

The Sun That Never Rose: Postcoloniality and Pan Africanism in Adichie

Nilanjana Sinha

Abstract: *Written against the backdrop of the 1967 Biafran War, Adichie's 'Half of a Yellow Sun' has produced integrated colonial questions that sought answers in the postcolonial world. How radicalism was substantiated through the process of civilizing missions when in reality the economic greed overweighed moralities, if there were any to have existed. If colonialism started with disintegration, it ended with the same. The stigma of the postcolonial world, having ripped off the cultural roots and indoctrinated with insecurities, was that 'identity assertion' became a need, that this is who we are and not what you have narrated us to be. This is partly why concepts like pan-africanism even arose in the postcolonial context, the necessity to establish a secure unchallenging identity, because the colonial psychological intensity had not abated even after years of decolonization, neither it is fully ever likely to be. The linear narrative of the novel provides sequential build up to the failed Biafran war, and Adichie expounds postcolonial issues like nativism, separatism, semantics and linguistic barriers, cultural syncretism and identity assertion. This paper seeks to analyze the postcoloniality in Adichie's writing of the 'Half of a Yellow Sun.'*

Keywords: colonialism, disintegration, identity assertion, radicalism.

'The Danger of a Single Story' was the title of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's highly influential 2009 Tedtalk. It explored the negative influence that a 'single story' brings about. The consequence of the single story is that: it robs people of dignity. *"It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult."* (Adichie 1:50). In order to deviate from such a casualty, Chimamanda provides for the narrative three voices, of Ugwu, Olanna and Richard, providing different angles on similar situations. Adichie effectively uses pairing of characters and themes throughout the book and delivers a big novel about life in modern Nigeria during wartime. The war in question is the Biafran War of the 1960's, during which the Southern region of Nigeria fought unsuccessfully to secede. The book's title comes from the Biafran flag, a symbol of rebellion. Olanna while teaching to the kids during wartime in a small town to which they have been evacuated, gives a detailed description of the flag. *"Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have and, finally, the half of a yellow sun stood for the glorious future"*, which never came (Adichie 275).

Half of a Yellow Sun creates rich metaphors for the public history of Nigeria in the private lives of imagined individuals who reflect the divided heritage of postcolonial subjects. In writing about the Biafran war which resulted in death over two million people, Adichie has narrated the conditions in the postcolonial African history that produced massive suffering among refugees and migrants. It was the 'inevitable failure of the nation created by British colonialism.' The novel places Nigeria in its historical contexts as a nation created in Europe for their own profit and infused with "European ideological commitment to the nation as an emblem of popular unity. (Strehle665)

"The British preferred the North. The heat was pleasantly dry [...] the humid south, on the other hand, was full of mosquitoes and animists and disparate tribes [...] The British created 'warrant chiefs', because indirect rule cost the Crown less. In 1914, the governor-general joined the North and the South, and his wife picked a name. Nigeria was born." (Adichie 115)

Tejumola Olaniyan writes "Part of the contemporary crisis of the African state is its inability to forge a nation from it's awkwardly thrown together constituent parts, that were routinely manipulated into fierce and set off against one another during the colonial rule." (271) This political jerry mandering of a heterogeneous people into nation-state identification for purposes of control and domination unfortunately creates long term disturbances that lasts well into the post-colonial phase (Radhakrishnan, 753)

The ideology of politics in the novel, before the war, comes largely from the dim lit living room of Odenigbo that reverberated High Life music, accompanied by kola nuts, dance and sometimes Ugwu's *"pepper soup and moi-moi chicken boiled in bitter herbs"*. The discussion on politics weighs heavier with every shift Odenigbo makes to the edge of the chair. *"We are living in a time of great white evil. They are dehumanising blacks in South Africa and Rhodesia [...] This defence pact is worse than apartheid and segregation, but we don't realise it."* (Adichie 110).

Conversations amongst the educated intellectuals of Nsukka, a small university town, reflects ideologies of the Southerners and somehow their alienation from the Nigerian nationalism. Speeches of Odenigbo itself provides for a very regionalistic outlook, is a *'hopeless tribalist'* and places demands on the creation of Biafra as the only solution. Contrary to him, Miss Adebayo upholds Pan-Africanism as the *"simply the most sensible response"* to African's common legacy of white oppression.

Master cut her short. 'You know, pan-africanism is fundamentally a European notion. 'Maybe it is a European notion,' Miss Adebayo said, 'but in the bigger picture, we are all one race.'

'What bigger picture? Master asked. 'The bigger picture of the white man.'

[...] 'Of course we are all alike, we all have white oppression in common, Miss Adebayo said dryly. 'Pan-Africanism is simply the most sensible response.' (Adichie 20).

Questions of identity in the postcolonial world seeks negotiation, a split consciousness between what was and what was given. Identity, then, demands reassertion.

“of course, of course, but my point is that the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe,” Master said. ‘I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity [...] But I was Igbo before the white man came.’” (Adichie 20).

Reassertion of native cultural identity, then, manifests in cultural fundamentalism and cultural identities are asserted through strategies such as separatism, nativism, cultural syncretism, hybridity, etc. This goes back to postcolonial theories as Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), Spivak’s *In Other Worlds* (1987), Homi K Bhabha’s *Nation and Narration* (1990), all discussing issues of culture and identity and how indigenous people from previously colonised and marginalised countries have increasingly found their voices, attempting to assert their own visions, tell their own stories and reclaim their own experiences. Because a single story is dangerous.

The Biafran War started in 1967 and ended in 1970. The military governor of eastern Nigeria, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, declared the independence of the Republic of Biafra from Nigeria. It resulted in varying numbers of dead. The revolution was a failure. While the Southerners wanted secession, the Northerners, largely controlled by the British, denied independence. The whole of Nigeria was under brutal control designed to benefit Britain. *“It’s the oil’, she [Kainene] said. ‘They can’t let us go easily with all that oil.’” (Adichie 180).* What the economy consisted of was potential raw materials. But then again, states were colonised because there were potential raw materials.

Those who opposed the secession, negatively termed it as ‘tribalism’ but the already-exiled Igbo understood their desire as ‘nationalism’. (Strehle 657). Nationalism as in creation of their own genuine culture. Because Nigerian nationalism had become impossible for most Southerners. The national dominance guaranteed to the Northern Hausa was followed by series of policy domination of the Igbo East. Adichie underscores the British role in fostering tribalism in the nation they created and shows tribalism poisoning communities while it generates public massacres. This, as acknowledged commonly, has been the one of the bitter aspects of colonial history.

“The real tragedy of our postcolonial world is not that the majority of people had no say in whether or not they wanted this new world; rather, it is that the majority have not been given the tools to negotiate this new world” (Adichie 101).

Another noteworthy highlight whilst maintaining a postcolonial reading of the text is the hierarchy of the languages used in the novel. Those who speak the privileged language, English, in a postcolonial world, by all means, get greater access to best of everything. Even in the native land of vibrant cultures, the ability to speak English is not only a means to establish one’s identity but also save lives. The hegemony of this discourse also expounds greatly between

Odineigbo and Ugwu, a Master-slave relationship. Ugwu remains his “sah’s” “good man”. It is not till the end of the novel that Ugwu’s English becomes stronger which enables him to develop his greater sense of identity and becomes an author of the book: *The World Was Silent When We Died*. The language hierarchy accounts for an important hegemonic discourse in a postcolonial reading of the novel.

The postcolonial reading of any text demands an understanding and perspective that often addresses the problems and consequences that decolonization paves way for. Questions relating to the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated people revolves around questions of identity assertion. *Half of a Yellow Sun* reveals the chaos over identity and culture establishments in a decolonized state, its challenges and transformations and the losses that shapes the characters, counting the costs of diaspora for postcolonial subjects.

References

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