "post-colonial". Many of the characters in this narrative question what must be done in the aftermath of British colonialism as they navigate the dynamics of their own identities and even develop a new identity: Biafran nationalism, Hausa, far from the previously imposed and the now negotiated Nigerian identity. At the beginning of the novel, before the war breaks out, we are introduced to Ugwu, a young illiterate houseboy who works for Odenigbo, an Igbo professional who is clearly an elite. The interactions between Ugwu and his "master" identify the class and identity politics present in post-colonial Nigeria. He seems to be most comfortable in English, speaking Igbo language "coloured by the sliding sounds of English, the Igbo of one who spoke English too often" (11). By mastering English, Odenigbo has lost touch with his native tongue and he has become alienated from his own self (14). The way he speaks Igbo reveals his linguistic hybridism and Ugwu understands this hybrid state of his boss and calls him master which signals his detachment from who he really is. The master lives in a western-style house, uses British terms of speech; he is known for saying "my good man" throughout the book; has tea and bread for breakfast, and plays tennis. It is when Ugwu comes to live with Odenigbo that he first becomes familiar with colonial establishments, despite their being both Igbo. Ugwu contrasts this new environment with his familiar traditional home life. When he hides some chicken in his pockets, master reprimands him, saying "Do your people eat while they sleep? ... food will stay in the dinning room and the kitchen" (11). This strongly suggests that the master is of a different class or group of people from Ugwu, or at least, he sees himself that way. In the scenario of post-independent Nigerian politics, Adichie traces the intervention of ethnicity and ethnic politics that also provokes and fuels violence. Here, complexity of ethnicity not only includes the inter-ethnic conflict, but also the situational religious conflict. Lack of resources triggers intense competition and ethnic polarization. Due to the politicization of ethnicity, Hausa came to power in the first election disappointing Igbos and Yorubas. The first coup was the result of ethnic intolerance or superiority complex when Igbo premiers overthrew the Hausa government assassinating the prime minister, and the second coup was inspired by the intensity of revenge from the side of Hausa. Ultimately, Richard struggles to reconcile his privilege with his desire to immerse himself in Igbo culture. There are numerous points in the novel in which Richard cleaves to the privilege that is

associated with his social status. Often, he becomes annoyed or insulted when members of the Igbo tradition fail to recognize his privileged status. By contrast, he loathes the racist attitudes of the British and makes whole-hearted attempts to embrace Igbo culture. The title of the book, *Half of a Yellow Sun* could be seen as the author's affirmation of the idea that Nigeria identity is burdensome. This idea is projected in the book where Nigeria is described as "a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp" (158). This is a reference to the country as a product of a colonial administration which for administrative convenience welded together disparate tribes without the people's consent. The result is the struggle for supremacy among the tribes in a bid to fill the power vacuum left by the colonial masters at independence. (Elena, 2007, p.20) in the novel confirms the above position thus, "one must see that tribe as it is today, is as colonial a product as nation and race". The historical fact of ethnicity and race as the bane of Nigeria's unity is projected in the novel through incidents that resonate with the failure of the leadership to identify and harness the positive aspects of Nigeria's history for national unity. For example, early in the novel, prior to the outbreak of hostilities precipitated by the pogrom in Kano against the Igbo, the predominant northern natives refuse to admit Igbo children in government schools. In order to educate their children, the Igbo Union constructs an Igbo Union Grammar School. This was because, the northerners viewed the Igbo as people who want to control everything.

In the novel, we find out that the identities of the characters in one way or the other affected their belief or propositions on the war. The Igbos who were hardworking, were being made to leave the northern and western parts of the nation for fear of taking over the whole nation. If only the diverse tribes in Nigeria will agree and act on a common identity then wars will be averted in the country. Identity and Politics in Achebe's *There was a Country; A Personal History of Biafran identity* played an active role during the Nigeria civil war. Due to the fact that Nigeria is made up of several ethnic groups, there was a struggle for relevance among these groups. The Igbo people were very hardworking and responded effectively to western education. They occupied relevant posts in the Nigerian Railway Corporation and Nigerian Ports Authority. According to Achebe: "Special attention instead was paid to the manpower distribution within the public services, where 45 percent of the managers were Igbo... Moreover, regrettably, though, the North's future contribution was credited with only 10 percent of the existing posts" (77). The Igbo people are industrious; this is their identity. Their success, instead of stimulating healthy competition among other ethnic groups, bred deep resentment and eventually led to strife. The Nigerian-Biafra civil war is therefore a product of the diverse identities of the different ethnic groups. Just as national institutions are important for promoting nationalism, there must be common national identity to promote a sense of belongingness. Until when there are common identities and symbols, nationalism would not stir national integration. Therefore, national integration is an art of creating a balance in the synergy between two or more incongruent elements to produce a common congruent element, that is, an identity. It is a situation, where togetherness is not determined merely by skin colour, language or cultural affinity but by shared belief in co-existence and nationhood, that is to say that, the different

ethnic groups must share a common identity for national unity to be achieved.

In the first part of the book, Achebe traces how tension remained latent throughout the period of colonial domination. In part two, the author focuses attention on the civil war and identifies the major gladiators, their actions and inactions, possible interest and his own personal experiences during the war. Issues that have generated most of the controversies associated with the book such as the infamous war policies of the Nigerian government, especially the obnoxious policy of economic blockade and starvation are the concern of part three. It also tries to counterbalance the claims of genocide from both sides of the conflict. In part four, the author stretches out Nigeria like a patient on a table and diagnoses corruption and indiscipline as well as leadership failure as the major problems of Nigeria and the greatest threat to national unity. However, the author provides and opens a window to peer into Nigeria's future and provides possible remedies. In the book, Achebe takes a critical look at the socio-political undercurrent that informed the drift of post-independent Nigeria nation until its descent into its eventual anarchy. On this autobiographical platform, he tries to create moral and political parameters towards a justification of his point of view that the war was a struggle and a conspiracy designed by the other two big ethnic groups, advertently or otherwise, to subdue and if possible subjugate the industrious and versatile Igbo race. At the other level, Achebe also argues that the Nigeria/Biafra war was aggravated by the standoff of wit and jealousy and more or less a personal war and collision of egos between Odumegwu Ojukwu and Yakubu Gowon with their henchmen and advisers at the top (120). In following, the narrator through this historically sensitive and delicate intellectual terrain, one could find the setback to national progress caused by ethnicity, tribalism, politics of bitterness and greed.

The war, having been fought and won, after the "no victor, no vanquished" pronouncement at the end of it in early 1970, Achebe points at the wounds of the war to show the point that is still festering and pinching as a reminder and as a pointer to the future. He puts the scenario of the independent anxiety, the budding hope of a new dawn and what became the nation soon after the twilight of his elevation to self-rule and nationhood that turned to stillbirth:

It has often been said that my generation was a very lucky one..., the rate of development, with villages transforming into towns, or the coming of modern comforts, such as electricity or running water or modes of transportation, but more of a sense that we were standing figuratively and literarily at the dawn of a new era. My generation was summoned, as it were, to bear witness to two remarkable transitions-the first, the aforementioned impressive economic, social and political transformation. But more profoundly, two decades later we were thrust into the throes of perhaps Nigeria's greatest twentieth-century momentous elevation from a colonized country to an independent nation... (40). Achebe writes on the January 1966 coup which he says had initially elicited widespread celebrations due to the unpopularity of the very corrupt and grossly inept civilian regime that was overthrown. The counter-coup of July 1966, still widely referred to as a revenge coup was the signal required to hunt down the Igbo people in the North and later in the West and slaughtering them like fowls. There seemed to be lust for revenge, which meant an excuse for Nigerians to take out their resentment on

the Igbo people who led the nation in virtually every sector "politics, education, commerce and the arts" (66-67). On August 25, 1968, while the Biafra-Nigerian war raged, Achebe told participants at a political science seminar at the Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. The story of the massacre of thousands of innocent Eastern Nigerians need not be told here. But a few salient features should be recalled. First, it was a carefully planned operation. Secondly, it has never been condemned by the Nigerian government. In short, thousands of citizen were slaughtered, hundreds were wounded and maimed and violated, their homes and property looted and burned; and no one asked questions (83). Achebe was one of the last to flee Lagos because as he says, "I simply could not bring myself to accept that I could no longer live in my nation's capital, although the facts clearly said so" (71). Achebe was disappointed that whereas mobs hunted innocent civilians down and slaughtered them, the federal government sat by and let it happen. Achebe was to hear later that a drunken soldier had gone to his office "wanting to find out which was more powerful, their guns or my pen" (70). Fortunately, Achebe was not in the office. Also, some determined 'pogromists' had visited his Ikoyi residence to look for him and, happily, he had left the house. It could be heart-shattering to be suddenly made to feel unwanted, in fact, that you have become a prized target for brutal slaughter in a city you once called your home. What flourished in Nigeria at this time was barbarism at its best. Achebe writes that a detailed plan for mass killing was implemented by the government, "the army, the police" the very people who were there to protect life and property. It was a premeditated plan that involved careful planning, awaiting only the right spark (82). Achebe observes that it was Collin Legum of the London Observer that first described the mass killings of the Igbo people after the July 1966 revenge coup as genocide (82). Many others including journalists, international observers, representatives of international humanitarian agencies and even Pope Paul IV's special envoy were to use the word genocide to describe the situation in Biafra. To the Nigeria authorities, all was fair in war, including such horrible crimes against humanity like callous bombings of markets, schools, hospitals relief centres and private buildings, ripping apart unarmed civilians mostly women, including many pregnant ones, children and health workers. It also meant to starve them unto submission using the policy of the Gowon-led regime. Major characters in the crisis: Ojukwu, Gowon, Awolowo, and many others. The Organization of African Unity (OAU), and countries like Britain and Russia, got their shares of critical examination in Achebe's memoir. The UN, for instance, was in a very good position to achieve an amicable resolution of the conflict and halt the genocide if it did not choose to encourage the atrocities against Biafrans by its atrocious silence. The British government which had reluctantly relinquished power to Nigerians ensured that the Nigeria she left behind was a disaster waiting to happen. She used a courageous English junior civil servant to rig Nigeria's first election in favour of her compliant friends so that she could still manipulate the country from London to safeguard British interests (50). And when Nigeria was plunged into a bloody conflict, it played direct, active role to ensure the victory of its preferred side.

Achebe has done in this book is to invite Nigerians to deeply reflect on their country's What journey so far. It is unhelpful to wish away your ugly mistakes with the hope that its consequences would just disappear or that somehow, they

would correct themselves. The post Nigerian-Biafra civil war era saw a unified Nigeria plagued by a homegrown enemy: the political ineptitude, mediocrity, indiscipline, ethnic bigotry, and corruption of the ruling class. Compounding the situation was the fact that Nigeria was now awash in oil-boom petrodollars, and to make matters worse, the country's military head of state, General Yakubu Gowon, following his victory, proclaimed to the entire planet that Nigeria had more money than it knew what to do with it. A new era of great decadence and decline was born. It continues to this day (243). It is saddening though, to note that Nigeria needed to waste three million lives to achieve this descent. The feeling gathered from Achebe's *There was a Country* exudes a reminder to the Nigerian leadership especially and the followers generally of our past that still haunt the present and even threaten the future. This past sticks to our national psyche. The discussion so far demonstrates the sensibility of Achebe as a writer with a deep sense of history, a statesman who sticks close to his own identity, bold and courageous with an abiding sense of nationalism and patriotism. His memoir further demonstrates his deep sense of disappointment over the failed opportunities to transform Nigeria into a formidable entity. He asserts this stating: "My feeling towards Nigeria was one of profound disappointment... especially because the federal government sat and let it happen" (71). He has in this memoir, made eloquent testimony of what he witnessed during the war, inside Biafra enclave and also told the story of the complications of the politics of Nigerian nationhood. Achebe traces Nigeria's political problems to the way in which the leadership of the country is selected. According to him: Today we have a system where only those individuals with the means of capital and who can both pay the exorbitant application fee and fund a political campaign can vie for the presidency. It would not surprise any close observer to discover that in this inane system, the same unsavory characters who have destroyed the country and looted the treasury and the nation blind are the ones to run for the presidency! (245). The leadership in Nigeria therefore, will be largely responsible to right the wrongs of the past and reposition Nigeria's history to strengthen national unity. If Gowon and Ojukwu had compromised their beliefs and social status, the war would have been averted. In order to achieve a corrupt-free politics in Nigeria, therefore, there should be a thorough scrutiny of the aspiring leaders.

Conclusion

Irrespective of how Nigerians from whatever tribe feel about the events of the 1960s, particularly the Nigerian-Biafra civil war, the fact remains that the events have become a significant, albeit painful part of Nigeria's history. The success of the narrative lies in their non-judgmental tone which allows the reader to digest the painful memories without anger. Adichie achieves this through her multiple narrators-Ugwu, Olanna and Richard, who bring to bear on the story their diverse identities, while Achebe's story, though told from a personal perspective benefits from a multiplicity of sources so that the memory can allow for both criticism and the possibility of a national reconciliation. Both books serve as admirable representations of a moment of huge importance for the most populous and dynamic country in Africa. And there is only superficial conflict between representing Biafra in fiction or as memoir. Both join a battle to fill the hole left by western histories of Africa.

Though Adichie never witnessed the war, she skillfully constructs a tragic story that spans a decade and revolves around the lives of diverse cast during the Biafran/Nigeria civil war. Achebe's book on the other hand, is made up of history, personal experience and strong opinions on the treatment of the Igbo people in the 1960s. His statements on the role of art in politics, the place of intellectuals in the society, and the need to formulate enduring visions are truly measured and profound. His personal stake in the war makes his account more than just a standard historical retelling. His love for his people and his hope for Nigeria's future are revealed in his writing. The Igbo tribe aroused hostility because of their intelligence and success. They had always been a democratic, well-educated and progressive people, and have flourished in the bigger context of Nigeria. This built up jealousy among the other tribes and led to the civil war eventually. It was a war of appalling savagery, but there was no coherent plan to end the horror. Two leaders of the different opposing sides could not compromise their identities in order to end the war. If only Nigerians will agree on a common identity, they will be able to fight the disagreement that has befallen the nation. Therefore, to achieve national unity, we have to compromise some beliefs and agree on one national identity in order to make the politics of the nation worthwhile.

References

Achebe, Chinua. *There was a Country: A personal history of Biafra*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2012. Print
 Adichie, Chimamanda. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Lagos: farafma Kachifo Limited, 2006. Print.
 Atofarati, Abubakar. "The Nigerian Civil War: Causes, strategies and lessons learnt". 2008. Web. April 12, 2017. <www.globalsecurity.org.>.
 Idowu, Moses. "Culture, Ideology and the Death of a Nation: A neo-colonial reading of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*". 2008. Web. April 12, 2017. <http://Wikipedia.com>.

John, Marie Elena. "Half of a Yellow Sun: Complexities of time and place". Black issue book review. 9.1 (2007): 40-41. Print.
 Knopf, Alfred A. "Half of a Yellow Sun: History captured with haunting intimacy". Publishers weekly. 253.26 (2007): 1-3. print
 Makinde, Adeyinka. "Chinua Achebe's *There was a Country: A personal history of Biafra*". 2017. Web. June 21, 2017. <http://www.wikipedia.co
 Maslin, Janet. "The Complex Business of Living While War Rages in Nigeria". The New York Times. 2006. Web. June 21, 2007. <http://www.wikipedia.c
 Nixon, Rob. "A Biafra Story". New York Times. 2006 Web. April 12, 2017. <http://www.wikipedia .com.>.
 Nwagbara, A.I. "Humanities and 21st Century Leadership in Nigeria: A reflection on Chinua Achebe's *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*". Madonna Journal of English and Literary Studies. 2.7 Awka: IFEVIC Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd, (2015): 120121. Print.
 Oyewole, Abiodun. "Interview Djembe Online Magazine 18". 2013. Web. April 12, 2017. <http://www.djembe.dk/no/1 8/32.
 Seaman, Donna. "Half of a Yellow Sun; Tales of post-colonial Africa". Booklist; Read Alikes. 39.1(2007): 1-2. Print.
 Tsaaio, James Tar. "From Cultural Nationalism to a National Democratic Culture: Chinua Achebe's *There was a Country: A personal history of Biafra*". SMC Journal of Cultural and Media Studies. 2.1. Lagos: PanAtlantic University Publishing House, (2013):83-84. Print.
 White, Frances E. "Half of a Yellow Sun: while the world watched". women's review of books 24.3 (2007):1-10. Print.