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**Othering and Conflicts in Chimamanda**  
**Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun***

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## Introduction

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Since December 2023, some of the states in Nigeria have been the scene of bloody intercommunal violence. The situation of Plateau state in central Nigeria is quite telling. This state is located on the dividing line between Nigeria's predominantly Muslim North and its predominantly Christian South, and it is a hotbed of recurrent intercommunal conflicts. Actually, tensions have increased exponentially since approximately 200 people have already been killed in raids by Muslims perpetrators on chiefly Christian-inhabited villages. The local Nigerian Red Cross estimates that two evacuee camps have been established in the town of Mangu, to shelter around 1,500 people<sup>1</sup>. Likewise, the 2023 presidential elections protests have illustrated the resurgence of violence by separatist groups in the Eastern region in most cases. The two candidates of the opposition Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi, who contested the election results, snubbed the reconciliation effort initiated by the President-elect Bola Tinubu. The situation gave real opportunity for separatist groups to intensify their actions. This is for example the case of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which aims at restoring the defunct Republic of Biafra. The activities of such groups, based on the contestation of the federal government authority, can be considered as a response to all forms of injustice and marginalization upon the local people, the Igbo for the most part. From this bird's eye view on the current socio-political situation, it is obvious to anticipate that Nigeria is still nagged and haunted by the past. All this puts the spotlight of the reality that the issue of ethnic or religious allegiance remains problematic, and the country's political hegemony is still shared between the Hausa and the Yoruba, casting aside the Igbo and the other minor ethnic groups. This said, no wonder that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a female Nigerian writer tackles these issues. Therefore, in her second published novel entitled *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie resorts to the contemporary history of her country to enlighten her readers on the critical and dramatic event of the Biafran War also known as the Nigerian Civil War, which occurred from July 1967 to January 1970.

After the Civil War, the country was still in the throes of a violent struggle for the control of power. This can be illustrated by the five coups which were perpetrated between 1975 and 1999 keeping the country under many years of military rule. Furthermore, the novel

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/01/26/nigeria-deux-attaques-font-plus-de-50-morts-dans-le-centre-du-pays\\_6213139\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/01/26/nigeria-deux-attaques-font-plus-de-50-morts-dans-le-centre-du-pays_6213139_3212.html)

was published in 2006, the period of appeasement during which the federal republic of Nigeria was recovering political stability. In this context, it may be asserted that Adichie's novel, for some reasons, has had a socio-political influence in the way that it imposes itself as a reminder of the moral responsibility of political authorities on the conflict on the one hand, and how the quest for political power based on ethnic allegiance can be disastrous to a nation on the other hand. However, during the recent African Cup of Nations, the progress of the Super Eagles, the Nigerian national football team, has revealed a feeling of national pride among the Nigerians. Compared to the aforementioned rationale, this can appear to be a paradox. It is what makes this study about Nigeria more relevant. Depending on this view, Adichie's novel becomes not only a historical and committed novel, but also a real mirror of the Nigerian society in all its complexity. In this perspective, *Half of a Yellow Sun* has received positive praises from the critics. This is the case of *Minneapolis Star Tribune*<sup>1</sup> which writes: "Destined to become a classic... This book confirms the notion that if you want to understand a country's soul, read its fiction." Significantly, *Half of a Yellow Sun* reveals Adichie's commitment to denounce the consequences of the Biafran War which are still much alive in people's memories. Chinua Achebe<sup>2</sup> praises the novel in these words:

We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers... She is fearless, or she would not have taken on the intimidating horror of the Nigerian Civil War. Adichie came almost fully made.

Though Adichie did not personally experience the brutality of the war and its trauma as she was born only seven years after the Biafran War, she adopts a postcolonial approach to explore the possibilities of fiction to engineer a new alternative or perspective to tell that story through her narrative techniques and rhetoric patterns. Anyway, this praise by Achebe validates Adichie's ideological perspective not only to denounce the consequences and the trauma of the war which has changed the lives of people, but also, she pays a special tribute to the victims, imprisoned by the initial history as rebels to the federation, giving them a voice to speak. Likewise, the novel appears like an inside testimony of the victims themselves.

The story is narrated from the point of view of three main characters which are presented in the early sixties. Ugwu, a 13-year-old village boy who works as a houseboy for

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<sup>1</sup> Chimamanda Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Anchor, (2006), p.5

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p.5

Odenigbo, a mathematics Professor at Nsukka University. Olanna, a rich and educated woman who marries Odenigbo and Richard, a British expatriate “who is obsessed by the roped pots of Igbo-Ukwu art and falls in love with Olanna's twin sister, Kainene”<sup>1</sup>. In this period Adichie depicts a peaceful life for the characters full of encounters, passionate love, and family ties. However, four years ahead namely in the late sixties, trouble is brewing between the Hausa, the largest ethnic group in the North and the Igbo, the largest and dominant one in South-East, because of a coup which overthrew Northerner authorities. The Hausa blame the Igbo army officers for having perpetrated the coup. As a result of this, a counter coup is perpetrated by the Hausa a few months later, and hundreds of Igbo people die in the massacres in Kano, North of the country including Olanna’s relatives. Following this situation of chaos, negotiations in order to reestablish peace and trust between both sides fail. For this reason, General Ojukwu declares secession and self-proclaims the Eastern regions an independent state of the name and title “Republic of Biafra”, calling on at the same time a mass mobilization of all the Easterners to join their homeland as the Nigerian government is no longer able to guarantee their safety anywhere in Nigeria. As an immediate reaction, the federal government launches a police action to bring back the rebel province to order. Unfortunately, this police action rather intensifies the mistrust and violence which quickly turns into a civil war. In the beginning of the rebellion, Biafrans are full of hope as they cause Nigeria to lose important cities in the East. As the war intensifies, the situation is reversed because Biafra loses important positions and is short of military equipment and support. Calls for donation to support the army are made and young people are highly encouraged and later on forced to join the army. The dramatic effects of the civil war are then shown through the new daily lives of characters. Among the recurrent bombings, the Nigerian army incursions and food shortage, characters are forced to move from a village to another to find refuge. Significantly, Adichie capitalizes on these insufferable living conditions to portray the resilience and the strong sense ethnic allegiance and pride shown by her characters in general and a devout sense of family and community ties by female characters especially, as a proof that life, love and dreams were still possible. Despite all this, it seems pertinent to mention that during the war, the lives of the characters drastically changed and were torn apart by the brutality of the war and decisions in their personal lives. Ugwu is conscripted in the Biafran army; Olanna is traumatized by both the violence of the massacres, the war and the disappearance of her twin sister Kainene who decided to trade across enemy lines to find food

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cerep.ulg.ac.be/adichie/cnaabout.html>

for the refugee camp she created. Biafra has failed to establish and defend itself as an independent republic and is finally reincorporated without conditions into the federation of Nigeria. Everybody has lost someone or something at the end of the story. It seems obvious that the novel explores a great deal of themes like: the political instability, identity, violence, famine, othering, and trauma to mention but a few. Before Nigeria obtained independence from the United Kingdom, the cohabitation after the amalgamation of the colonies in 1914 was not effective among the different major ethnic groups. The issue of national identity was already problematic even before the nation building the process could start. After the independence was proclaimed, the new nation was already in danger of falling apart as portrayed in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

The present work investigates the theme of othering in terms of how Adichie uses it to recreate the circumstances of the genesis of the mistrust among the major ethnic groups sired by the amalgamation, and finally how it is associated with conflicts that led to the Civil War. In this regard, the concept of othering will be developed according to Spivak and Ashcroft-Griffiths-Tiffin writings. Anyway, the relationships of mistrust among the political leaders of the major ethnic groups reinforced and intensified ethnicity and territoriality which later on brewed conflicts. Conducting a study on the issue of ethnicity and territoriality Jean-Pierre Missié<sup>1</sup> comments:

*[...] mais aussi et pour des besoins électoraux, que des acteurs politiques se forgent des bastions ethniquement hétéroclites. Ils s'activent à susciter chez les ressortissants de ces entités géographiques un sentiment d'appartenance à une même aire imaginée comme une même communauté géolinguistique, culturelle, ou en mobilisant une hypothétique histoire commune.*

The geographical and demographical repartition is a perfect illustration of this: the Hausa are in control of the North, the Yoruba of the South-West and the Igbo of the South-East. All things considered, the main focus of this work is to answer these two central questions: How are conflicts the consequences of othering in *Half of A Yellow Sun*? What rhetoric patterns does Adichie use to depict othering and conflicts?

The analysis of the novel and that of the country's historical, socio-political and economical context help consider the following hypothesis: with regard to some references to the pre-civil war period, the civil war, the Biafra secession and its dramatic consequences on

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<sup>1</sup> J.P Missié, « Ethnicité et territorialité. Deux modes du vécu identitaire chez les Tekes du Congo-Brazzaville », *Cahiers d'études africaines* 2008/4, n° 192, p. 835-864.



the perception of otherness among members of the three main ethnic groups: the Hausa, the Yoruba and the Igbo, it may be asserted that conflicts are the main consequences of othering in *Half of A Yellow Sun*.

Even so, for a better reading to enquire on the theme of othering in *Half of A Yellow Sun* some literary theories like Interactionist theory, Decolonial theory, New Historicism theory, Post-colonial theory and Trauma theory will be utilized. Interactionist theory will be necessary to investigate the interactions among the major ethnic groups. The socio-political and economic context will be examined through Decolonial theory. In addition to this, New Historicism as for it will be relevant to analyze the novel in the context in which it was written in order to show that it can be read as an historical fiction. As far as the representation of trauma is concerned, to shed light on this concept, it will be interesting to adopt Trauma theory. Also, because the novel deals with colonized people literature, the concepts of othering and conflicts will be investigated through Post-colonial theory.

As far as the outline is concerned, the present work will be divided into two main parts. In the first part, it will be interesting to present the historical, socio-political and economical context of Nigeria for the purpose of being enlightened on the situation prevailing in the country before the civil war and this genesis of the conflict. The second part will be devoted to the analysis of Adichie's narrative techniques and rhetoric pattern and to show how othering and conflicts are portrayed in the novel.

## **Part I: The Historical, Socio-Political and Economic contexts before and after the colonization**

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A study dealing with Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* requires appropriate knowledge of the contemporary historical, socio-political and economic situation prevailing in Nigeria before and after the independence. This requirement is essentially linked to the postulate that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a historical novel. The purpose of the present part is to present this context in order to contextualize Adichie's narrative. Thus, the main concern all along this part is to answer the following subsidiary question: How can the situation prevailing in Nigeria before and after the independence help contextualize *Half of a Yellow Sun*?

It will be interesting to answer this interrogation in three sections. In the first section, the sociological characteristics of the three major ethnic groups will be presented. The second section will deal with the historical context before and after the independence. Finally, in the third section the economic context before after the independence will be investigated as well.

### **I.1. Sociological characteristics of the main ethnic groups before the colonization**

There are more than 250 ethnic groups in the federal republic of Nigeria<sup>1</sup>. Within this ethnic diversity, three major ethnic groups are dominant than the other because of their size and geographical repartition in the country's territory. In this section, it will be crucial to discover how each of the three major ethnic group is can be characterized in terms of cultural backgrounds: traditions, customs and religious beliefs. All this, is an attempt to inquire and understand the relation of mistrust which has brewed conflict among them as portrayed in the novel. Therefore, the sociological characteristics of the Hausa, the Yoruba and the Igbo will be respectively presented.

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<sup>1</sup> Elie Mambou. *De la Postcolonie au Nigeria*, Malory: Rouen, 2009, p.45.

### I.1.1. The “Hausa”

The Hausa are the largest ethnic group in West Africa. In one of his articles, Ibrahim Tijjani Sabiu<sup>1</sup> illustrates this when he asserts that in the federal republic of Nigeria they represent 30% of the population. Likewise, statistica.com expresses their proportion with a percentage of approximately 30%. But, according to worlatlas.com they are composed of approximately 67 million people representing more than 25% of the total population. However, it must be admitted though all of these sources do not give the exact percentage, they agree that the Hausa are the first major ethnic group in Nigeria. They are mostly located in the Northern part of Nigeria and have intermingled with other different ethnic groups like the Fulani across centuries. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, they were already converted to Islam and they organized themselves in great city-states such as Dura, Kano, Gobir, Zaria, and Katsina. There was not a good cohabitation among those different city-states as they were frequently at war with one another.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an Islamic Revolution through the “Jihad” led by Usman Dan Fadio established the Sokoto caliphate, also known as the Hausaland<sup>2</sup>. This caliphate was established on principle of the strict implementation of the fundamental Islamic law known as “sharia”. The Hausa are devout Muslims who believe in Allah and in Muhammad as their prophet. They live according to the Islamic faith pillars. Importantly, Islam is not just a religion to a Hausa it is all his or her life and culture. Adichie let us know about this in emphasizing the gap between this specific way of life in the North, through the testimony of Olanna “When she got to Kano, it struck her once again how different it was from Lagos, from Nsukka, from her hometown Umunnachi, how different the North as a whole was from the South”<sup>3</sup>. It becomes obvious that the Islamic faith really influences Hausa society in all aspects of their life such as behaviors, art, housing, rites of passage and institutions. For this reason, they are discriminators to non-natives especially in the observance of their religion. Also, the conversation between Olanna and Mohammed, her ex-lover who is a Muslim Hausa is a clear illustration of this fact presented in the novel as well: “I am no longer that Igbo woman you wanted to marry who would taint the lineage with infidel blood” Olanna said and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibrahim Tijjani Sabiu, “Hausa people of Northern Nigeria and their development”, *Asian People Journal (APJ) Volume 1, Issue 1 (2018)*, PP 179-189, p.2

<sup>2</sup> F. Barth. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1969, p35.

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.37.

Mohammed replies “I would have married you anyhow, and she (Mohammed’s mother) knew it. Her preference did not matter”, but Olanna retorted “Maybe not at first, but what about later? What about when we had been married for ten years?”; “Your parents felt the same way as she did.”<sup>1</sup> Olanna does not intentionally see herself like an “infidel blood”, but this is the way Mohammed parents see her, because she is not a Hausa and a Muslim above all. The direct style here as a narrative technique is not used purposelessly by Adichie, it is to be considered as an alternative to put the spotlights on ethno-religious essentialization, which is one of the key elements laying the foundations to understand the genesis of the situation she depicts in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The Caliphate in the Hausaland is the socio-political and economic system of ruling that survived until the beginning of the British colonization. Because of the established Islamic tradition and institutions prevailing in that region, it was difficult for the British colonizers to spread their western culture and exert total socio-political domination. The political structure of the caliphate was propitious for the establishment of an indirect colonial system of ruling for the colonizer. As a consequence, there was less British colonial penetration over the “Hausaland”, which in return reinforced the Hausa desire of keeping their Islamic tradition and institutions almost intact. This corresponds to Ibrahim Tijjani Sabiu’s analysis: “[...] it is seen that the British did a huge disservice to the Hausa in Northern Nigeria by not enlightening them and equipping them with the right mindset and vision of the future as well as the actualization of that purpose.”<sup>2</sup> This fact constitutes one of the discrepancies of the colonial administration system, since because of this the North was less developed than the South in terms of modern infrastructures and education. They are traditionally polygamous and marriages are arranged and forced in some cases. The Hausa often live in large households including a man, his wives, his sons and their wives and children. As far as education is concerned, the Hausa children are generally educated according to Islamic principle since boys attend koranic schools at the age of six. Another specific characteristic about the Hausa is revealed to us by Adichie in her novel, when she writes: “The beggars outside the gates of Mohammed’s family home did not move when they saw Olanna... Olanna wanted to put some money in their bowls but decided not to. If she were a man, they would have called out her and extend their begging bowls, and flies would rise in buzzing clouds.”<sup>3</sup> These people described here as the “beggars” are very needy kind of

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.46

<sup>2</sup> Ibrahim Tijjani Sabiu. “Hausa people of Northern Nigeria and their development”, *Asian People Journal (APJ) Volume 1, Issue 1 (2018), PP 179-189*, p.6.

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.43.

people for whom it should not normally matter who helps them, but still they do not care about Olanna. The narrator wants us to understand that this attitude of the “beggars” towards Olanna is motivated by the fact that not only is she not Hausa, but also because a woman above all. This reading suggests that the Hausa society is discriminatory of women. All things considered, these sociological characteristics obviously show that the Hausa society is the product of centuries of traditions and customs which are much anchored in Islamic principles and faith. This is their identity, something that gives meaning to their life and the Sardauna, the Caliphate leader is their spiritual leader as well. Adichie lets her readers know this through in these words: “The Sardauna, after all, had not only been premier of the North, he had been also the spiritual leader for this man and so many Muslims like him.”<sup>1</sup> The use of the direct speech here again by Adichie reveals her intention to bring more realism to her story by putting real sociological characteristics on the spotlights. Liable to this, there is no other religion, for a Hausa than Islam, neither animism nor the colonizer-imported Christianity. In this regard, they tend to consider members of other ethnic groups, who are adherents of other religions and traditions, as being totally different and incompatible with their way of life. To them the Southerners, particularly the Igbo are like people without some faith and having barbaric behaviors.<sup>2</sup> This perception of the other based on prejudice about sociological characteristics is the hotspot that lays the foundations for discrimination to non-natives eventually undermining the cohabitation with the Igbo.

### **I.1.2. The “Yoruba”**

The Yoruba are an ethnic group who live in West Africa. They are currently estimated to be about 44 million people, the majority of whom live in Nigeria where they account for about 21% of the country's population. It is one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, and they speak the Yoruba language.<sup>3</sup> They are the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria. They live in the South- Western part of the country. The Yoruba are actually groups of people having Yoruba as a common language and claiming to originate from the same ancestor. Before the British colonization, this part of current Nigeria was the site of many great kingdoms like Benin and Oyo<sup>4</sup>. In the Yoruba communities, traditional life was dictated by

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.128.

<sup>2</sup> Ibrahim Tijjani Sabiu. “Hausa people of Northern Nigeria and their development”, *Asian People Journal (APJ) Volume 1, Issue 1 (2018), PP 179-189*, p.6.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-is-the-yoruba-religion.html>

<sup>4</sup> Elie Mambou. *De la Postcolonie au Nigeria*, Malory: Rouen, 2009, p.16.

elected priestly monarchs and a council of other minor noble leaders. Music also plays a significant role in all aspects of village life. The Yoruba celebrate around 13 important festivals annually. Religious festivals are also popular events that attract thousands around the region, and drums are an essential part of the music during these religious celebrations.<sup>1</sup> The same system of ruling society survived until colonization.

The Yoruba religious system comprises of traditional practices and spiritual concepts which over centuries has evolved. The Yoruba are made up about 20 sub-groups which use about eight distinct versions (dialects) of Yoruba languages that are not entirely mutually intelligible<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly, because of the proximity of some of the Yoruba sub-groups with the Northern Caliphate, they were influenced by the Muslim traditions from the North and, their cohabitation with the Hausa is not as problematic as it is with the Igbo. For this reason, some Yoruba are Muslims. Even though some of the Yoruba are Muslims, they have remained attached to their Yoruba traditions. It is obvious to mention that contrary to the Hausa who are devout Muslims, the Muslim Yoruba can enjoy the practice of the Islam, taking part in of the Yoruba traditional ceremonies and the practice a cult to honor the Orishas. All the more, this practice of Islam by the Yoruba represents the divide between them and the Hausa, because the latter consider this, as an offense to the Islamic law and way of life. Anyway, most of the Yoruba are Christians. The Yoruba became Christians only after their conversion to Christianity by Christian missionaries. Some other Yoruba worship the three traditional gods such as: “*Olorun*” who is the high god, the creator, “*Eshu*”, who is the divine messenger and “*Ogun*”, who is the god of war, hunting and metal working. The practice of arranged marriages is common among them and kinship is the most important relationship. The Yoruba line of descent is patrilineal. Clan members live in a large residential area called the “compound”<sup>3</sup>. Males of the clan are born, married and buried in it. It is important to mention that there are vast differences in wealth among the Yoruba. People obtain higher positions within the community according to how rich they are. It is not problematic for a Yoruba, for instance to marry a woman who is not an adherent of his religion. A Christian Yoruba can marry a non-Christian Yoruba without it being subject to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/who-are-the-yoruba-people.html>

<sup>2</sup> Aderemi Suleiman Ajala. “Yoruba Nationalist Movements, Ethnic Politics and Violence: A Creation from Historical Consciousness and Socio-political Space in South-western Nigeria”. Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität. 2009.p.20.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Yoruba.html>

any discrimination from the community. Though they are conservative of their culture and traditions, but there is a peaceful cohabitation with their neighbors.

### **I.1.3. The “Igbo”**

The Igbo are the third largest ethnic group in Nigeria representing about 18% of the total population. They are located in the South-Eastern part of the country. The Igbo speak the Igbo language<sup>1</sup>. Their society is organized in clans and a clan is composed of many families. The Igbo are polygamous as well. The polygamous family is made of a man and his wives and all their children. This means that having a wife and kids is necessary since it grants respect and pride within the community. Beyond that unit is the extended family, consisting of all the sons in a family and their parents, wives, and unmarried daughters<sup>2</sup>. A name-giving celebration for a kid is common within the Igbo community, and the event involves drinking and eating. There were no kings, and local villages were instead governed by a council of common villagers with priests and elders. The novel sheds light on this since one of her characters comments: “He said the people of the Igboland do not know what a king is. We have priests and elders...It is because the white man gave us warrant chiefs that foolish men are calling themselves kings today.”<sup>3</sup> Through the use of intertext as a narrative technique, Adichie assumes the role of a teacher to enlighten us on authentic history of the Igbo. Also, this intertext helps her put an emphasis on the fact that this socio-political structure was peculiar to the Igbo, as many ethnic groups in Africa were ruled by a king<sup>4</sup>. This is what Joan Zilius<sup>5</sup>, also illustrates in his Master’s thesis when he states: “Life there tended to be highly competitive and emphasis was placed upon achieved status. Decision-making was controlled by associations from which one could purchase membership. There appears to have been no example of royal lineages or clans such as we found among the Yoruba.” It is then clear that, contrary to the Hausa and the Yoruba who established great kingdoms with a centralized authority based on dynastic rule, the Igbo clans were independent with no hierarchical dynastic authority like a great king or emperor. The supreme institution of the village was the “village assembly” where socio-political decisions were made and any member of the

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<sup>1</sup> F. Barth. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1969, p50.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Igbo.html>

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.71.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/who-are-the-ibo-igbo-people.html>

<sup>5</sup> Joan Zilius. “Nationalism and Regionalism in Nigeria”. Kansas State University, 1969, p.36

community with higher social status, like being rich could become an influent member of that assembly. Because of substantial changes in their traditions and communities, the Igbo were more receptive to the western culture and embraced modernity much earlier than other major ethnic groups, especially the Hausa. For this reason, during the period of the tripartite colonial administration, the Igbo proved to be more enterprising and educated, as they were in the foreground nationalist movements such as the NCNC, to claim independence from the British. Chris C. Ojukwu comments on this stating that: “The Igbo as a people have a great historical and cultural pedigree as widely acknowledged, recognized and attested by some world class anthropologists, colonial administrators and foreign missionaries who have always recognized their great human qualities, strive and dynamism, their versatility and creativity.”<sup>1</sup> When the country obtained the independence from the British, the Igbo occupied the most of the higher positions. Because of that, they consider themselves in the position of assuming the political hegemony over Nigeria. It was then clear that, they would not relinquish political power and leadership to the Hausa or the Yoruba, though the latter are larger in terms of population and political representation in the assembly. About this Chris Ojukwu adds “Igbo people are generally held to be tolerant, ultra-democratic and highly individualistic. They have a strongly developed commercial sense and a pragmatic approach to life.”<sup>2</sup> An illustration of this is that, the first president of Nigeria Nnamdi Azikiwe was Igbo. The Igbo believe in a great high god, the creator of everything called “Chukwu Abiama”. In spite of this, they also believe in many spirits whose good will depends on the way one treats them and human called “priests” serve as messengers of these spirits. Each Igbo also worships his or her traditional and personal god called “Chi”. But, they are Christian in majority. Many Igbo are Christians, but they remain attached to their traditions. A great community of them was established in the Northern region, where they developed great businesses. Accordingly, they were mainly opposed to the establishment of the “sharia” in the North, as it was a radical way of life, which intensified the discrimination by their host, who cast them aside. This discrimination in the novel is presented like a testimony by a secondary character Aunty Ifeka, a common Igbo who witnesses their daily experience in the North: “The Sardauna was an evil man... He hated us. He hated everybody who did not remove their shoes and bow to him. Is he not the one who did not allow our children to go to school?”<sup>3</sup> The Sardauna represents the supreme authority

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<sup>1</sup> Chris C. Ojukwu. “Igbo Nation, Modern Statecraft and the Geopolitics of National Survival in a Multiethnic Nigeria”. *International Scholars Journals Vol. 5 (5)*, pp. 001-009, 2011. p.2.

<sup>2</sup> Idem

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 130.



in the North and certainly he is the one who encouraged the policy of discrimination. In the early days of the Nigerian nation building process, the Igbo, because of the active prominent role they played during the period of nationalist struggles, were considered as a threat by the Hausa. The Hausa feared the Igbo socio-political and economic hegemony over the South in particular and all over the country in general. That is the reason why, the Hausa have always considered them as a threat. The Hausa are opposed to the Igbo in matters of religion and way of life. The Hausa call the Igbo, the “infidels” and the Igbo, in returned perceived them as “backward-people”. On the basis of this, it must be asserted that, the conquest of the political power has only intensified the fear and the mistrust between the Igbo and the Hausa. This situation in the long run, created terrains for tensions between these two major ethnic groups, leading to a dramatic conflict: the Biafran war.

The sociological characteristics of the different major ethnic groups presented as such, would appear as a simple descriptive analysis if they are not sustained with the use of a theory. In this regard, using interactionist theory will shed more light on these characteristics. Also known as interactionist perspective or interactionism, interactionist theory is a scientific way to account for the assumption that people’s relationship with different aspects of society is a response to their interactions with others. It is obvious that this is a specifically sociology-oriented approach. Interactionist theory has developed over time, from the work of the German sociologist Max Weber through his concept of social action. Social action suggests the idea that society is the sum of human activity and that the actions taken thoughtfully by individuals should be the basis of sociological research. Later on, the works of other sociologists like Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, Manford Kuhn and Sheldon Stryker have significantly contributed a lot to the development of the theory. But, like some other theories, the limits of interactionism can be summarized by the fact that, focusing only on interactions, it misses for example the way politics and history impact people experience or the way their own personal emotions may influence their actions. In relation to this, some sociologists argue that the theory is vague, since it fails to provide precise results. However, it is substantial to mention that the interest of utilizing this theory does not lie in recalling or commenting on those debates, but the objective is rather to show how the analysis of the interactions among the major ethnic groups: the Hausa, the Yoruba and the Igbo described above, can help better understand why the Hausa essentialize the Igbo and vice versa. On the basis of this, it can be assumed that investigating on the sociological characteristics of these two ethnic groups, interactionism helps shed light on the reasons why the Hausa decide to

interact in a specifically repulsive way with the Igbo, “They held meetings in his yard. [...] she still remembered the meeting where irritated men and women talked about the northern schools not admitting Igbo children. Uncle Mbaezi had stood up and stamped his foot. [...] ‘My people! We will build our own school!’”<sup>1</sup>, and why they undertake extremely violent and pitiless actions that completely break trust and hope of social cohesion with the Igbo in the late sixties and early seventies, “The Igbo must go. The infidels must go. The Igbo must go”<sup>2</sup> as presented in the novel. Importantly, there are many schools of thought of this theory, which are very complementary of one another on different postulates. Sheldon Stryker of Indiana School of Symbolic Interactionism has much contributed to the study of the self and the social structure. He developed the concepts of role and role-taking coined by Herbert Mead, in order to better illustrate the structural aspects of interactions. For this reason, he emphasizes the fact that the meaning people generate from their different interactions with others lead to patterns that create and uphold social structures<sup>3</sup>. Stryker then defines roles or role-taking as “expectations which are attached to [social] positions or symbolic categories [that] serve to cue behavior”<sup>4</sup>. This suggests that social role and role-taking must be considered as a particular set of practices and behaviors that members of a given ethnic group can adopt, but at once these practices and behaviors are chiefly influenced by the social context or circumstance, their sociological characteristics for instance, in which they assume that role. Adichie describes the Igbo as the very enterprising people who consider the North, especially great cities like Kano as a land of opportunity to make huge fortune “There was, after all, a fortune to be made in the North; he knew of people who had gone up there and came home to tear down huts and build houses with corrugated-iron roofs.”<sup>5</sup>. Though they go in the hope to have peaceful cohabitation with the local people, what is quite telling is the way the narrator presents this idea suggesting that the Igbo take the role of real opportunist very receptive of modernity with all that characterizes it: doing business and making profits. Here they are presented as a community very opened to modernity and susceptible to lead socio-economic changes that can/will ensure the transition from a traditional colonial experience to a modern independent society. The Hausa as for them take the role of conservatives of their Islamic traditions and practices, the defenders of their way of life. They cannot stand the Igbo

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of A Yellow Sun*, p.57-58.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p.147.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Carter and Celene Fuller, “Symbolic Interactionism”, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Sheldon Stryker, *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*, 1980, p.57.

<sup>5</sup> *Half of A Yellow Sun*, p.8, 9.

leading a not pious life, corrupted by modernity. This is illustrated by Stryker and Serpe, (1982) “someone who identifies heavily with a religious identity is more likely to go to religious services than someone who does not”. The Igbo do have a religion and practice their traditions, but they are not as pious and devout as the Hausa. Carter and Fuller (2015: 4) make it clear when they assume that “expectations of roles vary across situations and within the context of cultural or social change... Roles as they are attached to positions may be analyzed as predictors of future behavior for individuals in various social categories.” With the Igbo being perceived as opportunists making fortune in the North, this places them in the controlling and dominant position in their host communities as they own great business with huge financial means. Susan, a British expatriate gives Richard a bigger picture of the Nigerians when he first arrives in the country: “She told him the Hausa in the North were a dignified lot, the Igbo were surly and money-loving, and the Yoruba were rather jolly, even if they were first-rate lickspittles.”<sup>1</sup> This particular role and position assumed by the Igbo within the Hausaland, becomes the stereotype through which they are identified by the Hausa in the scope of their social interactions: the dominator, the ones who want to own everything. Adichie directly presents this situation by different means. First, she associates it to the displeasure of a man, a Yoruba addressing Olanna at the airport about the Igbo power: “The problem with the Igbo is that they want to control everything in this country. Everything. Why can’t they stay in the East? They own all the shops; they control the civil service, even the police. If you are arrested for any crime, as long as you can say *keda (kedu)* they will let you go.”<sup>2</sup> Another passage is when Suzan confides to Richard “I remember somebody telling me when I first came to be careful about hiring an Igbo houseboy because, before I knew it, he would own my house and the land it was built on.”<sup>3</sup> And finally Adichie mentions that even the media were used to spread this “The papers ran articles about Jihad, and Radio Kaduna kept broadcasting the late Sardauna’s speeches, and there was talk about how Igbo people were going to take over the civil service and – ”<sup>4</sup> The choice of words by Adichie in all these three references, by a Yoruba, a British expatriate and a Northern media respectively is her way to explore the possibilities of fiction intertwining reality to provide a bigger picture of the social interactions dominated by a Igbo persecution, a sort of what can be referred to as “Igbophobia” in the country. These passages point at the Igbo in a common exaggerated

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 136.

characteristic of identification, which clearly seem to be a xenophobic and tribalistic propaganda that intensifies prejudices on the Igbo. To insist on this rationale, Stryker (Carter and Fuller, 2015) shows the reciprocity of the individual and society. To him, in every situation, individuals identify themselves and others in the context of social structure. Individuals identify themselves by the roles they take in social structure and the beliefs and opinions that others identify them with, become internalized. These internalized expectations of how someone with a particular set of roles is supposed to behave become an identity. All this considered, it is obvious that mistrust is constructed on some prejudices about ethno-religious differences between the Hausa and the Igbo. When trustworthy interactions that favored this social cohesion that the French sociologist Emile Durkheim considers as “*la conscience d’un destin partagé et, donc, d’une solidarité*”<sup>1</sup>, which is the core of a nation, do not prevail upon the sociological characteristics or differences of each major ethnic group, a good and peaceful cohabitation among them is jeopardized. Adichie really insists on this fact when she uses direct speech. The choice of this narrative technique that is very often used in the novel becomes one of the device through which she lets her characters really immerse the readers into their experience within the society they depict or bring testimony of, based on prejudices that engender hostile and antipathetic interactions, which in the course will bring about a bloody massacre neighbor betraying neighbors, friends killing their fellow friends “We finished the whole family. It was Allah will!” one of the men called out in Hausa. The man was familiar. It was Abdulmalik”<sup>2</sup> the man is Olanna’s uncle’s friend.

## **I.2. The socio-political context before and after the independence**

The exploration of the contemporary history of Nigeria reveals that this country, formerly ruled by the British is very rich in ethnic diversity. On the basis of this, one can wonder how it is possible that cohabitation in a powerful country with such an ethnic diversity could be endangered by ethnic and religious divisions. This ethnic diversity should normally be one of the great assets to national unity and development. Conversely, the ambiguous colonial heritage and the political instrumentalization of ethnic and religious differences, by political leaders over years, have transformed the ethnic diversity into ferments of conflicts which engineer mistrust, hatred and eventually divide the people, the

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Forse, Maxime Parodi, « Une théorie de la cohésion sociale », 2009, p.2.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 148.

Hausa and the Igbo for instance. Shedding light on this should orient us to major issues in that period and help lay out some basic background to the problematic ethnic policy, the massacre in the North, the Nigerian civil war in relation to the Eastern region secession and the creation of the Republic of Biafra. Depending on this rationale, it may be asserted that the explanations of that conflict depicted by Adichie in her well-received novel are rooted in the aforementioned events although she does not clearly precise that such and such events are more relevant or not really essential to the understanding of the situation, since she wittily portrays her country: its history, its people, its turmoil and the agony of a given people, the Igbo.

### **I.2.1. The colonial structure and its mechanisms: The Indirect Rule**

Before going further, it is interesting to make a brief survey of the birth of Nigeria. Following the conversion of the largest southern part of Nigeria to Christianity by missionaries in 1842, the British established a consulate in Lagos in 1861 and formally initiated the colonization of Nigeria. From that point, British influence spread into the hinterland from Lagos and the lower reaches of the Niger until it reached the North. Mainly, political control was formally established over Nigerian by the year 1900. British colonial control over Nigeria took a tripartite form of three autonomous colonial administrations: The Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria<sup>1</sup>. However, to maintain control over their protectorates, the British used a very special colonial policy of ruling that is commonly referred to as “indirect rule.” In other words, indirect rule was the strategy to use existing ethnic structures and traditions as channels for establishing rules and regulations while British administrators operated behind the scenes and could exercise authority and make the final decision. In some cases, the British selected an individual who acted as a “chief” or a “warrant chief” in regions where there was no clearly centralized hierarchical structure like a kingdom, this is the case of the Igboland. This implies that the British colonial administration devolved some administrative powers to selected local leaders, who were much closer to the native population, to better keep control over the masses, but under the strict supervision of a colonial or a few colonial officers. Much of the work was done by the selected chieftains in the North and warrant chiefs in the South,

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<sup>1</sup> Tunde, Oduwobi, “From Conquest to Independence: The Nigerian Colonial Experience”, *HAOL* N°25 2011, p.1.

like local affairs concerning keeping order, collecting taxes and reinforcing the respect of the colonial principles and regulations. This was less expensive for the British. In return, indirect rule maintained local traditional institutions: “the Hausa-Fulani were narrow-featured..., feudal and therefore perfect for indirect rule”<sup>1</sup>, and consolidated the power of local leaders with for example, the Sardauna of Sokoto as the supreme political and religious leader of the North “Equable Emirs collected taxes for the British, and the British, in return, kept the Christian missionaries away”<sup>2</sup>. Also, it legitimated the position of appointed warrant chiefs in the Igboland “Since they did not have the good sense to have kings, the British created warrant chiefs, because indirect rule cost the Crown less, missionaries were allowed in to tame the pagans...”<sup>3</sup>. Adichie’s choice of words in these passages is severe and sharp. This is quite telling of her intention to present this issue like one of the problematic ones that later made cohabitation difficult. In reality, one of the most important factors that Adichie highlights through this is the fact that the colonial policy by means of indirect rule established the administrative boundaries of the territory without taking the sociological and historical realities of the natives into consideration. The geographical partition of the country was the choice of the British to better maintain control over the colony “...the British had to preserve Nigeria as it was, their prize creation, their large market, their thorn in France’s eye.”<sup>4</sup> This also corresponds to Vincent Hiribarren<sup>5</sup>, who argues that indirect rule was meant to be applied as the British Empire colonial administrative policy. The regional boundaries of colonial Nigeria were a European creation, and the result of economic and strategic interests with very little regard for pre-colonial territorial considerations. To him, indirect rule had a twofold effect on Nigeria. On the one hand, it anchored some of the pre-colonial geographical and cultural practices, as in the case of the North. On the other hand, under indirect rule, the British used a theory-based conception of the socio-political and ethno-linguistic structure of southeastern Nigeria to create regional boundaries. Consequently, the first discrepancy this strategy caused was the disbalance in terms of political representation. The Northern region being much larger in size of the population was favored by the colonial system in terms of representation in the Assembly. No wonder that by the year 1959, when self-government was

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.115.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.115.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent Hiribarren, « L’héritage spatial de l’Indirect Rule au Nigeria », *Hérodote*, 2015/4 (n° 159), pages 13 à 26.

stated, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the leader of the Northern People Congress became the leader of the majority party in the Assembly, and later become the Prime Minister of the federal government. Adichie illustrates the impact of these changes in *Half of a Yellow Sun*: “To propitiate the North, they (the British) fixed the pre-Independence elections in favor of the North and wrote a new constitution that gave the North control of the central government. The South, too eager for independence, accepted this constitution.”<sup>1</sup> From the tripartite administration, the amalgamation to the transformation of the colony into a federation of three regions, it is clear that all these changes rather highlighted and intensified more differences, fear and mistrust than generating and promoting unity and cohesion among the major ethnic groups. As a consequence of that, Adichie ingeniously epitomizes the context that lets the reader enter the heart of the story she narrates in her novel by this very striking passage: “At independence in 1960, Nigeria was a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp.”<sup>2</sup>

Anyway, it must be admitted that indirect rule was the starting point of ethnic conflicts, since the amalgamation of the initial three protectorates that followed in 1914 did not create a compatible political structure suitable to the ethno-political situation in Nigeria. The unsuitable political structure and system of ruling promoted by that colonial policy continued to fuel ethnocentric ideologies until the creation of the Nigerian nation. It generated rightly or wrongly, among the major ethnic groups, the belief that adherence to ethnocentric ideologies is the only way to secure maximum protection of ethnic identity and maximum protection against political domination and economic marginalization. Because of that, the very first political parties were created on the basis of ethnic and regional allegiance rather than because of the ideals they promoted: The Northern People Congress for the Hausa in the North, the Action Group for the Yoruba in the West and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons for the Igbo in the East. Having said, this helps us comprehend Elie Mambou’s analysis. Actually, he argues that the amalgamation was somehow unfavorable to the building process of the future Nigerian nation, and writes: «*ce système a eu pour corollaire d’accentuer et d’aggraver le conflit entre le Nord, musulman et feudal, et le Sud, multiple, divisé, moins conservateur et plus réceptif aux influences modernes.*»<sup>3</sup> To him, the amalgamation was a forced political unification, regardless of the different socio-political situation of three primary protectorates. In the same way, Adichie emphasizes that indirect

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of A Yellow Sun*, p.155.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*

<sup>3</sup> Elie Mambou. *De la Postcolonie au Nigeria*, Malory: Rouen, 2009, p.22.

rule created social and political terrains that also introduced a new unbalanced socio-political culture, which gave birth to the monster of uncontrollable corruption in the public service before and after the independence. The introduction of the “Warrant Chiefs” for instance, signaled the loss of both independence and the ultra-democratic local political system<sup>1</sup>. Over the years, these public officers grew more powerful in status and position and never felt any loyalty or responsibility to their own people. As a consequence, authority in the community began to move away from working for the well-being of the people to working for the interest of the colonial master or for his own profit. This illicit practice was even worsened when the country obtain independence. Isichei underlines this in her book:

“In regard to the mindset of ‘winner-takes-all’, the financial situation amongst many politicians was initially very fragile. Except for the few who belonged to an old generation of aristocrats, most politicians had made a desperate and successful struggle to escape rural poverty. The frantic accumulation of wealth was meant to build a wall between themselves and poverty, between their children and poverty”<sup>2</sup>

Dramatically, the desire to secure a higher civil service or political position began to acquire the image of amassing wealth at the disadvantage of the community. Discussing the fact that Western region premier election was a fiasco, Odenigbo one of Adichie’s characters comments “A corrupt brute will always behave like a corrupt brute. It’s the Sardauna who’s in charge. The man is ruling this country like his personal Muslim fiefdom.”<sup>3</sup> This illustrates Adichie’s intension to introduce us the political context in which the elections were organized. She highlights the interference of the federal government, under great influence of the North, in favor of the western region premier, the leader of regional government especially in the North and the South-West, through the attitude of imposing a designated leader rather than a democratically elected one for the purpose of keeping pressure on him and having him under their influence. More importantly, by presenting the situation this way, she lets us discover the mechanism used by the Northerners to secure maximum political hegemony over the rest of the country. Here she directly denounces electoral irregularities and manipulations illustrated by corruption and bribe practices, to prevent the Igbo from having political hegemony over the South. Toyin Falola, one of the most famous Nigerian historians,

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<sup>1</sup> Uzochukwu j. Njoku, “Colonial Political Re-engineering and the Genesis of Modern Corruption in African Public Service: the Issue of the Warrant Chiefs of South Eastern Nigeria1 as a case in point”, *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, n°14, 2005, p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth, Isichei. *A History of Nigeria*. Longman Group, 1983. P.468.

<sup>3</sup> *Half of Yellow Sun*, p.245.



points this strategy of domination as he argues: “Akintola abandoned the Action Group (AG) and founded the United People’s Party (UPP), and later the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), which formed an alliance with the northern dominated NPC government and used the power of incumbency to rig elections in 1964 and 1965. The chaos in the Western Region resulting from the 1965 elections was one of the main factors that led to the military coup of January 15, 1966. Akintola was killed in the coup.”<sup>1</sup> Another one is the displeasure of a common Igbo man Richard meets at Kano airport “... my family cannot send me overseas, and the people in Lagos are giving scholarships to the children of the people who can bribe them.”<sup>2</sup> Adichie chooses to put these words in the mouth of a common man not only to stress the magnitude of this evil practice that favored social gaps among the people of different ethnic groups, also to reveal that this evil practice was known and experienced by ordinary people in their daily lives. By “the people in Lagos” that man merely means the Prime minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, a Hausa and the Yoruba people. Corruption in return bred poverty and poverty fortified the feeling of injustice forcing people to react. There is another point than Adichie mentions, which indicates the Hausa fear to be dominated by the Southerners, mainly the Igbo. The Northern supreme leader, the Sardauna, having the majority in the federal Assembly initiated a series of policy of regionalization with measures aiming at restricting maximum Southerners influence within the Northern native community such as the public service and the education institutions. The North felt that the number of their natives in the service was minimal in comparison to their counterparts in the South because of their lower exposure to modern education. This corresponds to what Ibrahim Tijjani Sabiu asserts:

Equally, the ramifications of indirect rule in Northern Nigeria for the country as a whole was that it involved little development, as well as less social, economic and political transformation in the Northern part of the country, meanwhile the opposite was what was observed in the Southern part of Nigeria. The effect of this exacerbated the differences between Northern and Southern Nigeria that were already in existence during the colonial period.<sup>3</sup>

In reaction to this, measures were initiated to train northerners, and to try to fill positions in the civil service with Northerners, political leaders at the federal level also made it a priority

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<sup>1</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *The History of Nigeria* 2008. p.20

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p.152.

<sup>3</sup> Ibrahim Tijjani Sabiu, “Hausa people of Northern Nigeria and their development”, *Asian People Journal (APJ) Volume 1, Issue 1 (2018), PP 179-189*, p.6

to secure Northern representation in senior positions of the Federal service. The Sardauna Sir Ahmadu Bello justifies this as a need to be aligned in the equal position with the Southerners, the Igbo in particular: “The people in Mr. West's and Mr. East's houses have already gone far on the way, having started their journey earlier in the morning .... Therefore, it is very necessary for us to run at a very terrific speed in order to overtake those people, and be able to reach our common destination together.”<sup>1</sup> His choice of words in this passage is a perfect illustration of the race to political hegemony and the fear of being submerged by Southerners influence launched by the colonial policy. Colonel Madu an Igbo officer, one of the characters, states this “I was part of the commission that told our GOC that we should scrap it, that it was polarizing the army, that they should stop promoting Northerners who were not qualified. But our GOC said no, our British GOC.”<sup>2</sup> This attitude here again is denounced as the promotion of incompetence creating a vicious circle. No doubt, this situation jeopardized the creation of a nation with a strong sense of social cohesion.

### **I.2.2. The offspring of the colonial rule**

This section deals with the aftermath of colonization in Nigeria namely the period that covers from the independence to the Biafran War. It will be interesting to look at how Adichie represents this period in her novel and the intertext she uses to contextualize the problematic related to the creation of the Nigerian nation, and to what extent the concept of modernity plays an important role that create the gaps and ambiguity as far as the interpretation of the colonial heritage is concerned. In this regard, decolonial theory will be utilized to put the spotlight on the concept of modernity and the creation of the nation, because the latter is the offspring of decolonial struggles initiated by the colonized: the Nigerians.

#### **I.2.2.1. The concept of modernity**

The 16th century is a very eventful period of time in the universal history. It was a period of significant changes, the changes which immersed the world, especially Europe in a new era: The Modern Period. Likewise, those changes brought about the development of new ideas that shaped the world as it is known today, and also fathered the ascension of dominant European empires with the perception of Europe as the birth place from where human

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony, Douglas, "Decolonization, Race, and Region in Nigeria: Northernization Revisited". *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 2018, 51 (1): 37–62.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 141.

civilization was spread all over the world. Equally, this Eurocentric perception of history supports the assumptions that all non-European peoples, are not civilized, that is why they should adopt western basic principles, because they are the best for their modern life. These principles include individualism, legislative democracy, market capitalism, political freedom, guaranteed human rights, and Christianity. Colonialism is the perfect implementation of such convictions and this is illustrated by the British writer Rudyard Kipling in one of his poems entitled “The White Man’s Burden” which can be considered as an ideological propaganda about the justification of British colonization. That is to say that the rest of the world was uncivilized, barbarous and it was the burden, the mission of Europeans to bring light to Africa for instance, considered as the “dark continent”. Light here represents everything that modernity has created: colonialism and a Eurocentric history of the world. To better analyze this concept of modernity in the context of Adichie’s novel it will be interesting to present decolonial theory before going further in the analysis. It must be noted that the purpose of this section is not to make a case against the colonial heritage, illustrated by modernity, nor it is Adichie's intention in her novel. This analysis is an attempt to show that certain historical and sociological elements of that colonial heritage have fostered tensions which, when they reached their peak, led to large-scale massacres between the Hausa and the Igbo, and a Civil War that effectively devastated a significant part of the population: the Igbo. Anyway, shedding light on the concept of decolonization, from which the term decolonial derives in the first place will help better understand the context of the theory as well. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “decolonization is the withdrawal from its former colonies of a colonial power; the acquisition of political or economic independence by such colonies”. Dane Kennedy sheds light to this definition provided by the *OED* when he states that: “What we normally characterize as decolonization was the collapse of colonial empires and the creation of nation-states across what came to be known in the decades following World War II as the Third World.”<sup>1</sup> Also, he urges that the rationale for decolonization “was the radical idea of popular sovereignty, which presumed that political authority derived from the people.”<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, decolonization is to be understood as the historical process through which colonized peoples claimed and obtained their rights to self-determination from the western colonial empires, by means of upheavals and rebellions. Importantly, decolonial theory originates from the process of decolonization which started in Latin America. It is

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<sup>1</sup> Dane Kennedy, *Decolonization: A Very Short Introduction*, 2016, p.5.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p.9.

mostly defended and promoted by theorists like: Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel and Ramon Grosfoguel. However, it is substantial to note that the framework of analysis for the decolonial thinkers is the adoption of a standpoint epistemology that excludes narratives, identities, theories and citational references based explicitly on European texts and influence. Because of that, decolonial theory assumes that the production of knowledge should be made “with or from subaltern perspective” without being limited to the influence of Western canon of thought.<sup>1</sup> Decolonial theory is associated with three main concepts which are: coloniality, modernity and decoloniality. Philippe Colin<sup>2</sup>, one of the contemporary scholars in decolonial studies, argues that decolonial theory focuses on the study of the structural links that unite Western material and intellectual domination, colonial monopolization, the racialization of subjugated peoples and the eradication of non-Western knowledge and ways of life. He emphasizes that modernity is merely the attractive aspect of a vision that remains hard to decipher unless the analysis includes its external aspect that is coloniality. Coloniality, according to him denotes the colonial relationships of domination that emerged with the conquest of America and which were gradually established on a global scale, imposing a world hierarchy of peoples, based on racial, sexual, epistemic, spiritual, linguistic and aesthetic criteria. All things considered, this concept of coloniality clearly widens decolonial theory in the scope of African studies in general and to the context of Adichie’s novel in particular. The British colonial rule over Nigeria created the federal republic of Nigeria with the implementation of the colonial policy known as indirect rule. This political structure and its system of ruling, as it has already been demonstrated, were imposed on the Nigerians who gradually accepted it, and had to undergo the consequences of its incompatibility to their sociological characteristics. This problematic situation became part of their colonial heritage when the country obtained the independence in 1960. Philippe Colin’s analysis is relevant to the extent that his description of coloniality as the external aspect of modernity suggests that the independence of Nigeria did not end the continuation of colonization permanently, colonization continues through that colonial heritage that had established discrepancies mentioned in the previous section. Adichie presents this in her novel through the character of Susan, a British expatriate who epitomizes westerners’ condescendence with her undignified remarks on the Nigerians: “...to think that they are

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<sup>1</sup> Josias Tembo, ‘Do African postcolonial theories need an epistemic decolonial turn?’, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Colin, Lissell Quiroz, *Pensées Décoloniales : Une Introduction Aux Théories Critiques d’Amérique Latine*, 2023.

relatively uncivilized; one could compare them (the Igbo) to the Yoruba, for example who have had contact with Europeans on the coast for years.”<sup>1</sup> ; “It’s quite extraordinary, isn’t it, how these people can’t control their hatred of each other. Of course, we all hate somebody, but it’s about *control*. Civilization teaches you control.”<sup>2</sup> The choice of words in these two passages is striking, because through the mouth of this character, Adichie unveils the belief that without the British, Nigerians were uncivilized people. The use of “*control*” and “*uncivilized*” here denotes the fundamental assumption that the Nigerians were totally incapable of rational thinking and with the British masters gone, they were impossible to talk to and reason with. Given that reason has no effect on them, it is therefore inevitable that they appeal to their basic emotions and instincts, killing one another in bloody massacres. The Character of Richard also is a way Adichie uses to depict this issue While he is described as shy, awkward and lacking confidence, he is received in Nigeria as a “*white*” man, the master, with privileges associated to his status as British expatriate. For Maldonado-Torres a well-known decolonial theorist “Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day”.<sup>3</sup> From this postulate, decolonial theory also help us investigate how Adichie presents, the re-existence of colonialism and its continuity in different forms in modern Nigeria through the coloniality of power, of knowledge and of being expressed through the concept of modernity and the capacity of resistance to it by the Nigerians.

*Half of a Yellow Sun* depicts post-independence Nigeria as a modern society especially in the South. This depiction highlights the difference in terms of the territory exposure to the colonial penetration. The country is a federal republic of three regions with an elected president and a Prime minister as the head of the federal government. The North and South-West have each “the premier” as regional leader, and the South-East is led by

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.154.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.154.

<sup>3</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept”, 2007, p 243.

“Governor-General”. Here Adichie discloses the political structure and system imposed on the Nigerians to fit the colonizer vision of a modern society. This very political organization binds Nigeria, although an independent country, to implement a system of ruling that will generate disbalance as far as the political representation of the ethnic groups is concerned. Also, the country will be compelled to become a member of the Commonwealth, respecting and applying the measures dictated or inspired by the British: the separation of powers, the structure of the administration, the modalities of elections, the partition of the country, the official language... This can be considered as the coloniality of power, because the Commonwealth as an organization is another attempt to rebuild the British Empire in another form: the image a family with Britain as the father gathering the ex-colonies as the children, thus compelling them to follow a vision that they have not defined by themselves. This organization maintains a hierarchization of peoples stressing misbalanced relationships. Because of that, it not only contributes to the continuation of the British influence over the country particularly in their attitude to influence or dictate decision-making: “I was part of the commission that told our GOC, that they should stop promoting Northerners who were not qualified. But our GOC said no, our British GOC.”<sup>1</sup> The insistence on “our British General Officer Commanding” is an adjunction. This is actually a figure of speech that is used by Adichie to underline Colonel Madu's remarks that the British are in absolute control, and also it reveals the significance of their authority to make such an irreversible decision on Nigeria's future, without considering the recommendations of the people directly concerned. Odenigbo's harsh reply to his colleague about the first coup confirms this: “The BBC should be asking their people who put the Northerners in government to dominate everybody!”<sup>2</sup> The coloniality of power also maintains misbalanced relationships based on exploitation: “He argues that Nigeria did not have an economy until independence. The colonial state was authoritarian, a benignly brutal dictatorship designed to benefit Britain. What the economy consisted of in 1960 was potential raw materials, human beings, high spirits, and some money from marketing board reserves left over from what the British had taken to rebuild their post-war economy”<sup>3</sup>. All this had a significant impact on the different issues leading to disagreements and mistrust in the nation-building process when it comes to the redistribution of national resources, like oil for instance. The coloniality of knowledge in the novel is represented by the University of Nsukka first and then the Europeans' monopolization of

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 141

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p.125.

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 204-205.

universal history and knowledge of history. "...her father said that the idea of Nsukka University was silly, that Nigeria was not ready for an indigenous university and that receiving support from an American university rather than a proper university in Britain was plain draft..."<sup>1</sup> With this mentioned, Adichie reveals her intention to stress Western paternalism in general. Such support appears double-sided: it is supposed to be empowering, but in fact it is a form of pressure. The university receiving support from the West implies that their academic programs, criteria for academic selection and performance, and everything concerning research will be somehow dictated. Adichie presents the Western monopolization of universal history as form of domination. She introduces the conversation between Odenigbo, a charismatic university lecturer, a very modern Igbo with his houseboy Ugwu. "Education is a priority! How can we resist exploitation if we don't have the tools to understand exploitation?"<sup>2</sup> Here he means western education; "There are two answers to things they will teach you about your land: the real answer and the answer you give in school to pass."<sup>3</sup> He continues "They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Niger. That's rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger before Mungo Park's grand-father was born."<sup>4</sup> Because history is written by the colonizer, what Odenigbo calls the "real answer" is not valid, since he notes "But in your exam write that it was Mungo Park."<sup>5</sup> These passages illustrate that coloniality is in fact not necessarily established by means of violence, but is instead firmly entrenched and maintained through different forms of knowledge and a perception of human history that represents the Western world as the author of that history. Through Odenigbo's attempt to enlighten Ugwu about the "real answer" Adichie here again as African writer assumes the role of teacher and historian to recall the counter-hegemonic practices of the Africans in general and the Nigerians in particular, in their struggle to unveil or displace the mechanisms of western long-standing hegemony, which create and maintain subjectivity, in all its forms. About this Chinua Achebe states: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels did no more than teach my readers that their past with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them."<sup>6</sup> Another form of coloniality represented in the novel is the coloniality of being. This

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<sup>1</sup> *Idem*, p.32.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.11.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p.11.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*, p.11.

<sup>6</sup> Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher", *African Writers on African Writings*, (1965), p.4

form of coloniality emphasizes how modernity has created the conditions for a rational questioning of the colonized peoples and their cultures, legitimizing the invasion, occupation, and exploitation of those peoples' lands and resources. The Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o analyzing the issue of language as an instrument of progress and power argues: "English language, being the language of power and control, was regarded as a superior language and consequently a superior culture as well. All other forms of indigenous knowledge were considered inferior and primitive."<sup>1</sup> Adichie portrays modern Nigeria with English as the official language. The way she uses language in terms of grammatical structures, choice of words in direct dialogues when she lets her characters express their thoughts is very telling of the language as a symbol of status, progress and power. When modern and educated characters like Odenigbo, Olanna and Kainene and Richard speak, language is sophisticatedly used by Adichie: "Master's English was music, but what Ugwu was hearing now, from this woman was magic. Here was a superior tongue, a luminous language, the kind of English he heard on Master's radio rolling out with clipped precision."<sup>2</sup> Here the way English is spoken by Olanna is for Ugwu, a village boy, the illustration of beauty and modernity, all the things he aspires for, so that he can be admired like his Master. This is so amazing to him that she uses this image: "It reminded him of slicing a yam with a newly sharpened knife, the easy perfection in every slice."<sup>3</sup> No wonder that Ugwu considers himself inferior to Olanna and Master because of his broken English. Adichie really puts the spotlights on this insistence on proficiency in English which symbolizes assimilation to modernity at all expenses, had had a harmful impact on the Igbo culture and the way other more conservative ethnic groups like the Hausa perceived them. It is obvious that Adichie's intention is to let us discover that modernity was one of the symbols of divide and tensions between the Hausa and the Igbo.

#### **I.2.2.2. Creating a nation**

By the end of World War II, Nigeria's anti-colonial struggles had become an increasingly active force. The Nigerians were given the very opportunity to reclaim their freedom by creating self-government for them. But, numerous issues were to stand as barriers to such a desired freedom. With over 250 different ethnic groups within the colony, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Decolonizing the Mind: The politics of Language in African Literature", 1982, p.2.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.22.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p.22.



colonial rulers had the power of approval and were determined to use this power to make sure that their interests and influence would remain satisfied under the new government in place. Actually, most of these struggles were led by intellectuals who had been educated mainly in Great Britain and the United States. Such was the case, for example, of Nnamdi Azikiwe and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Despite their exposure to European Enlightenment ideas, progressive and capitalist ideals, each of them was born and raised in the values and practices of their respective ethnic groups. This explains why they spoke different local languages, and used English as the official language to communicate with each other, given that they were all British colonial subjects. In the light of what has been mentioned above, the members of each ethnic group expressed a strong attachment to their sociological characteristics: language, religion, customs, homeland and history. It has been demonstrated also that colonial rulers' attempts to create a sense of Nigerian unity through the policy of indirect rule and the colonial partition of the territory engineered issues making that unity hard to reach. This problematic heritage became the first fundamental obstacle independence forefathers would face in the process of creating the Nigerian nation. Discussing the problem of the nation-state after decolonization Dane Kennedy states: "[...] At the same time, the tragedy derived from the implementation of the nation-building process, with all too often precipitated conflicts between different ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other cultural groups that sought to shape the new nations in accord with their own interests and identities."<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that the Nigerians' efforts to establish self-government meant that they had to find a suitable way to integrate the realities of their cultural diversity with its differences in their government structure, with eventually the potential to create a new Nigerian national identity. The purpose of doing that meant also replacing the existing ethnic loyalties that had been exacerbated by the colonial policy over the years. However, their dire desire to reform their native cultures in the light of their own experiences became the subject of divide and disagreement on which elements or not would be the core of the nation and how they would be implemented on a national scale. The country was divided, each major ethnic group sought to secure their own interests. The divide between the Hausa and the Igbo for instance, was so obvious that even in great cities of the North like Kano, Kaduna and Zaria, there were special areas called "Sabon Gari"<sup>2</sup> especially created to accommodate the Igbo who migrated there. These areas were meant to limit maximum contacts with the native Hausa. These issues are depicted by Adichie

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<sup>1</sup> Dane Kennedy, *Decolonization: A Very Short Introduction*, 2016, p.69.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of Yellow Sun*, p.146.

in her novel. Importantly, using historical intertexts such as the colonial period and the mechanism of its policy, the policy of communitarianism in the North, she reveals to her readers that the difficulties of creating the Nigerian nation lie in the fact that there was no strong basis for unity that would have guaranteed a good national cohesion and a peaceful cohabitation among the major ethnic groups. If there was, it was only a strategy. Uniting forces in their struggle against the British was more efficient. “The South, too eager for independence accepted this constitution... Nothing was done about the clamor of the major ethnic minority groups, and the regions were already competing so fiercely that some wanted separate foreign embassies.”<sup>1</sup> This passage is an illustration of Adichie’s desire to emphasize the fact that today’s Nigerian people did not consider themselves members of a single nation until the amalgamation, when they were brought together to form a unified entity by the British for administrative purposes. No wonder, there was the resurgence of ethnic loyalty resulting in conflicts that she wittily contextualizes in the novel. She presents a number of factors such as the mistrust of Northerners in terms of the South being more modernized and educated, the South fearing Northerners total hegemony over the country in terms of political representation, the policy of regionalization of the administration promoting Northerners massive and quick promotion to higher positions within the federation especially in the army, the disagreement on the repartition and sharing of national resources. Actually, in 1964, legislative elections were held and the “Northern People’s Congress won 162 out of 312 seats in the House of Representatives. The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) won 84 seats in the House of Representatives.”<sup>2</sup> The more striking is that the Northerners obtained more than half of the seats of the Parliament and the Easterners obtained not even a one-third of the seats. With the majority of seats in the federal assembly, the Northerners were in the position of making important decisions about the future of the newly independent nation. In this regard, they initiated for example the policy of mass recruitment of Northerners officers in the federal army. Analyzing the political situation in Nigeria in the 1960s, Toyin Falola argues: “In 1961 the Northern People Congress reversed this trend by extending the quota system to officer recruitment. Thereafter, 50 percent of all officers came from the Northern Region, regardless of their relative qualification vis-a-vis those of their southern compatriots. 16 Policies such as these infuriated southerners, who saw their hard-won skills

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.155.

<sup>2</sup> <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/nigeria-1960-present/>

disregarded by a federal system that increasingly seemed to value ethnicity over merit.”<sup>1</sup> The Igbo’s fear of being completely swallowed forced a political reaction. Through her characters’ thoughts and experience of the difference circumstances leading to a series of massacres, two coups and secession, Adichie implicitly makes us consider the people of northern Nigeria’s: the Hausa, responsibility in these dramatic events. The Hausa are somehow charged with taking control of the federation on behalf of the belief that what was good for them would be accepted as good by everyone. Odenigbo’s analysis of this situation is quite telling “It’s the Sardauna who’s in charge. The man is ruling this country like his personal Muslim fiefdom.”<sup>2</sup> Adichie assuming the role of historian presents a paradox concerning General Gowon’s policy. To illustrate this, she makes an intertext by contextualizing the Aburi Agreements, which is a historical fact, to shed light on the General Gowon’s refusal to implement the recommendations agreed by the two parties: the Igbo and the military government. In other words, Adichie emphasizes that Gowon’s reversal of policy and vision of the federation since he imposes a unitary decree, the very reason that precipitated a second coup bringing him to power: “He agreed to confederation at Aburi, and now he wants one Nigeria with a unitary government, but a unitary government was the very reason that he and his people killed Igbo officers”<sup>3</sup>. All things considered, she intends to make a point from this rationale that no reason could justify the mass killing of innocent people because of their ethnic difference as the pretext leading to this: “He gestures to complex the problems facing the new country but focusing on the 1966 massacres. The ostensible reasons revenge for the ‘Igbo coup’; the protest against a unitary decree that would make Northerners lose out in the civil service did not matter.”<sup>4</sup> A In the same way she represents the South counter-hegemonic practice to quench the Northerners influence through the implementation of the unitary decree after the first coup as being offensive to the Hausa. As a consequence, there are the crystallization of the ethnic tensions between the Hausa and the Igbo. Ethnic withdrawal by means of propaganda against the Igbo becomes “a super strategy” for Northerners to take over the power in order to secure their political interests and hegemony over others. Considering that the conquest of power is always rough, ethnicization thus provides that conquest with a means that is mass mobilization which helps reactivate and enhance ethnic allegiance and loyalty.

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<sup>1</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *The History of Nigeria* 2008. p.166.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of Yellow Sun*, p.245.

<sup>3</sup> *Half of Yellow Sun*, p.159.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 205.

Because of that, extremely violent reactions to this hostile atmosphere were inevitable, making the outbreak out of a civil war imminent.

### **I.3. The economic context after the independence**

The purpose of this section is not to present an historical overview or to provide a precise study of the economic situation in Nigeria in the 1960s. Instead, it seeks to highlight the different constituent elements of what made up that economy, and to demonstrate how the sharing of revenues from the nation's resources contributed to creating a climate of mistrust and disagreement that fueled conflicts and hostility between the Hausa and Igbo peoples. Actually, the federal republic of Nigeria has always been labeled as an “African giant”. This situation is unquestionably linked to its economic potentialities. When Nigeria became an independent nation in 1960s, the country was already blessed with significant economic assets. Agriculture provided most of the Nigerian economy, ensuring food and employment for the population, and the majority of government revenues and foreign exchange income. But, with oil exploration and commercial export, the agricultural assets gradually decreased, while crude oil replaced it as the main source of income and export revenue. To take just a few examples, its peanuts were the biggest export, it was by far the most productive cocoa producer in the world, and it was a major cotton producer it was the most important palm oil producer in the world. It must be mentioned that the majority of the farming lands, mining resources, and oil deposits in Nigeria are located in the Eastern regions. To consider the huge quantity of exploited oil and the amount of money collected and controlled by the Federal State, one could expect that the enormous benefits could be invested in the extraction regions in compensation to damages such as water and soil pollution. Also, one could expect that these benefits could bring great programs favoring regional development in relation to the different constraints that the region faces. In reality, nothing of such was done. Most of the great benefits were confiscated by the federal government to initiate great projects of modernization of the North. All of this was favored by the discrepancies of the federal system. Actually, between 1960 and 1966, the federal system exacerbating regional divisions became completely dysfunctional, because the major political parties in each of the three regions (the North, the South-West and the South-East) competed bitterly and uncritically to gain or retain control of the regional and federal assemblies. As a result, obtaining that political control was the key to gain decision-making power over Nigeria's natural resources redistribution. The controlling parties were able to share government resources among

themselves and their supporters, and by the same standards, to deny or restrict access of those revenues to their opponents. In 1967, the military governor of the Eastern region, General Ojukwu confiscated the oil revenues as the compensation to the coast generated by the massive move of Easterners following the massacres. This situation became one of the main reasons leading to the civil war. As response the military government adopted of the Petroleum Decree in 1969, which gave them the right to assume the total control of oil and mining resources, vital for the survival of the country. The autonomy of the Eastern region for instance in the management of their own production revenues was revoked, while the principle of subvention of North by the south set up by the federal State appeared increasingly unjust. This misbalanced and unequal redistribution of national revenues engendered social protests and political reacts by Easterners against the federal government controlled by the Northerners. Adichie presents this issue as one of the major causes of the Biafran Secession. Through one the most utilized narrative techniques in the novel, namely direct speech, she lets her characters lead the readers envision the oil deposits in the Eastern region of Nigeria like gold that the military government led by Gowon cannot afford losing, also it represents a great economic potentiality to the Biafrans and their hope for prosperity. When the military government react by means of force to the Biafran by means of force Kainene, one of her characters urges: “‘It’s oil’ she said ‘They can’t let us go easily with all that oil.’”<sup>1</sup> With all this mentioned, it is obvious that problematic issue of oil revenues sharing was the *casus belli* that immersed the country into a bloody Civil War in 1967.

At the end of this part, it can be asserted that, in the light of the subsidiary question, the historical, the socio-political and economic context in Nigeria before and after the independence was crystallized by a problematic socio-political organization inherited from the colonial policies with a great deal of discrepancies. Also the impartial sharing of national resources like oil precipitated the newly independent nation into turmoil. No wonder, all these factors combined truly intensified and exacerbated the relation of mistrust and hatred which paved the way to the dramatic post-colonial situation prevailing in Nigeria in the late sixties and early seventies: the Biafran war contextualized by Adichie in her second published novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* through the use of intertexts to real historical facts about her country, the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 180.

## Part II: Adichie's view and Othering in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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The context described in the first part of the present work, as it was expected, is the opening to Adichie's novel. On the basis of this, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is indeed the contextualization of the post-colonial situation prevailing in Nigeria in the 1960s and the early 1970s. Adichie uses very sophisticated narratives techniques, to revive and shed light to the genesis and the dramatic effects of Biafran War, which was obviously perceived by the people of the Eastern province of Nigeria, namely the Igbo, as oppression. Likewise, it is clear that even if they were part of the same country: Nigeria, before the secession, the Igbo people, because of their differences in terms of culture, religious beliefs and traditions with the Northerners: the Hausa, were systematically denied membership within the Hausa community and excluded from it by all means, both discriminations and the resort to violence. All this jeopardized cohabitation, social cohesion, the relations of trust exacerbating ethnic differences and hatred between the two major ethnic groups. Therefore, the aim the second part of this work is twofold. On the one hand, the objective of this part consists in substantiating Adichie's point of view on her novel. Here, it will be interesting to provide evidence which show that *Half of a Yellow Sun* can be read as a historical novel. Also, it will be substantial to discuss the role of the Igbo woman in relation to her experience of the war. Depending on that, New Historicism theory will be used to conduct this analysis. On the other hand, the theme of Othering will be investigated in relation to how it is associated with conflicts and trauma in the novel. In accordance, the concept of Othering will be defined and examined. In this analysis, theories such Post-colonial theory and Trauma theory will be utilized.

### II.1 The act of narrating: Literature and history

Dealing with this section implies shedding light on the concept of history so as to comprehend how it influences the act of narrating on the one hand, and how Adichie connects it to literature. In the previous section, it has been demonstrated that Adichie's novel is a historical novel. Focusing on the definition of the concept of history will be helpful to the analysis. In fact, there are many definitions of the concept of history. Anyway, *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "The branch of knowledge that deals with past events; the formal record or study of past events, especially human affairs. Also: this as a subject of study." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as for it refers to history as: "a chronological record of

significant events (such as those affecting a nation or institution) often including an explanation of their causes”. If the *OED* puts an emphasis on “the past of human affairs”, the *MWD* adds the “explanation of their causes”. In this perspective, one can mention for example, the colonization of Africa or the Biafran War. It is obvious that history is not only about telling or reviving the “significant events” of the past, but also shedding light on the reason why those events had occurred. From the root “history”, derives the noun historian, which refers to a specialist who writes history adopting scientific methods, and the adjective historical, which rather means something related to history: a historical novel for instance. The distinction here is that, a writer is a person whose occupation is writing, the one whose work is published. Put another way, a writer is an author whose work are based on fiction. However, history is associated with objectivity and implies the use of scientifically objective and verifiable methods or approaches. In this context, a certain level of objectivity is of particular relevance, since it appears as the defining characteristic that distinguishes history from historical fiction. To better understand the intersection between literature and history in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* emphasizing on the historical novel is relevant. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* refers to a historical novel as “a novel that has as its setting a period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity (which is in some cases only apparent fidelity) to historical fact. The work may deal with actual historical personages, or it may contain a mixture of fictional and historical characters.” This definition highlights the characteristics of a historical narrative, though it may deal with historical facts, its main goal is not to establish or re-establish the truth with a level of objectivity. With this in mind, the reference to historical facts, personages, period and setting can make the narrative become more realistic, if one considers that, to some extent, all stories use the real world as a reference point, so that readers can be provided with knowledge about the real world. While history with objectivity seeks to establish a certain level of truth about the past, historical novel with realism tries to provide the readers with different ways of interpretation of the past. To give this issue of historical novel a great deal of attention, many literary theorists have developed theories about this specific fiction. Among them, Georg Lukács, who is a Marxist literary theorist, is widely considered to be the leading critic of historical novel. His work entitled *The Historical Novel* provides the basis from which other literary theorists have developed their respective theoretical paradigms. In this work, Luckacs argues that the development of this specific kind of fiction in the nineteenth century should be seen as a product of social forces. From the above, it is essential to acknowledge that the historical novel is inextricably linked to

European literature. Sir Walter Scott was the one who first pioneered the introduction of what Luckacs refers to as the “specifically historical” into the format of the novel and should therefore be reckoned as the forefather of the historical novel. To follow, in Luckacs’s deeper analysis, he asserts that “What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters, is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality.”<sup>1</sup> This fiction engages with history by giving it a different dimension, exploring a reality that goes beyond the facts in order to think about history from a different perspective. As an African writer, Chinua Achebe, inspired by the codes of the European historical novel, was able to narrate the history of his people who had been obliterated by European historiography and discourse. Here, Achebe captures historical facts by means of fiction, giving them new meaning and, eventually, suggesting new ways of interpreting the pre-colonial African societies and the clash between the West and those societies. Adichie following this tradition is quite aware of the high-stakes of this kind of fiction. She captures a very specific period of her country’s history, which she transforms into a literary object by reshaping the events and time through narration. In the author’s note of her novel, Adichie emphasizes: “This book is based on the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967-1970. While some of the characters are based on actual persons, their portrayals are fictitious as are the events surrounding them.”<sup>2</sup> From that, one notes that the most significant issue here for Adichie is not historicity but the reality that lies beyond facts. The combination of romantic, dramatic and tragic atmosphere in the novel is able to form a single whole to convey the complexity of the Biafran War, of its causes and its grievous consequences within the Nigerian society. Since Nigeria was engaged in the process of reconciliation to recover a sense of national feeling by 2003 with democratic elections, after a long period of military regimes, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is intended as a poignant reminder that the issues that initially divided the country remain unsolved and probably hamper the achievement of this process. Above all, Adichie’s novel should not be considered as the retelling of the Biafran War, but as an exhortation that invites readers to engage with the history of Nigeria in order to read and interpret the period she contextualizes beyond the historical facts mentioned in her work. Anyway, one can’t help asking these questions: why did Adichie decide to relate to that particular conflict more than thirty year after? Is this a

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p.42

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.445.



work of memory as a result of oblivion of history? What is the pertinence of her novel? Many factors make the history of Nigeria, particularly the issue of Biafra, worth studying. It is substantial to mention that the grievous effects of the Biafran War on the Nigerian society, especially within the Igbo community had inspired, and continues to inspire, a local literature, in terms of the quantity and the quality of the works which were produced about that issue. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is an incredible work that has the merit to encompass a number of different problematic issues in a single context: the impact of the colonial rule, the difficulties of creating a nation, and the complex dynamics of ethnic diversity. This connection with history is pertinent and it constitutes the richness of the novel. The intersection between the historian and the writer in the literary context raises the issue of the writer's commitment to his or her community: its history, its people and its culture. With this in mind, it can be asserted that Adichie narrates about the history of Nigeria because she assumes the role of a committed novelist. Actually, this issue of commitment, in anglophone African literature in particular, is very crucial, because literature reflects society. In other words, African literature in this context is the representation of the reality of society, the denunciation of its abuse and vices, as well as a means of expressing its resistance and struggle against the colonial and the neocolonialist discourse. In this regard, anglophone African literature is not only, connected to the history of anglophone African societies, but also, it draws its inspiration from the history and the experience of the people living in those societies. The African writer therefore assumes the role of historian. Like aforementioned, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portraying the "African past not being as dark a place as how the colonizers would portray it"<sup>1</sup> perfectly corresponds to this postulate. Adichie as one of the writers who are greatly influenced by Achebe, follows his footsteps. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* in this context is considered as a very crucial work. Not only because, it contextualizes the Biafran War, but also because, has it given another perspective, another way of interpreting the history of Nigeria of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and even beyond that period. While the Federal Military Army relate to that dramatic event as an act of Igbo rebellion, Adichie presents elements that suggest a much deeper analysis of this issue. Here again her intention is not to provide the readers with the truth, but she rather writes: "because I grew up in the shadow of Biafra", and 'because I wanted to engage with my history in order to make sense of my

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<sup>1</sup> Joke De Mey, "The Intersection of History, Literature and Trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*", 2011. p.8.

present’, ‘many of the issues that led to the war remain unresolved in Nigeria today’<sup>1</sup>. That being said, Adichie wittily succeeds in extending the interpretation of narrative beyond the end of the war and the reintegration of Biafra within the federation. For this reason, the pertinence of the novel also lies in the fact that it raises relevant questions about the new status and the fate of the Igbo newly reintegrated within the federation. As it has been demonstrated in part one, for the sake of political power control over the country, the Hausa attitude towards the Igbo was exclusionary. They defined and identified them as the enemies, the “problem of the country”, and justified their discrimination, violence, and oppression as a way to secure maximum protection and avoid domination. This is what Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, the supreme military commander of the Igbo during the Biafran War, declared in an interview given on *Nigerian TV*, which is national TV channel: “The aim of the massacres was to impose the final solution to the Igbo problem in Nigeria. That is, when there are no more Igbo in Nigeria, and then there will be no more problems”.<sup>2</sup> All this is quite telling of the fact that the end of the war did not solve all the very issues that led to it. The policy of political and economic marginalization initiated by the federal military government worsened the situation of the Igbo back within the federation. The end of the war was an opportunities to weaken the most the Igbo and have them under control “I hope it is not true what they are saying, that the government will take over all the Biafran bank accounts”<sup>3</sup>, “Her bank account in Lagos was gone. It no longer existed.”<sup>4</sup> Without any money and almost disqualified to assume important positions in the army or in the civil service, with the creation of more states in the South-East, the Igbo power and voice was almost subdued.

### **II.1.1 Literary context: *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a historical fiction**

Given that the present fiction is based on real historical facts about Nigeria, the way in which Adichie presents those facts is a relevant element to be examined. She utilizes different narrative techniques to tell her story. One of those techniques is that the story is told through the point of view from which three main characters: Ugwu, Olanna and Richard measure their

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<sup>1</sup> <https://socialistworker.co.uk/reviews-and-culture/interview-with-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-about-half-of-a-yellow-sun/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woQ0KcAeVWE&t=3s>

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 413.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 432.

experiences. The reader discovers that their different experiences are greatly shattered by the trauma, of both the massacres in the North and the Biafran War. In this regard, with the combination of fiction, the use of real historical data which connects *Half of a Yellow Sun* to history, and the characters' trauma, Adichie somehow creates intersections "to question the boundaries between the literary, the historical and the psychological"<sup>1</sup>. The fact that all these elements intermingle, the story in the novel can lead to various possible interpretations. This is one of the elements that make it a very fascinating work. From this rationale, the standpoint is that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a historical novel. To begin with, this section will be analyzed through New Historicism theory. In this regard, it will be interesting to emphasize the definition of this theory. New Historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. This theory is based on the literary criticism of Stephen Greenblatt and influenced by the philosophy of Michel Foucault. New Historicism theory developed in the 1980s, and gained widespread influence in the 1990s and beyond. Accordingly, New Historicism acknowledges not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author's time and circumstances, but also that the critic's response to that work is also influenced by his environment, beliefs, and prejudices. A New Historicist then sees the relationship between history and texts as reciprocal and looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's time affects the work and how the work reflects the writer's time. This corresponds to Lyu's analysis: "Literary texts are agents as well as effects of cultural change and are parts of the documents which compose history."<sup>2</sup> Mainly, the New Historicism theory reestablishes the necessity of taking history into consideration in literary studies. As society is in constant evolution, texts must be interpreted in the context of the society that created them. However, this theory is sometimes subject to debates for the reason that it privileges the study of history in the field. With this in mind, applying New Historicism to this study on *Half of a Yellow Sun* will help show the intersection Adichie makes between history and fiction. Toyin Falola, a specialist of Nigerian history writes: "Most damaging, however, was the culmination of these problems in a two-and-a-half-year civil war from 1967 to 1970 that rent the country along regional and ethnic lines, killed between 1 and 3 million people, and nearly destroyed

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<sup>1</sup> Joke De Mey, "The Intersection of History, Literature and Trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*", 2011. p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Xiaotang Lyu, "An Introduction to New Historicism", 2021.

the fragile federal bonds that held together the Nigerian state.”<sup>1</sup> This quote is from a book of history about the real history of the country. In reality, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda Adichie, assumes the burden of writer and historian, since she revives the issue of the Biafran War, which is a very crucial topic that was explored by many historians especially. Thus, the topic of the novel itself becomes one of the key elements that constitute the basis of the standpoint aforementioned. Likewise, Adichie’s novel is the contextualization of a particular period of Nigerian history. Importantly, she enlightens her readers on the causes of that dramatic war, highlighting the problems inherited from the colonial policy, in the creation of a national identity after the independence, as the starter of the struggle for political power hegemony between two of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Hausa and the Igbo. About this she writes: “The North was wary; it feared domination from the more educated South and had always wanted a country separate from the infidel South anyway.”<sup>2</sup> It is obvious that the information she provides her readers with in her novel are inspired from the history of Nigeria, recorded in books of history. In his book entitled *Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture*<sup>3</sup> the American critic, Louis Montrose defines New Historicism as the “textuality of history and the historicity of texts.” He refers to the “historicity of texts” as the cultural specificity and social embedment of all modes of writing, the rootedness of a text in the social-historical, political and cultural ambiance of its production, whereas “textuality of history” is the fictionality and constructedness of history. What Montrose emphasizes here is that history should not be considered as something absolutely objective. For him history is a narrative, which like language, is produced in a context and influenced by the social, economic and political interests of the dominant groups or institutions. All things considered, this approach helps comprehend how Adichie blurs the line between literature and history to unveil all inconsistencies, contradictions and discontinuities surrounding the history of her country, her people: the Igbo, and also this shows her intention to develop a coherent and credit historical narrative, another alternative about the Nigerian history through the fictionality of real historical experiences and memory, since the story in *Half of a Yellow Sun* appears like the testimony of the victims of the massacres and Biafran War themselves. Relating to the novel like a testimony, corroborates the standpoint that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a historical novel. Analyzing the definition of literature, the french critic, writer and philosopher Jean Paul Sartre assumes that « *On n’est pas écrivain pour avoir choisi de dire*

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<sup>1</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *The History of Nigeria* 2008. p.158.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.194.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Montrose, *Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture*, Routledge, 1989.

*certaines choses mais pour avoir choisi de les dire d'une certaine façon.* »<sup>1</sup> This is to say that it is rather the subject and the circumstances that prompt Adichie to choose this alternative of narrating her story. Adichie presents Richard and Ugwu as novelists: “I shall use this anecdote in my book... The war, and what happened before, and how much should not have happened. It will be called ‘*The World Was Silent When We Died*’”<sup>2</sup>, about Richard and about Ugwu: “Olanna told you about the woman carrying her child’s head on the train? Yes, sah. It will be part of a big book. It will take me many more years to finish it and I will call it ‘*Narrative of the Life of a Country*’”<sup>3</sup>. Ugwu’s story, which is finally entitled “‘*The World Was Silent When We Died*’”<sup>4</sup> with eight chapters, builds on the story told by Adichie, who is part of a country that suffered colonial domination and oppression. Adichie herself used historical facts to demonstrate her country's struggle for independence. The need to use historical facts as a basis for literary inspiration gives Ugwu the right, but also the duty, to tell the story of Biafra, his country also oppressed by a hegemonic group: the federal military government led by the Hausa. For that, Ugwu’s story, like Adichie’s, becomes much more than mere fiction. This story thus reads as the testimony of resistance against hegemony, of the silence of the whole world, and that of the re-existence of a people affected by trauma after massacres and the civil war. Just like Adichie, Ugwu understands the necessity not only to write as a form of re-existing, but also to bring realism to the story he narrates, since his inspiration comes from real events, his own experience or testimonies. In other words, Adichie directly associates the act of writing a story with history which is somehow is connected to memory. In so doing, she reveals her commitment showing that it is almost impossible to find a work of literature that excludes the realities of a given society. No writer is completely unexposed to his or her environment. It is the duty of a writer to convey the real-life events in his or her society and present them to the society as a mirror in which people can look at themselves and bring changes where necessary.

Apart from that, she also utilizes intertextuality. This also makes of *Half of a Yellow Sun* a more realistic novel, with facts, events, dates, names of major personalities and places like in the real history of Nigeria. This can be illustrated by the allusion to real names of people who were the major actors in the Biafran War like “Colonel Ojukwu”; “Yakubu

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce la Littérature?*, 1948, p.30.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.396.

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.424.

<sup>4</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.82, 115, 155, 205, 237, 258, 375, 433.

Gowon”, names of real places like “Kano”; “Lagos”; “Nsukka”; “Port Harcourt”; allusion to speeches pronounced by military leaders like Chukwuemeka Ojukwu<sup>1</sup>. Deemed as, intertextuality between the history of Nigeria and Adichie’s fiction reinforces the reading of the novel as a historical one. This reading helps not only comprehend how Adichie circumscribes the time, the setting and the circumstances which have influenced her story, but also it reveals the impact the novel has on the African literature in general and Nigerian literature in particular. In an interview entitled *Humanizing history* Adichie herself confirms the aforementioned intertextuality, when she admits: “I’m particularly drowned as I read and write a kind of fiction based on facts that makes sense. There is a sense in a sort of which I feel that I can be radically honest. And, by that it means there is a greater depth and that it can illuminate facts. [ ...]”.<sup>2</sup> The verb “illuminate” in this quote is quite telling of her desire to shine light on history that still haunts her country. She does not intend to open the wounds of the past, but she breaks the boundaries of the sensitive and the intimidating to substantiate a certain freedom like Sartre urges: «l’écrivain, homme libre s’adressant à des hommes libres, n’a qu’un seul sujet: la liberté»<sup>3</sup> that deeply implies a reflection on an eventful past to better envision a strong social cohesion in the future. Through intertextuality, Adichie presents the real facts of the war in Biafra which she successfully mingles with literary ingredients, not only to denounce and bring out of oblivion the consequences as a result of the failure of creating a strong national identity and the trauma that changed the life of people: the Igbo, but also to pay a special tribute to the victims of the war. Also, since the novel was published during the period of appeasement with democratic elections, it brings back to the forefront the pertinent question of the socio-political and economic status of the Igbo more than 30 years after a conflict that the federal military government described as a rebellion. Therefore, the novel really immerses the reader, through a deeper experience of a country that is the reflection of Nigeria of the late 1960s and late early 1970s. Intertextuality in this analysis also recreates, through some references to real-life facts, the original circumstances and periods of the massacres and the war, and depicts their chronology, with the main warring factions, and their power of destruction. *Half of a Yellow Sun* then becomes a historical novel focusing on the chronicle of the Biafra War: its causes, the way the world perceives it, what it represents for the Igbo and its dramatic effects on them in particular.

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.161-162.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Lx1BDdNF4w&t=321s>

<sup>3</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *Qu’est-ce la Littérature?*, 1948, p.70.

## II.2 Othering and conflicts

This section deals essentially with the theme of othering and conflicts. In this regard, the concept of othering will be defined, and then analyzed in a Postcolonial context in relation to how it is associated with conflicts, the Igbo victimization, and their oppression by the Hausa in Adichie's novel.

### II.2.1. Defining Othering

Othering is one of the key concepts in Postcolonial studies. Even if, the term has been used in a great number of studies by many critics, it is substantial to recognize that it was coined by Gayatri Spivak. Indeed, Spivak coined this concept to discuss the processes by which imperial discourse creates its 'others'. In other words, othering refers to the practice of representing and defining the colonized, used by the colonizers to create and sustain the negative and inferior views and assumptions about the colonized natives. *In Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin outline the origins of the term, along with further definition. Accordingly, in their analysis, these authors assume that othering is:

“a process, by which the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes. [...] The business of creating the enemy,... in order that the empire might define itself by its geographical and racial others”. [...] Because of the binary relationship in which they exist, the imperial definition of 'self' is dependent upon its 'other'”.<sup>1</sup>

From this definition, one can understand that othering is based on the principle of power relationship between two groups: a dominant-group and a dominated-group. Domination in this perspective is also implemented through the hierarchization a number of characteristic that separate the two groups, such as culture, history, geographical location... This analysis corresponds to Jean-François Staszak as he writes:

To state it naïvely, difference belongs to the realm of fact. Othering consists in applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: 'them' and 'us'. The out-group is only coherent as a group as a result of its opposition to the in-group and its lack of identity. This lack of identity is based upon stereotypes that are largely stigmatizing

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin. *The Key Concepts* Second edition, 2007, p. 170-171.

and obviously simplistic. The in-group constructs a group or more groups, setting itself apart and giving itself an identity.<sup>1</sup>

During the colonial period, the British were the dominant group that gave themselves the identity of masters and the civilized. This medium of self-identification from the subjects, the uncivilized draws a line of distinction that establishes a hierarchy not only of culture, but also the racialization of peoples. It is obvious that this construction of identity in stigmatizing differences inevitably separate one group from another through different processes such as discourse. Likewise, Sune Qvotrup Jensen's refers to othering:

as discursive processes by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups. Such discursive processes affirm the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and condition identity formation among the subordinate.<sup>2</sup>

In the Nigerian context, the British colonial discourse focusing on the hierarchization of cultures and knowledge, and the racialization of peoples placed the colonizers in the position of the superior and civilized masters, whose burden was to bring civilization to the uncivilized. Such hierarchization should be understood as a mechanism that served to legitimize colonial domination over supposedly inferior and uncivilized peoples: the Nigerians, who in this process became *ipso facto* the "other". Like it has been demonstrated in part one of this work, rather than encouraging cohesion and complementarity among the many different major ethnic groups, the British instead exacerbated their sociological differences, creating the conditions for competition which would later become problematic. Consequently, that supremacy or domination springs from othering, without which the dominant-subject relationships are impossible. Significantly, Adichie writes: "The British preferred the North. The heat there was pleasantly dry; the Hausa-Fulani were narrow-featured (a centralized organization) and therefore superior to the Negroid Southerners, Muslim and therefore as civilized as one could get for natives, feudal and therefore perfect for indirect rule."<sup>3</sup> What she portrays here is the binary dimension of the colonial policy of hierarchization that defines the Hausa as the "other": first as uncivilized subjects and then as having a centralized organization compatible to the implementation of the indirect rule. Adichie intends to show

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<sup>1</sup> J-F, Staszak, "Other or Otherness", *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography: Elsevier*, 2008,p.2.

<sup>2</sup> Jensen, S.Q.. "Othering, identity formation and agency". *Qualitative Studies, Vol.2(2)*, 2011, pp.63-78. p.3.

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, P. 115.



extension of that hierarchization among the colonial subjects: the Northerners and the Southerners especially the Igbo. In the gaze of the British, the Hausa self-identify as privileged subjects, which in return establishes them in a position of being hierarchically superior to the Igbo. In the course of their self-identification among other ethnic groups, the Hausa reproduce or inherit that process of hierarchization from the colonizers to distinguish and separate themselves from other groups, by stigmatizing the others' different sociological characteristics and giving themselves identity. Othering then occurs as the consequence of the British colonial policy. Ashcroft-Griffiths-Tiffin quoting Lacan refer to the colonizers in this perspective as the “*grande-autre*” the great Other, in whose gaze the subject gains identity.<sup>1</sup> Once independence was proclaimed, each major ethnic group was eager to overtake the dominant position, which revived the heritage of exacerbating the differences. This obviously shows that, the way of transforming the particularities and perceiving the other ethnic groups, becomes at all level a “social construct”, a strategy which is meant to give a group the legitimacy not only to dominate, exclude and marginalize the other one, but also to establish norms of identification on behalf of the superiority and authenticity of its particularity. Othering in this context generates what Antonio Gramsci refers to as “hegemony” and creates mechanisms to intensify that hegemony. Quoted by Steve Jones Gramsci recognizes that: “Hegemony: it is a process without an end. [...] Hegemony is not simply a question of meanings and values: it also takes economic, material and legal-political forms.”<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, in the effort to secure power, the Hausa and Igbo, suspicious of each other, labeled the features of their differences: language, customs, religious practices and rituals, social structure organization... as what theorists refer to as the other. Adichie writes: “The BBC should be asking their people who put the Northerners in government to dominate everybody!”<sup>3</sup> Through the use of the pronoun “everybody”, Odenigbo refers to his people: the Igbo, as well as the other ethnic groups. Having said that, it is substantial to mention that the other which corresponds to the investigation conducted in the present work, associated with the Postcolonial theory corresponds to what Staszak describes as: “a member of the dominated out-group whose identity is considered as lacking and who may be subject to discrimination by the in-group”.<sup>4</sup> From this rationale, labeling one's fellow countrymen as “the other” legitimizes the mechanisms adopted to secure power. The policy of exclusion,

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin. *The Key Concepts Second edition*, 2007, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Jones, *Antonio Gramsci*, ROUTLEDGE CRITICAL THINKERS, 2006. p.61.

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> J-F, Staszak, “Other or Otherness”, *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography: Elsevier*, 2008, p.1.

mistrust, violence and hostility become justifiable as a means of guaranteeing maximum protection against the other. For the Hausa, the other (the Igbo) represents the invader, the source of all problems, “the people who want to own everything”, the people who want to control them and ruin who they are, “the infidels”. In this regard, to the Hausa the Igbo represent everything that is contrary to what they are. Adichie then portrays any attempt by the other: the Igbo, to oppose to the way they are represented as offensive, an attempt to subvert the Hausa. This vicious circle fuels the ethnic tension between the two groups, and is also the link that connects othering and Conflict at the heart of the novel.

### **II.2.2 Signifying otherness in *Half of a Yellow Sun***

The *Oxford Learners Dictionaries* provides two definitions for the verb to signify. The first is: “to be a sign of something”, and the second is: “to do something to make your feelings, intentions, etc. known”. It is obvious that from these two definitions, two ways of understanding this verb may be possible in relation to how this term can apply to the analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It has been demonstrated that *Half of a Yellow Sun* cannot be read just as a simple novel, because of its capacity to navigate among the literary, the historical and the psychological. The richness of this novel lies in the fact that it also raises questions that are more complex than they seem to be. This section intends to show Adichie’s representation of othering in her novel. In this regard, the first understanding of signifying otherness in *Half of a Yellow Sun* implies the idea of signification, which is directly associated with the author’s use of signs and symbols. The signs such as the period: Postcolonial Nigeria and the setting: the Northern and Southern regions are symbols of a specific context within which a certain number of events can be analyzed and interpreted. Because of that, the context determines the reasons that make the study about the Biafran War not only relevant, but also beyond what Adichie presents in her novel, and comprehending the conflict between the Hausa and the Igbo. Adichie uses the narrative technique of a book within a book, with Ugwu’s novel, *The World Was Silent When We Died*, to help her readers understand the initial context of the clash with the British and between the North and the South. From that, she reveals her intention to present two clashes. On the one hand, there is the clash between the British and the local people, the Hausa: a centralized and predominantly Muslim Caliphate and the Igbo: a society of autonomous villages predominantly animist. The first clash established colonial rule that subjected the local people. On the other hand, Adichie portrays the clash between the

North and the South of Nigeria as the consequence of the first clash. She writes: “In 1914, the governor-general joined the North and South, and his wife picked a name. Nigeria was born.”<sup>1</sup> This passage must be considered as a sign that she uses to mark the beginning of the colonial administration’s misunderstanding and disregard of the local cultural diversity. In reality, her perspective is to help the reader be aware that othering and conflicts between the Hausa and the Igbo did not occur unexpectedly. Likewise, Adichie invites the reader to envision this second clash as the ramifications of the colonial policy’s discrepancies that fueled the differences between the two culturally different parts of the country, and later generated othering. Within this context, some names of real people, the proclamation of the independence and the policy of ethnicization leading to Igbo communitarianism in the North: “I am no longer the Igbo woman you wanted to marry who would taint the lineage with infidel blood,” Olanna said<sup>2</sup>. The two coups and the dramatic massacres that follow: “They are killing us like ants. Did you hear what I said? Ants.”<sup>3</sup>; “I saw a whole family, a father and mother and three children, lying on the road to the motor park. Just lying there.”<sup>4</sup> The Biafran War and its grievous effects, become very telling signs with the choice of words to express her characters thoughts that chronicle the narrative and provide a much deeper literary and historical meaning to the elements she presents.

Adichie also signifies through the heartbreaking massacres as the apex of othering. However, it is worth highlighting that colonialism infused the colonized peoples with a new perception of the conquest of power, a perception fundamentally shaped by hegemony through violence, massacres to repress any competition or resistance, as well as a hierarchization of cultures. Such Hegemony was intended as a mechanism for survival and self-preservation developed by certain ethnic groups, such as the Hausa, in the Nigerian context. The manner in which the massacres are presented, or told about by the characters with a specifically melancholic choice of words, reveals the apex that othering produces. Here again, a much deeper historical meaning is intended by Adichie. She opposes two points of view from two British expatriates:

*It is imperative to remember that the first time the Igbo people were massacred, albeit on a much smaller scale than what has recently occurred,*

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 144.

*was in 1945. [...] The tribes of the North and the South have long had contact, at least as far back as the ninth century, [...] No doubt these groups also fought wars and slave-raided each other, but they did not massacre in this manner. If this is hatred, then it is very young. It has been caused, simply, by the informal divide-and-rule policies of the British colonial exercise.*<sup>1</sup>

This passage is an extract of an article Richard Churchill, wrote to for the *Herald*, a British newspaper, to inform British readers, or the world about the real facts on the situation in Nigeria. Susan, comments: “It's quite extraordinary, isn't it, how these people can't control their hatred of each other. Of course, we all hate somebody, but it's about control.”<sup>2</sup> To Richard, his article is a response to the annoying British articles full of stereotypes he reads. It is obvious that behind Richard's perspective is Adichie's commitment to shed light on this heartbreaking episode of the Nigeria history, so that her readers as well can really seize why the massacres occurred. In addition, in another passage, Odenigbo, one of the major characters urges: “Of course, of course, but my point is that 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.”<sup>3</sup> This statement may seem radical from an intellectual being part of a nation in its early days. But the point is that literary constructiveness gives fiction the power to construct a reality or to provide an alternative to a particular social reality, and to depict it more effectively through a sign or symbol. Such a sign symbolizes strong attachment to the homeland, to local culture and to the region, all of which are very significant elements in the perception of identity. However, it is worth remembering that Adichie does not epitomize this about separation or a will to exclude others, but more about a way to show the feeling reconnect with oneself, with one's roots and, above all, to remedy the misperception and disregard for diversity that was caused by the colonial policy of amalgamation. Within the context of competition for political hegemony, such attachment to identity can only be perceived as a withdrawal into ethnicity, demonstrated by effective loyalty to one's ethnic group: you make propaganda, you vote, you engage in combat, not for the national interest, but for your own ethnic group. From that perspective,

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 22.

Hausa oppression and violence against the Igbo only reinforced that ethnic withdrawal, leading to the tragedy of the Biafran War.

Significantly, indifference, silence or neutrality and rape are other symbols used by Adichie to signify otherness. She portrays the association of two strong feelings that were born from the cohabitation among the three major ethnic groups: love and indifference, two concepts that allude to life and death. Before the conflicts and the massacres, the members of the three major ethnic groups though loyal to their respective group, developed peaceful contacts in different ways: friendship, business partnership, love relationship... However, because of politics, the situation became completely different. This is signified by the indifference of Muhammed, Olanna's ex-boyfriend a Muslim Hausa, about the war in Biafra. He writes Olanna a letter, describing his daily life without expressing any compassion, and this really shocks Olanna: "Mohammed's letter incensed her; it insulted her reality. [...] Yet she felt angry that the patterns of his old life remained in place, so unquestioningly in place that he could write to her about his polo game."<sup>1</sup> Likewise Adichie intends to point out the Yoruba's silence and neutrality during the war as one of the significant symbols. About neutrality, Desmond Tutu, a South African Nobel Prize for Peace winner and great fighter of the Apartheid regime, once declared: "If you are neutral in a situation of injustice, then you have chosen the side of the oppressor."<sup>2</sup> Yoruba' neutrality is revealed in *Half of a Yellow Sun* a Yoruba character called Miss Adebayo. Though living in the South-West, in Lagos, she assumes that people from there did not know about what was going on in Biafra. Her amazement after the war, when she revisits her colleague Professor Odenigbo with whom she used to have thought-provoking debates, is an illustration of that: "You know, we didn't really understand what was happening in Biafra. Life went on and women were wearing the latest lace in Lagos. It was not until I went to London for a conference and read a report about the starvation."<sup>3</sup> Her amazement was even greater when Odenigbo describes his experience of the horror of the war. While war continues at its worst, women become the ones who suffer the most: they have lost their beloved sons, and are subjected to all forms of violence: physical, moral and sexual, intended to humiliate and impose on them a form of male domination. In this case, in the novel, rape is presented as a way of testing a teen-soldier's manhood. By manhood, is meant the soldier's intrepid courage, ruthlessness and fierceness, his darkest side.

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 377.

<sup>2</sup> <https://citations.ouest-france.fr/citation-desmond-tutu/neutre-situation-injustice-alors-as-108811.html>

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 423.

This description of this innocent young girl rape corresponds to this rationale: “The bar girl was lying on her back on the floor, her wrapper bunched up at her waist, her shoulders held down by a soldier, her legs wide, wide ajar. She was sobbing, ‘Please, please, biko’. [...] Between her legs, High-Tech was moving. His thrusts were jerky, his small buttocks darker-colored than his legs. The soldiers were cheering.”<sup>1</sup> However, what the author does through this description of this scene of rape, is to prompt the reader to delve beyond the literary sign she presents and consider the woman not just as a mere victim, but also in a context where she is defenseless, humiliated and reified, like a playground where the soldiers test themselves to reveal their deepest darkest side: “A soldier pulled him off and was fumbling at his own trousers when somebody said, ‘No! Target Destroyer (Ugwu) is next!’ [...] ‘Ujo abiala o! ‘Target Destroyer is afraid!’”<sup>2</sup> ; “Target Destroyer, aren’t you a man? *I bukwa nwoke?*’ [...] Ugwu pulled his trousers down, surprised at the swiftness of his erection. She was dry and tense when he entered her.”<sup>3</sup> Notably, other elements of analysis are presented by Adichie, enabling a deeper understanding of the fact that, during wartime, the rape of women became one of the means used to infuse or perpetuate fear and terror. It became a weapon used by several men to assert their manhood or satisfy their lust such is the case of Father Marcel, a Priest who takes profit of his position at the relief camp to rape innocent young girls: “Apparently I’ve been blind; she’s not the only one,” Kainene said. “He fucks most of them before he gives them the crayfish that I slave to get here!”<sup>4</sup> From this point of view, the woman becomes the natural victim, and remains permanently injured by the trauma inflicted upon her.

### II.2.3 Essentializing the other

In this subsection, the main focus is to show who the “other” represents and how they are represented in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. However, it will be opportune to understand the term “essentializing” first. According *The Oxford English Dictionary*, to essentialize refers to “To formulate in essential form, to express the essential form.” *The Wiktionary the Free Dictionary*, as for it defines it as: “to reduce something to its essence or to misrepresent a

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 365.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p.398.

characteristic of something by falsely portraying it as essential to the whole (that is, implying that it defines the whole's essence)". For instance to essentialize race by stereotyping "what Whites do" or "how Blacks think".<sup>1</sup> From this definition, the verb essentialize implies a direct link with the way the "other" are perceived and represented by a dominant group. To put it another way, it is the process through which this dominant group transforms an elements of the particularities of the group that they consider as the "other", in giving them a negative meaning and a falsely representation through stereotypes for example. This corresponds to what Victoria Osei-Bonsu, describes as "Thirdsight". Actually, about this she writes: "I coin the term 'thirdsight' to probe the connections between visualization and thirthing-as-othering. Thirdsight refers to a way of seeing things in both real and imagined ways which impact on our judgment of situations and people".<sup>2</sup> In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie presents two major ethnic groups in tensions in Nigeria: the Hausa and the Igbo. On the one hand, the Hausa, most recognizable characteristic is that they are devout Muslims and very conservative of their traditions and religious way of life. On the other hand, there are the Igbo, are very open-minded, and privilege values of work and business. Showing one's richness among the Igbo communities is not an offense. Many among them are Christians and others are animists, worshiping spirits and their ancestors. Because of this cultural difference between the two groups, the Hausa consider the Igbo as the "Infidels". In the beginning of her narrative, Adichie makes it clear to which camp her main characters belong. They are Igbo, later on Biafrans. They are essentialized by the Hausa, because of their difference in matters of religion, tradition and way of life. And most importantly, the Hausa consider them as their direct opponent for the race to political hegemony over the country. That is why there are labeled as the "enemy". In this regard, the bloodiest massacres perpetrated in the Northern region targeted only the Igbo. This is illustrated by Odenigbo, a firm believer in Biafra when he shouted to Miss Adebayo, a Yoruba woman, his colleague and friend: "Did your cousins die? Did your uncle die? You're going back to your people in Lagos next week and nobody will harass you for being Yoruba. Is it not your own people who are killing the Igbo in Lagos? So what are you saying? How is your opinion relevant? [...] The truth has become an insult."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/essentialize>

<sup>2</sup> Victoria Osei-Bonsu, "Representations of the Other in Selected Works of Joseph Conrad", PhD dissertation, University of Basel, May, 2018, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 174.

The Igbo are also representation by the Hausa like it has already been mentioned in the previous sections as the “problem” of the country. They want to own and control everything, every business and they are everywhere and occupy almost all the highest position in the civil service, and the army. In the novel, Adichie presents elements which shows that the first coup that killed the North Premier and the Prime minister both Hausa, perpetrated by a group of Igbo officers, placing General Ironsi as the leader of the military government is the climax of the animosity of the Hausa against the Igbo. Considered as enemy and great threat to their very existence of their culture and ways of life, the Hausa did not hesitate to massacre the Igbo first, and later leading the federal military government, they condemned millions of Igbo to suffer starvation, with Biafra blockage. Likewise, all the elements presented in this subsection and in the previous ones demonstrate the direct link between essentializing the Igbo with othering and conflicts

### **II.3 Othering as ferment of conflicts in *Half of a Yellow Sun***

The aim of this section is to examine how othering, contributes to brew conflicts between the Hausa and the Igbo in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. As it has been mentioned in the previous sections, this novel is the contextualization of the Biafran War, representing the Igbo people as the victims of the oppression perpetrated by the Hausa people. Therefore, it will be interesting to investigate on the political instability and ethnic pogroms as being the main causes of the Biafran War.

#### **II.3.1 Political instability**

Here again, it is substantial to remind that the Nigeria inherited many discrepancies of the British colonial administration, which favored the Northerners, in giving them the leading position over the two other regions in the South. The first years after the independence provided a complex picture of the Nigerian political system. After the elections of Nnamdi Azikiwe as the first president of the Federation, the elections in the South-West region in 1965 were tainted by many irregularities such bribes, corruption and intimidations, all this for the purpose of ensuring the Yoruba’s political control of that region. This happened with the support of the leaders of the Northern region, fearing the Igbo political Hegemony over the South. All over the country, especially in the South, the people complained about corruption and the inefficiency of the federal government to lead the newly independent country to prosperity. The Northerners leaders took advantage of their leading position in the assembly



to imposing their ethnicization policy intended to *northernize* the administration and the army, so as to secure maximum higher positions for the Northerners in the federal government, administration and the army. The Nigerian Historian Falola<sup>1</sup> assumes that that policy emerged the fear of “domination.” Indeed, in his analysis of the 1960’s situation in Nigeria, he argues that the southern leaders were concerned about the possibility that a government controlled by the Northern People Congress, would only represent the North’s interests and would eventually redirect all government resources to develop the North. This would jeopardize Southerners’ positions in the administration and the army. Such domination would give the Hausa the means and opportunity to systematically Islamize all parts of the country. As a result of this, a coup was perpetrated in 1966, to counter the Northern growing domination. Adichie presents this situation through Professor Ezeka’s comments: “The BBC is calling it an Igbo coup. [...] And they have a point. It was mostly Northerners who were killed.’ ‘It was mostly Northerners, who were in government.’”<sup>2</sup> After the coup General Johnson Ironsi became the head of the military government. Yet, to redefine the country political organization, he initiated a unitary decree that ending the federation system. This provoked protests in the North, because the Hausa being very suspicious of that political move considered it as Igbo attempt to reinforce their control. For that reason, Northerner army officers realized that the South would devote more resources to its own development especially in the Igboland, preventing the North from developing competitively. They also were very worried that Igbo hegemony actually implied that they would ultimately control the North’s civil service and educational institutions. To the Hausa, this also meant that the North would continually be deprived of the resources required to develop an educated citizenry able to compete with the South on the basis of merit. All things considered, the conditions were settled for a counter coup that occurred six months after the first, and it was a Hausa coup leading General Yakubu Gowon to power. Before and after that coup, there were massacres against the Igbo people in the North. Many of them were killed. This situation immersed the country in turmoil leading to Eastern region’s secession.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a number of facts may be counted among the reasons why the Eastern region decided to get out of the federation. The Biafran war in general can be considered as an immediate consequence of othering and to the failure of the federal government to secure balance among the major ethnic groups in its national policy. But, the

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<sup>1</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *The History of Nigeria*, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 125.

most striking aspect is the way Adichie presents that secession. This is what motivates the reading of this period as the beginning of the era of political instability. Adichie lets her readers discover through her use of direct speech of her characters: “What peace are we looking for? Gowon himself has said that a basis for unity does not exist, so what peace are we looking for?”<sup>1</sup> Odenigbo asked. This passage reveals that with the Hausa back to power, and after all the massacres of regards to the power of the Igbo in the North, the situation was more complex than before. Political instability is also expressed by the way the new federal military army redefine the political organization: “He agreed to confederation at Aburi, and now he wants one Nigeria with a unitary government, but a unitary government was the very reason that he and his people killed Igbo officers.”<sup>2</sup> Because of that boiling and confusing political situation, the Igbo leaders were convinced that secession was the best alternative. In this regard, the Igbo harped on the principles of self-determination, basically interested in creating an independent state called Biafra established out of the federation of Nigeria, to set free from the Hausa oppression. In the novel, the massacres are also presented in a way that shocks and hurts the Igbo people, producing in them a strong feeling of anger, hatred towards the Hausa. This is what Ugwu, explains to Olanna when he replies her: “No, mah. We are not like those Hausa people. The reprisal killings happened because they pushed us”.<sup>3</sup> It is obvious all those feelings brewed an attitude of lassitude that could no longer stop the Igbo from expressing their displeasure with the federal military government impartiality and indifference about the massacres of their fellow people in the North and the West. As a consequence, they did not hesitate to launch a campaign of massive mobilization of the Igbo to go back to the Eastern region and get out of the throes of the Nigerian federation. The rationale, here was an enthusiastic and urgent need for change: the change of regime, the change that would bring autonomy, security, equality, freedom and prosperity. Accordingly, to galvanize the people into action, the leaders of the Biafra diabolized the Nigerian military government: the Hausa, as the vandals, and rather nourished the Igbo people with the hope of a better life and the pursuit of happiness. Odenigbo, addressing the students, says: “Biafra is born! We will lead Black Africa! We will live in security! Nobody will ever again attack us! Never again!”<sup>4</sup> That is to say that the Igbo were sick and tired of being the victims of Northerners and being under total control of a government not guaranteeing their safety. With

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.158.

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.159.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p.177.

<sup>4</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.163.

all the natural resources they possessed, particularly oil, they were very confident and envision a great future after winning the war against the “vandals.” The federal military government considered that secession as a rebellion, and launched a counter-offensive that resulted to a bloody Civil War. With this in mind, it is substantial to say that even if the secessionist did not achieve to maintain the republic of Biafra as a highly recognized and independent nation, it is crucial to mention Adichie’s intention to give credit to the Igbo revolt as a counter-hegemonic struggle to end oppression by conferring themselves a positive and autonomous identity that restore their dignity as a people.

#### **II.4 Trauma theory**

The civil war had negative effects on the mind of both Nigerians and ex-Biafrans. In this section, it will be interesting to put a particular emphasis on the representation of both the violence of the massacres, and then the brutality and cruelty of the war in the mind of the people, which created a trauma.

The concept of trauma, which is itself a source of critique, is generally understood as a severely disruptive experience that profoundly impacts the self’s emotional organization and perception of the external world. Trauma studies as a field of study explores the impact of trauma in literature and society by analyzing its psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance.<sup>1</sup> The studies on trauma took a significant turn with the works of the Austrian psychoanalyst theorist Sigmund Freud. In his works, Freud widened the meaning of the concept of “trauma” which was basically narrowed to indicate a “physical injury”. He demonstrated that it was rather a “psychological injury”, suggesting that the original event that causes the psychological injury is not traumatic in itself but only in its remembrance. In the mid-1990s, trauma theory had another turn with the works of other theorists who were inspired by Freud such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman. But it is worth recalling that all these aforementioned theories based their works on the psychological effects of the Holocaust in the long term. Each theorist tackled this concept in a very specific angle nourishing the theory with new concepts. In the *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* (1996: 4, 18) for instance, Cathy Caruth examines the “rhetorical potential” of recurring figures in texts that capture the splintered referentiality that points to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://literariness.org/2018/12/19/trauma-studies/>

the “knowing and not knowing” of the traumatic past, which in turn reveals the “traumatic nature of history” itself. Just like Freud’s works, this view of Caruth was enriched by a pluralistic model of trauma associated with history and memory, which suggests traumatic experience, locates value and knowledge through a variety of representational modes. This is the case Doris Laub notion of “My position as Witness” in *Testimony* (1992). Here the theorist emphasizes three distinctive levels of witnessing in relation to the Holocaust: the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of the others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself. As far as *Half of a Yellow Sun* is concerned, I can assert that my theme as formulated has not yet been the object of any research. Nevertheless, I recognize the existence of some articles and even theses on Chimamanda’s writings. In her Doctorate thesis “The Intersection of History, Literature and Trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*” (2011), Joke De Mey explores how history, literature and the trauma theory converge, and how Adichie uses a literary work to mediate her own relation to a traumatic past. Therefore, the aim of this section is not to explore the Trauma theory as merely an approach at elucidating a character analysis, but it aims at examining the effects of trauma on the major characters: Ugwu, Olanna, and Richard to know how this can help better understand the novel. Importantly, Cathy Caruth (1996) one of the most prominent pioneer of Trauma theory states that there is no firm definition for the term “Trauma”, which has been given various descriptions at various times and under different names. This assertion echoes the complexity of analyzing consistently Trauma. Anyway, according to *The Longman Advanced American Dictionary*, “a trauma is a psychological injury”. To follow, “it is a mental condition caused by a severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last for a long time”. *The Oxford English Dictionary* as for it describes it as “A psychic injury; one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed”. Both dictionaries provide two variable characteristics. For the first the “effects last for a long time” and the latter they remain “unhealed”. Likewise, Freud analysis in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* evokes that “Trauma” is understood as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind [...] not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor”.<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that all these descriptions present common characteristics, but

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<sup>1</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, 1996, p. 16-17.

Freud adds another relevant characteristic which indicates that “Trauma” is “not available to consciousness”. In the light of this, the description to be made of Trauma is that it refers to a complex psychological affliction caused by a tragic or an unpleasant experience, which springs up and haunts the victim or, in some cases, the perpetrator permanently without him or her being conscious to control it. Anyway, analyzing what is or not called Trauma, Richa Dewani<sup>1</sup> argues that it is well-known in genocide, war, and crime situations. It is almost always seen in tortured victims and targets of mobbing. It is common, but less often identified in situations of domestic violence, pedophilia, and incest. It also occurs in victims of child or elder abuse. It manifests itself as a deep breakdown of the individual and feelings of fear, shame and humiliation that are especially strong. Literature and literary theory explore Trauma through texts of a certain period that speak about and speak through the profound story of traumatic experience. This corresponds to what Caruth (1996: 17) comments as: “Trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available”.

#### **II.4.1 Trauma theory in the context of African studies**

This sub-section is relevant for the reason that it is worth contextualizing the use of Trauma theory to the particular scope of African studies. Because the novel is part of postcolonial literature, the use of some of the concepts and characteristics of this theory might not match with the postcolonial context. Novak points this out in these words: “another problem of the application of trauma theory to postcolonial narratives... Discourse of trauma is founded upon an erasure of the voice of the Colonial Other”.<sup>2</sup> In the light of this, discussing the same issue, Joke De Mey (2011: 39) led a subsequent analysis that can be summarized in these words. In novels dealing with trauma there is often a repetition of the same scenes from different points of view, this shows the disbelief in one universal, reachable truth. Authors no longer try to discover the one truth, as they believe it does not exist. There can be confusion about certain facts, often caused by different interpretations; the past as a whole is no longer attainable in a straightforward way. In a lot of cases, the chronology of the story is also

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<sup>1</sup> Richa Dewani, “The Impact of Trauma in Literature”, 2023, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Novak, “Who Speaks? Who Listens?: The Problem of Address in Two Nigerian Trauma Novels”, *Studies of the Novel* (2008), p.32

disrupted. Some of these techniques are present in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* as she tries to get across the trauma of the war. As I have stated before, the majority of these theories was developed in relation to the Holocaust, so a careful approach with keen attention to the details is the preferred mode of investigation here. This theory may be transferred to a postcolonial context, but some elements will need to be adjusted. The thinkers of trauma theory, she quotes Ward, "offer a critical vocabulary for, and ways of thinking about, trauma and memory which are highly valuable to a psychological exploration of the postcolonial." From that point, it can be asserted that *Half of a Yellow Sun* can be explored through the trauma theory. Tackling things in this way will require taking into account how Trauma is represented in the corpus.

#### **II.4.2 The representation of Trauma in *Half of a Yellow Sun***

The Biafran War had negative effects on the mind of both Nigerians and ex-Biafrans. Numerous elements in the novel serve as frames of reference to the way Trauma is represented. Those elements include aspects like the structure of the novel itself, the experience of the major characters, the use of language by the writer and the use of myths as intertexts. It is worth recalling this selected list of elements is not complete, other elements can be incorporated. However, for sake of investigation, I assume that the one aforementioned are telling and express a trauma which meaning can contribute to a better understanding of the novel. The novel is structured in four parts containing chapters each. What is more striking is the way the different parts are presented. In a chronological order the each part would have followed each other, but in the novel the different parts intertwine in a form of flashbacks and flashforwards. That is to say that the following of the story in part one is to be found in part three, whereas part two tells the following of events that occur after part three. The story is told from the point of view of three main narrators: Ugwu, Olanna, and Richard. Trauma is represented here to the extent that there is a shift from a thematic point of view. From the narration of a peaceful life in part one that starts like a love story with a good atmosphere where the main characters are introduced, there is a sudden change to more tragic narrative presenting the traumatic experiences of Olanna and Richard. The change of theme and order of narration conveys a particular meaning. This sudden shift is very significant in Adichie's narrative strategy not only to demonstrate that fiction can be used as alternative to construct reality, but also to emphasize the absence of consciousness and the fact that the victims (her characters), and even the reader who is immersed into the story, have no control over the

trauma. This kind of thematic trauma even affects the chronology of the narration in part two. From the order: Ugwu-Olanna-Richard in part one, there is Olanna-Richard-Olanna-Richard-Ugwu. All things considered, Trauma really affects the character and above all it affects the structure of the novel in this part suggesting a new way in which a new story must be told. In addition to that, another element through which Trauma is represented is the experience of characters. In reality, Adichie's characters suffer Trauma as a result of the cruelty they have experienced or witnessed during the massacres and the Biafran War. In the novel for instance, the writer links the traumatic after-effects of the massacres in Kano and those of the civil war which impact negatively the mind of the main characters especially Olanna and Richard. "The image of her relatives' dead bodies"<sup>1</sup> and that of "the woman who carried her daughter's head in the calabash on her way back from Kano"<sup>2</sup> after the massacres and that of the air raids, really haunt Olanna's mind repeatedly and makes her feel bad or sometimes she feels like crying. Richard's trauma originates from the execution of people at the airport in Kano. He is haunted as well by this traumatic experience of the execution of Nnaemeka, a nice young Igbo custom officer he had just met there. Ugwu as well is traumatized by the cruelty of the war and by the bond rape of a girl he participated in as a forced conscript soldier. From this it is obvious that Trauma is represented in different ways, it is not a collective one, but an individual or personal experience that produces personal reacts. For Olanna the effects are much serious as she is paralyzed. Memories of the massacres keep intruding her daily life, leaving her in a state of panic. Here Trauma is represented as the intrusion or invasion of a tragic past into the present. Caruth describes this as a form of recall that survives at the cost of willed memory or the very continuity of conscious thought.<sup>3</sup> The effects of Trauma on the characters that profoundly destabilize their lives help better understand that memories of the past interrupt their live. They cannot get rid of the past Using Kano airport, the execution, and the massacres as historical references, is a way to state that this is not just an ordinary story, it really happened.

Significantly, Trauma is also represented through the use of language in the novel. The use of language here refers to the ways it fails to really express the magnitude of Trauma. In this context, an alternative strategy is used by the narrator to provide very clear and precise description of the traumatic experience. It seems as though the narrator has the burden to let

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<sup>1</sup> Chimamanda Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, 2006, p. 147

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p.148

<sup>3</sup> Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction", p.152

the reader miss no detail of what he or she is about to witness. It is almost like feeding the reader with empathy or springing images in his or her mind to transfer the traumatic experience. “She stopped when she saw the bodies. Uncle Mbaezi lay face down in an ungainly twist, legs splayed. Something creamy white oozed through the large gash on the back of his head.”<sup>1</sup> This is for instance Olanna’s description of their relative dead bodies. About this, Joke De Mey (2011: 43) comments: “The failure of language may show a frustration with documents, which can give no real access to a trauma, and often poses more questions than they answer. It also points to the feeling that language is not an adequate medium to express dramatic traumatic experiences, so the writer may resort to other ways of representing it.” There is also the use of untranslated Igbo terms, which accordingly fill the gap English fails to fill. The last element of the representation of trauma is the use of myths as intertexts. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines intertext as: “Language or text which is either intermediate, as between different language forms”. *Collins English Dictionary* as for it defines it as: “a literary text that is related to one or more other texts, especially through the use of allusions to these texts”. What is more interesting in the second definition is the use of “allusions to these texts”. The question that one may be tempted to ask is how this can represent Trauma. Actually, there are different layers of intertext in the novel, but in this article the main focus is on the allusion to Igboland traditional background. The novel in deed is set in Nigerian, but specifically in the Eastern Region where the Igbo are the major ethnic group. The Igbo culture is obviously present in the novel in various ways. There is allusion to language, religious beliefs, and tradition. Olanna for instance as a highly educated woman does not believe in witchcraft, but still the traumatic experience of not finding her twin sister Kainene, forces her to change her perception of what to believe in or not. Adichie writes: “She gave him a bottle of whiskey and some money to buy a goat for the oracle. She drove to the River Niger to throw in a copy of Kainene’s photo. She went to Kainene’s house in Orlu and walked around it three times. And she waited for the week that the *dibia* had stipulated, but Kainene did not come home.”<sup>2</sup> Back in the story told in part one, before her Trauma, this was unreal to her, after she had lost the hope of finding her sister, she seeks to reconnect to her roots, her traditional beliefs, her cultural heritage. This is a perfect illustration of the way a traumatic experience can bring radical changes in the life, a change that lead to self-questioning and to consider new alternative about the perception of reality or truth. One need

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<sup>1</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.147

<sup>2</sup> *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.433



to recognize that there is a much deeper meaning behind Adichie's perspective of representing Trauma the way it has been demonstrated. Depending on that, there is a transition and transmission dimension expressed through that representation. Prior to undertaking any deeper analysis, it is evident that the common visible element between the two is the prefix "trans", which denotes "cross, over, and beyond" according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*. With this in mind, transition refers to the process of passing from one state or condition to another. It is specifically associated with the notion of change, but not a complete change, rather an in-between state of change (identity, period, or situation). Transmission as for it is defined as the action of transmitting something from one person to another or the fact of being transmitted something by someone. This can be assimilated with the notion of transfer (culture, idea, discourse). In Adichie's novel, numerous references evoke these notions of transition and transmission. Through the effects of traumatic events, the main characters are unwillingly strapped in an in-between state of change. They live in the present, but they are haunted by the past, their perception of reality changes, they question their beliefs. The flashbacks and flashforwards leading into a change of story and the way it is told correspond to a transition. That said, the trauma of Olanna for instance becomes the transition through which the gruesome memory of the past is accessible to the reader in the novel. In this regard, Trauma itself becomes a transition that helps the reader navigates between the present and the past as well. Transmission also is illustrated in the novel. Chimamanda Adichie revives the issue of the Biafran War. The most striking is the fact that she uses intertexts which are references to historical facts that took place more than seven years before her birth. It is obvious that she is in the position of a witness to a testimony. She comments this in an interview: "When I was researching for *Half of a Yellow Sun*, I tried to read all the books published about that period and I talked to lots and lots of people [...] I spent so much time in archives and libraries [...]".<sup>1</sup> Adichie has not only done research, but she had been told stories of the war by her parents. This corresponds to Hirsch's notion of "Postmemory". Actually, this term describes "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right".<sup>2</sup> Transmission then occurs in the way that Adichie is involved in the trauma of her parents and grandparents, who were traumatized directly by the events of the Nigeria-Biafra War. Adichie inherited their

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Lx1BDdNF4w&t=321s>

<sup>2</sup> Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory", p.103

trauma, and this novel is her interpretation of their past, and of her own trauma. From this rationale, Trauma becomes directly associated with transmission.

## Conclusion

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Finally, the exploration of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* has revealed a great deal of details in the attempt to answer the central question of the present work. In a very lucid intelligence and compassion she recreates the circumstances of the 1966 massacres and the violence of the civil war. Most importantly, the novel appears as a landscape in which different characters from different social classes (the rich and the poor), different ages (young and old people) and from different ethnic groups like the Yoruba (Miss Adebayo) and the Hausa (Mohammed) and the Igbo, express the diversity of point of views about the civil war and the massacres. There is no chronological order in the proceeding of the narrative, but there is rather a kind of jumps between the past and the present expressed through "the early sixties" (part one and three) and "the late sixties" (part two and four). In the light of this, these flash-backs and flash-forwards clearly demonstrate the writer's intention to show the move of the characters between love and hatred, a peaceful living and a struggle for survival, life and death, hope and despair, memories and trauma in relation to different experiences, information and rumors before, during and after the civil war. Furthermore, for practical reasons the present work has been divided into two main parts. In the first part, an attempt has been made to investigate in details the preliminaries of the nature of conflicts which have been happening in Nigeria before and after the independence. It has been the contention here that since the establishment of the colonial rule and its policy: the "Indirect Rule", Nigerians have been living in a situation of turmoil, unfortunately due to their ethnic membership and adherence to religions of all types. The fact is that these entities are always instrumentalized by politicians who simply care about their own interests and not the whole population as one. In the light of this, the historical, socio-political and economic context in Nigerian before and after the Independence was crystalized by tensions and conflicts between the Hausa and the Igbo, as a result of the policy of the misperception and disregard of the Nigerian cultural diversity by the colonizers, the failure of the federal government to establish a strong social cohesion, which later led to the discrimination, marginalization and the oppression of the Igbo people.

In the second part, the main focus was to substantiate Adichie's point of view on her novel and investigate the theme of othering and how it can be associated with conflicts in the novel. Adichie can be considered as a committed writer, she is sensitive to preserving and perpetuating the memory of her people. Having said that, it may be asserted that *Half of a*

*Yellow Sun* is indeed a historical fiction and can be read as the chronicle of the war in Biafra: its causes and dramatic effects on the Igbo in particular. Adichie assumes the burden of writer and historian, as way she embarks her readers to witnesses her people's dramatic experience during and after the civil war in Biafra. All things considered, the novel appears as the narrative of the Igbo people who were essentialized by the Hausa, because of their cultural, traditional and religious differences. Essentializing the Igbo to the level of "threat", "infidels" and enemy only strengthened their desire to devaluate their victimization, by reacting in way that Adichie presents as a counter-hegemonic struggle. No doubts, their struggles made their oppressor intensify oppression. This led to the war in Biafra, a war with dramatic consequences among which there is trauma. In the light of the central question, it may be assumed that conflicts are the immediate consequences of othering in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, to the extent that othering has laid terrains of tensions in its particularity of stressing and stigmatizing ethnic and religious differences between the Hausa and the Igbo. Throughout this work, it has been demonstrated that Adichie genuinely uses a great deal rhetoric patterns such as symbolism, metaphors and special narrative techniques like the indirect speech and intertextuality to signify otherness. All this led to the inhuman massacres of the Igbo in 1966, and the horrific war in Biafra. It has also been demonstrated how the effects of such bloody events have impacted the living of the Igbo people. Adichie as a genuine writer is aware that a story has the power to redress sufferings and pain or can reestablish a sense of justice to very difficult experiences. In her novel, she projects the subjective voices of the Igbo that would certainly never be expressed highly. Writing this narrative becomes an attempt, not only to help her people cope with the trauma they are exposed to, but also to substantiate a healing process, which can only be complete when people really understand and recognize their responsibility and role so as to truly reconcile. *Half of a Yellow Sun*, in this perspective becomes a symbol that reminds us that the issues leading to chaos in the 1960s and early 1970s still haunt Nigerian. With this in mind, one may wonder whether Adichie, through her literary work, projects the opinion and position of the Igbo, her people on the question of nationhood or whether the trauma of their loss and sufferings is an interpretation of their rejection of the Northerners. It will be interesting to examine these issues in further studies.

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## **L'Altérité et les Conflits dans «L'Autre Moitié du Soleil Jaune» de Chimamanda Adichie**

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Ce mémoire porte sur l'étude du second roman de Chimamanda Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* ou « L'autre moitié d'un soleil jaune ». En effet, ce roman est une contextualisation de la situation socio-politique et économique explosive qui prévalait au Nigéria avant et après l'indépendance. Cette situation explosive a mis en évidence les différences culturelles entre les principaux groupes ethniques, intensifiant les tensions et la relation de méfiance, entre les Hausa et les Igbo plus particulièrement. Par conséquent, cette dite situation a été à l'origine d'un événement dramatique connu sous le nom de la guerre du Biafra entre 1967 et 1970. Le but de ce mémoire est donc d'étudier le thème de l'altérité en tant que source de conflits dans le roman. A cet effet, l'accent est mis sur le contexte socio-politique et économique de la période avant et après l'indépendance, mais aussi sur le point de vue d'Adichie sur son roman. De même, ce travail se propose d'analyser les éléments rhétoriques utilisés par Adichie pour peindre les thématiques de l'altérité et des conflits.

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Mots-clés : Altérité, conflit, groupe ethnique, identité, guerre.

### **Othering and Conflicts in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun***

The present paper focuses on the study of Chimamanda Adichie's second published novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Actually, this novel is the contextualization of the explosive socio-political and economic situation, which prevailed in Nigeria before and after the independence. This explosive situation highlighted culture differences among the major ethnic groups, intensifying tensions and the relations of mistrust, especially between the Hausa and the Igbo. As a result of this, a dramatic event known as the Biafran war occurred from 1967-1970. Therefore, this paper investigates the theme of Othering as being the source of Conflicts in the novel. In this regard, a particular emphasis is put on the socio-political and economic context before and after the independence and the Adichie's view on her novel. Likewise, this paper also analysis the rhetoric patterns used by Adichie to depict the themes of Othering and Conflicts.

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Keywords: Othering, conflicts, ethnic group, identity, war.

